

“The Most Daring of [Our] Leaders”



Nashville students sitting in at lunch counter

WHEN DIANE NASH ARRIVED AT Fisk University in the fall of 1959, it seemed a perfect match: a lovely, intelligent, cultured young woman and a prestigious black school that would give her not only an excellent education but an introduction to some of the most eligible young African-American men in the South. A college degree was desirable, of course, but for middle-class young women who came of age in the 1950s, black or white, real fulfillment lay in finding the right man to marry and having children. Or so almost everyone said.

Adlai Stevenson, for example, informed members of Smith College's graduating class of 1955 that they should focus their energy on "the humble role of housewife," regardless of any other ambitions or talents they might have. "The assignment to you, as wives and mothers, you can do in

the living room with a baby in your lap or in the kitchen with a can opener in your hand," lectured the paragon of modern American liberalism. "If you are clever, maybe you can even practice your saving arts on that unsuspecting man while he's watching television." A few years later, Dr. Benjamin Mays, president of Morehouse College, delivered the same message, somewhat less patronizingly, to new Spelman College graduates: "[O]ver and above business, politics and the professions, you Spelman women will be called upon to be wives, mothers and homemakers. . . . The husband and father will make exacting demands of you, and he will expect certain things of you in spite of your education and degrees."

If all that were true, what better place for a young black woman to look for the right man than Fisk, Nashville's academic citadel of black privilege? Renowned as one of the best black universities in the South, Fisk was founded in 1866 by Northern Congregationalist missionaries to educate newly freed slaves. The famed Jubilee Singers, who popularized black spirituals in the late nineteenth century, had been Fisk students. So was W. E. B. Du Bois. James Weldon Johnson had capped his brilliant, amazingly varied career as civil rights activist, poet, novelist, and diplomat by teaching at Fisk.

With its sterling pedigree, Fisk, along with Morehouse, Spelman, Howard, and a few others, attracted the cream of the South's black middle and upper class. But the schools' lineage was white as well as black—white missionaries had founded them, white philanthropists helped fund many of them—and they had taken on much of the coloration of white society, including white standards of proper behavior and white ideals of beauty and femininity. On such campuses, light skin, Caucasian features, and straight hair were the sine qua non of attractiveness, and students of both sexes who did not meet those criteria often suffered the pain of rejection. For young college women, who were expected to get a husband as well as an education in college, such rejection was particularly hurtful.

Diane Nash had no such problem. Light enough to pass for white, she also was astonishingly pretty. When asked about Nash, men who knew her in the late 1950s and early 1960s invariably praised her beauty. "The first thing you have to say about Diane—the first thing anyone who encountered her noticed, and there was no way *not* to notice—is that she was one of God's beautiful creatures, just about the most gorgeous woman any of us had ever seen," raved John Lewis, one of her Nashville civil rights comrades. Lewis went on to describe Nash as "[s]mall and shapely, with honey brown skin and bright green eyes." In the late 1990s, Kwame Ture, formerly known as Stokely Carmichael, who worked with Nash in SNCC,

dropped his customary revolutionary fervor when reminiscing about her. "Ah, Diane, Diane," he said with a fond laugh. "Everybody wanted to marry Diane. She was warm, she was gentle, she was so brave, she was so intelligent, she was so pretty. . . . Everybody wanted Diane Nash. Everybody."

For the first twenty-one years of her life, Nash, the product of a middle-class Catholic upbringing in Chicago, had not done much to challenge the white society whose values her family had largely adopted. In high school, she had even dreamed of becoming Miss America and in 1956 was a runner-up in a local pageant leading to the Miss Illinois contest. (In the pageant's talent competition, she sang "Take Back Your Mink" from *Guys and Dolls*, wowing the judges when she unfastened her evening gown to reveal a leotard underneath.) She had been raised in a home that tried to overlook race, influenced greatly by a grandmother who believed that emulating whites was the best way for blacks to get ahead. Educated by nuns, at one time thinking about becoming a nun herself, Nash had an intellectual understanding of racial discrimination, from whose harshest effects she had been sheltered. Even when she first went away to college, attending Howard University in Washington, she experienced little overt prejudice. After a couple of years at Howard, she decided to transfer to Fisk.

Like many other young women, regardless of race, Nash wanted more than she was getting out of life. As products of the postwar teenage culture, women of her generation had been encouraged to believe they were special, to do well in school, to develop their talents and abilities. Then they were expected to exchange that early independence and assertiveness for a lifetime of self-denial and dependence on men. Young women of the 1950s faced a classic double bind—the bind that Margaret Mead described when she said a woman could define herself as "a woman, and therefore less an achieving individual, or an achieving individual and therefore less a woman." If she chose the former, she was on her way to becoming "a loved object, the kind of girl whom men will woo and boast of, toast and marry." But if she followed her own interests, she risked forfeiting "as a woman her chance for the kind of love she wants." While women had faced this dilemma for many years, young women growing up after World War II were questioning its validity even as they outwardly conformed to the era's political and social conservatism.

African-American women, especially, were enmeshed in contradictions. Forced since slavery to be more self-sufficient and assertive than white women, many were nonetheless faced with the same middle-class

expectations, subjected to the same pressure to get married, to subordinate their own interests and desires to those of others, particularly their husbands and families. In a 1960 article entitled "The Negro Woman," *Ebony* editor Lerone Bennett declared, "One result of the traditional independence of the Negro woman is that she is more in conflict with her innate biological role than the white woman." Young black women might have been influenced by that point of view, but they were not necessarily buying it. Like white women, many were seething with questions and doubts about the future. Their questioning, however, extended beyond their role as women to the abuse and discrimination to which they and other blacks were subjected because of their skin color. They were about to join black men of their generation in challenging the very underpinnings of white Southern society: racial segregation. And in the vanguard would be the soft-voiced, seemingly demure Diane Nash.

Nash's moment of epiphany came at the Tennessee State Fair in 1959. She had gone to the fair on a date, and wanted to use the ladies' room. She found two—one marked WHITE WOMEN, the other COLORED WOMEN—and for the first time in her life suffered the degradation of Jim Crow. This was no longer an intellectual exercise: She was being told in the most searing way imaginable that *she* was beyond the pale, unfit to use the same facilities as white women. Outraged by the experience, she was even more upset that her date, a Southerner, did not share her fury. Neither did most of her fellow Fisk students. They did not seem to care that they could shop at downtown stores but not eat at the stores' lunch counters, or that they had to sit in the balcony to see a movie. The more Nash found out about segregation in Nashville, the more she felt "stifled and boxed in." In the rest of the country, Nashville had the reputation of being more racially progressive than most Southern cities. Blacks could vote in Nashville. The city's schools and buses were integrated. Blacks served on the police force, fire department, City Council, and Board of Education. But segregation still firmly ruled in theaters, restaurants, hotels, and libraries, and Diane Nash, a deep-dyed moralist, decided then and there that Nashville was in a "stage of sin." She couldn't believe that "the children of my classmates would have to be born into a society where they had to believe that they were inferior." Above all, she could not believe that her classmates were willing to let that happen.

Since they did not seem to share her anger, she looked elsewhere for support. Paul LaPrad, a white exchange student at Fisk, told her about a black minister named James Lawson, who was training college students in

the use of nonviolence as the framework for an all-out attack on segregation. For Lawson, who had spent three years in India studying the principles of Gandhi, nonviolence was more than just a protest technique: It was the means by which he ordered his life. The young minister talked about the power of nonviolent confrontation with evil, about overcoming the forces of hate and transforming society through love and forgiveness. At first, Nash was skeptical. How could such high-flown idealism be harnessed as a weapon against gun-toting sheriffs and club-swinging racists? Even after attending several of Lawson's workshops, she still was sure "this stuff is never going to work." But since, as she said, it was "the only game in town," she kept going back, and after weeks of studying theology and philosophy, of reading Thoreau and other advocates of passive resistance, of discussion and arguments with the workshop's other participants, the intense young woman from Chicago was finally captured by Lawson's vision. She was particularly drawn to his belief that to be effective, these young would-be activists would have to transcend self-hatred and a sense of inferiority, that they would have to learn to love themselves. Having been raised in a milieu that downplayed her blackness, she now found herself part of a group "suddenly proud to be called 'black.' Within the movement . . . we came to a realization of our own worth . . ."

Many students at the workshops did not know what to make of Nash. She was one of only a handful who attended from Fisk, where the notion of protest was antithetical. So what was this beautiful, light-skinned, quintessential Fisk type doing at the workshops? Whatever the reason for her being there, her presence entranced virtually every man in the group. "Plenty of fellows attending those sessions gave a go at hitting on Diane," said John Lewis, an American Baptist College student who was one of the participants. "You saw resentment among some guys because they thought another guy was making an inroad with her." Several women in the group were jealous of the attention she was getting. Even so, sexual and romantic undercurrents remained generally in the background of the Nashville movement. In time, Lewis said, Nash "came to be seen more as our sister than as an object of lust. . . . We all became brothers and sisters, a family."

In the late fall of 1959, the students at Lawson's workshops formed a central committee to act as the decision-making body for the group. Nash, who had impressed everyone with her clear-eyed thinking and the intensity of her developing commitment to nonviolence, was named to the committee. More and more, the students were turning to her as one of their main leaders.

The committee had chosen the lunch counters and restaurants of Nashville's downtown stores as the target of the students' first protest, scheduled for February 1960. For the next several months, the students underwent rigorous training to prepare for the upcoming sit-ins, and on February 13, 124 students left a Nashville church and made their way to the lunch counters of several downtown stores. There, they took their seats and asked for service. The men wore suits and ties, the women, dresses, stockings, and high heels. They were poised and polite and gave little outward sign of the fear many of them felt. Diane Nash, for one, was terrified—a terror that would never leave her, no matter how many sit-ins and protests she would participate in afterward.

As frightened as the students were during that first sit-in, however, they had to struggle to keep from laughing at the stunned, panicky reactions of white store workers and patrons, who acted, Nash recalled, as if these well-dressed young people were "some dreadful monster . . . about to devour them all." Waitresses dropped dishes, cashiers broke down in tears, an elderly white woman almost had a seizure when she opened the door of a store's "white" ladies' room and found two young black women inside. Throwing up her hands, she screamed, "Oh! Nigras everywhere!"

There were no arrests and no violence. After a couple of hours, the students left the stores, jubilant that their first foray had gone without a hitch. A second sit-in was planned for the following week. In the meantime, several members of the students' Central Committee came to Nash and asked her to head the group. She was hardworking and outwardly fearless, and she did not seem to have the ego problems that a lot of the men had. "Because she was a woman and not a man, I think Diane never had to go around and do any posturing," said Bernard Lafayette, an American Baptist College student and one of the Nashville movement's leaders. But Nash had no desire to become the recognized head of this movement. Like most young women of that time, she had been raised to stay in the background. The men pressured her into accepting, however, and when she returned to her dorm room, she was so frightened by what she had done that she could hardly keep her legs from collapsing under her. "This is Tennessee, and white people down here are *mean*," she told herself. Not only that, but "we are going to be coming up against . . . white Southern men who are forty and fifty and sixty years old, who are politicians and judges and owners of businesses, and I am twenty-two years old. What am I *doing*? And how is this little group of students my age going to stand up to these powerful people?"

Once again, she managed to damp down her fear. She joined the other

students in the second sit-in, which was as quietly successful as the first. Nevertheless, the city was losing its patience. Nashville officials, deluged by complaints from store owners that the sit-ins were causing whites to stay away from downtown, warned the students not to continue. If the warning wasn't heeded, they made clear, the kids could forget about being treated with kid gloves any longer. Worried about the possibility of violence and arrests, the ministers connected with the movement urged the students to reconsider their plans for another demonstration on February 27.

With their numbers swelling, the young people refused. In the middle of another snowstorm, more than three hundred of them poured into downtown Nashville. No sooner had some of them sat down at the Woolworth's lunch counter than the ministers' fears proved justified. The demonstrators were met by an opposing force of cursing young white toughs, who yanked them from their stools and threw them to the floor, beat them with fists and clubs, kicked them, spat on them, extinguished lighted cigarettes on their backs and in their hair. The police were nowhere in sight, and when they finally arrived, they approached not the white attackers, but the bruised and shaken demonstrators, who were spat-tered with mustard and ketchup, spit and blood. "Okay, all you nigras, get up from the lunch counter or we're going to arrest you," one of the cops barked. When no one obeyed, the students were ordered to their feet, arrested for disorderly conduct, and marched out, through a gauntlet of hostile whites, to police paddy wagons. When they looked over their shoulders at the lunch counter, they saw a new wave of students quietly moving in to take their place.

As the police wagons pulled away, the demonstrators inside steeled themselves for an experience for which there was no adequate preparation. They had rehearsed the sit-ins, had tried to get a sense of what they would be like, how it would feel when someone beat them or called them nigger. But it was impossible to simulate how it felt to go to jail for the first time, to give themselves up voluntarily to this dreaded system, to risk incurring a stigma that could mark them forever. Like others in the wagons, Diane Nash was wrestling with an almost paralyzing fear. Only bad people went to jail, she had been taught, and bad things happened to them once they were there.

The eighty-one arrested students were released on bail that evening. Monday morning, they reported to the city courthouse for their trials. Nashville's black community had been shocked by the arrests, and more than 2,500 blacks surged around the courthouse in an impressive show of solidarity. Inside the courtroom, the trials proceeded with bureaucratic

efficiency—one after another, the students stood, were found guilty of disorderly conduct, and given fifty-dollar fines. Then, suddenly, Diane Nash threw a monkey wrench into the works. Nash told the judge that she, John Lewis, and fourteen others had decided to go to jail instead of paying the fines. Drawing on the principles of Gandhi, Nash declared, "We feel that if we pay these fines we would be contributing to and supporting injustice and immoral practices that have been performed in the arrest and conviction of the defendants." Stunned by Nash's announcement, the students who already had agreed to pay their fines declared that they, too, would go to jail.

Until then, most students arrested in sit-ins nationwide had spent little, if any, time behind bars. The idea that young people who had done nothing more than politely demand their rights would be sentenced to jail for thirty-three days electrified Nashville's blacks and touched off protests throughout the country. The city put the demonstrators to work, and the sight of the men shoveling snow and cleaning city streets and the women polishing the marble staircases of the courthouse threw the black community into even more of an uproar.

The jailing of the students had clearly backfired. Nashville's mayor, Ben West, a political moderate who had courted black votes in his last election, proposed a compromise: He would let the jailed students go and appoint a biracial commission to consider steps to desegregate the downtown stores if the demonstrations stopped. Nash and the others agreed and were released. Nash, however, was not content to sit around and wait for the committee's report. Two days after her release, she and three other students sat in at the city's Greyhound bus terminal, which was not covered by the demonstration cease-fire that the mayor had arranged. To the astonishment of everyone, including the demonstrators themselves, they were served at the bus station without any problem. It was one of the first sit-in victories in the South.

But there was little time for celebration. When the mayor's biracial committee failed to make any serious recommendations for desegregating downtown lunch counters and restaurants, the students resumed their sit-ins. At the same time they launched a boycott of downtown stores and picketed the city's central square and courthouse. Racial tension escalated, and this time the mayor seemed powerless to do anything about it.

On April 19, just two weeks after Nash and the other leaders of the Nashville movement attended SNCC's organizing conference in Raleigh, a tremendous explosion ripped through the home of Alexander Looby, the students' lawyer. The early-morning bombing was so powerful that it

shattered more than a hundred windows in nearby Meharry Medical College, yet, miraculously, Looby and his wife were not injured. Outraged, the students called for a mass march to City Hall and sent a telegram to Mayor West, asking him to meet them. When the marchers, now numbering more than three thousand, reached City Hall, the mayor was waiting for them at the top of the steps. An activist minister named C. T. Vivian made a short speech, and the mayor began to reply, pointing out all that he had done for Nashville's blacks and reminding them that he was mayor of all the community. Listening to him, Nash grew increasingly frustrated: "He was making a political speech, and I remember feeling like, 'This is not getting us anywhere. What can I do? What can I say?'"

What she did was ask a simple question, one that would have far-reaching consequences for the city of Nashville. "Mayor West," she said, "do you feel it is wrong to discriminate against a person solely on the basis of their race or color?" The question went to the heart of nonviolence, bypassing all the political boilerplate and appealing directly to West's conscience. The mayor did not disappoint. He nodded—and then said yes. "They asked me some pretty soul-searching questions—and one that was addressed to me as a man," West said years later. "And I found that I had to answer it frankly and honestly—that I did not agree that it was morally right for someone to sell them merchandise and refuse them service. And I had to answer it just exactly like that."

Stunned by West's honesty, the marchers burst into thunderous applause, and the next day, the Nashville *Tennessean* ran a huge headline: INTEGRATE COUNTERS—MAYOR. Three weeks later, six downtown stores targeted by demonstrators opened their lunch counters to blacks.

It was an enormous victory for the fledgling movement. The day after the march, Martin Luther King came to Nashville to honor the students. Calling their campaign the "best organized and the most disciplined" in the South, he said he had come "not to bring inspiration but to gain inspiration from the great movement that has taken place in this community."

The Nashville students would become models for thousands of young people in the burgeoning Southern civil rights movement, and the Nashville leaders, including John Lewis, James Bevel, Bernard Lafayette, and Marion Barry, would be among the movement's foremost activists. But in the early days, at least, no one was better known or more awe-inspiring than the intrepid Diane Nash. Lewis called her "the most daring of [our] leaders." Demonstrators on trial in Nashville were often asked, "Do you know

Diane Nash?" Suddenly, she was everywhere—on the cover of *Jet*, on television, on the front pages of the Nashville newspapers. Her fame was not much to her liking—she was not fond of personal publicity, and she was often singled out by racists who recognized her from her picture in the paper. Once, at a sit-in, she was terrified when one of the toughs surrounding the students spotted her and yelled, "That's Diane Nash! She's the one to get!"

But if that was the price that had to be paid, so be it. She had been transformed by her experiences, and now she was a true believer, surrendering her heart and soul, in a way few people ever would, to nonviolence and the fight for freedom. In early 1961, her reputation as one of the most daring young firebrands in the movement would be burnished even further by a monthlong stint in jail. At the request of local students, Nash and three other SNCC activists, including a Spelman College sophomore named Ruby Doris Smith, had joined a sit-in at a drugstore in Rock Hill, South Carolina. They were promptly arrested, but rather than post bond, they opted to go to jail for thirty days.

Not long after the four were released, Nash dropped out of Fisk. "The Chaucer classes," she said, "became unbearable after Rock Hill." She was hired by both SNCC and the local SCLC affiliate. Her combined salary was about twenty-five dollars a week, and she rented a room at Nashville's YWCA. When *Jet* magazine asked her about her plans for the future, she said, "I'll be doing this for the rest of my life."

Logically, Diane Nash should have been elected first chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee at the end of its founding meeting in Raleigh. At that point, she was the Nashville movement's acknowledged leader, and in a struggle for influence between the two most powerful student groups—Nashville and Atlanta—it had been decided that the first SNCC chairman would come from Nashville, while the organization would be headquartered in Atlanta. After the balloting, however, the new chairman turned out to be Marion Barry, Jr., a suave, politically astute Fisk graduate student in chemistry who, while an activist in Nashville, had not been as involved in the movement as Nash and some of the others. The vote was taken while Nash was absent from the meeting; the timing, John Lewis was convinced, was deliberate. "Diane was a devoted, beautiful leader, but she was the wrong sex," Lewis said. "There was a desire to emphasize and showcase black manhood." The students were products of a time in which men, not women, customarily held formal positions of authority. With Nash as its leader, the Nashville move-

ment was clearly an aberration. "Before the women's movement, men and women tended to see the males as naturally in leadership positions," Nash said years later. "The thing that we didn't do is take the out-front positions, and when the TV cameras were around I know I, for one, and I think many other women, were content to let the men who were interested in dealing with the press be with the press."

But for black women, it was more than following the norms of society. Prathia Hall, who would become a leading SNCC organizer, said black women had no problem with men being out front because women felt it "important to our community that black males be seen as competent, standing up and giving strong leadership. I don't think . . . that women felt that taking that posture was depriving them or taking anything away from them."

Because men occupied the formal leadership positions in SNCC, as they did in SCLC, because men were the ones sought out by the press, it was not surprising that most Americans had little idea of the key roles women played in the movement from the beginning. SNCC, in particular, would be unprecedented in the way it welcomed women—young and old, black and white, college students and illiterate sharecroppers—to its ranks and gave them the latitude to become major strategists, organizers, and activists. In other words, they were leaders in all but title and outside recognition. From the beginning, this daring, idealistic, adventurous organization insisted that everyone have an equal voice. Many of the women in SNCC came to see the group as having a distinctly "feminine" ethos, especially as compared with the authoritarian, masculine cultures of civil rights organizations like SCLC and the NAACP. SNCC was "very nurturing, very loving—it really *was* the beloved community," said Sandra "Casey" Hayden, a prominent white SNCC activist. In short, SNCC reflected the philosophy of its spiritual mother and guiding force, Ella Baker.

Baker was still working for SCLC when the student organization was founded, but from the moment of SNCC's birth, it became the recipient of most of her formidable energy and devotion. She carved out working space for SNCC's first office at SCLC headquarters, and gave the students access to SCLC's mimeograph machine and mailing facilities. She recruited Jane Stembridge, a young white theology student from Virginia, to run the office. Along with Stembridge and Connie Curry, another young white woman, Baker kept SNCC running that summer of 1960, all the while trying to figure out how to use SNCC as the engine for transforming the student crusade into a mass movement, embracing blacks of

all ages and classes throughout the South. Both Stenbridge and Curry had been at the Raleigh conference, welcomed from the beginning, as were other white observers. The "beloved community" envisioned by SNCC embraced whites as well as blacks, and the organization's logo showed a white hand and black hand clasped in friendship. "There was a time," recalled Casey Hayden, "when if one was willing to punch a hole in the consensus of the times, one was welcomed into a community with others who were doing the same. . . . [A]ll you had to do to be in it was punch that hole and join up."

"Being White Does Not Answer Your Problems"



Casey Hayden

LOOKING BACK AT THE DAWNING of the 1960s, it is not surprising that young white women would be attracted to a fight for equality waged by blacks of their age. They knew very well how it felt to be discriminated against, even if their skin color shielded them from Jim Crow segregation and the terror of racial violence. "The truth is that women are . . . second-class citizens," declared an article in *The New York Times Magazine* on September 2, 1962. "[I]n the middle of the twentieth century, women are subject to prejudices that smack of the nineteenth century." Women, white as well as black, were denied

certain jobs, were barred from many of the nation's most prestigious colleges and graduate schools, were paid lower wages than men, even when they were allowed to do the same work. Most churches refused to ordain women, the New York Stock Exchange banned them from its floor, many states would not allow a married woman to start a business of her own without a spouse's consent or get a credit card or loan in her own name. Three states wouldn't accept women as jurors. In Texas, a man who caught his wife flagrante delicto could kill her lover, claim justifiable homicide, and escape punishment. The president of a New York advertising agency was quoted by the *Times Magazine* as saying, "No woman can successfully deal on equal terms with men—and remain a woman. If she tries it, she becomes ridiculous or repulsive."

In an October 1962 editorial entitled "In the Same Boat," *Ebony* magazine warned America's white male leaders to pay attention to the needs and demands of "the country's most hated and her most loved minorities: Negroes and women." Indeed, said *Ebony*, "emancipation of women is more tardy than the emancipating of Negroes. . . . The fear that prompts Senators to bar women [members] from their Capitol Hill swimming pool is the same fear that prompts white residents to bar Negroes from their neighborhoods. . . . The real fear is not so much in how the newcomer fits into his new environment as how much competition he will offer the old-timer."

Such fear was present after World War II, when white women, as well as African-Americans, were pressured to leave their wartime jobs to make way for returning white servicemen. Women were subjected to an intensive propaganda campaign by political and social leaders and the national press to return home and devote themselves to their husbands and children, no matter how much they needed the money or the psychic satisfaction of salaried jobs. In the view of sociologist Wini Breines, U.S. culture in the immediate postwar years was aimed at repressing both blacks and white women, in defense of white male prerogatives. "American politics and culture were structured by a defense of masculinity and whiteness . . .," Breines argued. "[T]he fifties were white men's last time of undisputed dominance," a time in which both "women and black people were to be kept separate and contained . . ." The fear of white women's independence spawned the same accusations of domination and emasculation of their men that had plagued black women for generations. "There has been a tendency in recent years to picture the American woman . . . as a domineering Mom who exploits the male, destroys his masculinity and reduces him to a quivering Milquetoast," *The New York Times* observed in 1962.

Unlike African-Americans, however, middle-class white women in the 1950s expressed little discontent. They were privileged, weren't they? Many now lived in new, postwar comfort, with a house, a car, gleaming appliances, and other heavily advertised consumer goods. Any concerns about their own psychological well-being were usually dismissed as ridiculous and trivial. Unlike blacks, white women tended to live in isolation, their lives focused on their immediate families, often in all-white suburbs (referred to in the mass media as centers of "suburban matriarchy"). If they were unhappy, they had no one to turn to, no community of like-minded women to offer support or guidance or to serve as a catalyst for change. Taught that any discontent they felt was selfish and unnatural, believing, in any event, that it was their own individual cross to bear, white women adopted a policy of dissemblance and concealment, hiding their dissatisfactions behind a facade of suburban bliss. And their daughters were encouraged to do the same. But for a good many young white women in the postwar generation, the indoctrination didn't work. They, like black women their age, had grown up with higher expectations, with a greater awareness of options, and they struggled against the suffocating conformity of the era and the stereotyped "feminine" roles they were supposed to play. Struggled against what Wini Breines called *the fact of cultural life* in the 1950s: that anything different was wrong, be it the color or texture of one's hair, the color of one's skin, the clothes or the makeup one wore, one's attitude. "The parameters of feminine beauty, personality, intelligence and ambition were so narrow that minor deviation meant exclusion and discomfort, and often unintentionally, became a wedge that grew into insurgence," Breines noted.

As narrow as the boundaries for female behavior were in the rest of the country, they were positively expansive when compared with those in the South, where white women were still expected to act like belles. Indeed, wrote sociologists Maxine Atkinson and Jacqueline Boles, "the southern lady today is a slightly modernized version of the plantation mistress, without the plantation." In a 1962 *New York Times Magazine* article, Hodding Carter, in his heyday as the cynosure of Southern liberalism, ridiculed playwright Tennessee Williams' depiction of Southern women as stifled, unhappy, and sexually repressed. That image tarnishes the good name of the South, declared Carter, who hastened to defend the modern Southern belle. "What's wrong with femininity?" he wrote. "What's wrong with a girl soft-pedaling her mental capacity when she wants a man who wouldn't like to find out that she's smarter than he is? . . . One of life's great objectives for a gal should be to make men like her, and another is to

make a home for the man she decides will do. . . . What's wrong with pretending helplessness and being wide-eyed and bearing down on an accent which a great many men prefer to the clipped or the twanged or the detachedly English tones of lovely women elsewhere?"

In fact, a growing number of young Southern white women thought a great deal was wrong with Carter's portrayal of this fluttery-eyed, honey-voiced, duplicitously subordinate creature. Most of the white women who worked with SNCC in the early days—Jane Stembridge, Connie Curry, and Casey Hayden, among them—were from the South. Spiritual heirs to Lillian Smith and Virginia Durr, they understood the close links between the repression of blacks and the subordination of women. By rejecting the symbol of sacred white womanhood, they, like Smith and Durr, were cutting themselves loose from the moorings of the society in which they had been raised. In the words of historian Barbara Ransby, these young women had become "race traitors," embracing "African-Americans, men and women, as leaders, mentors, friends and family." In Dixie, there could be no greater transgression.

The early white women in SNCC made clear they had not come to the movement to play Lady Bountiful in the cause of racial justice, as some of their nineteenth-century sisters had done. They were not there to dominate or dictate or lead. They were there to serve. And in serving, perhaps they would find their own freedom. "I came here because I, too, needed to be free, respected, a person, understood," Stembridge wrote a friend. "Being white does not answer your problems, being able to go in anywhere does not end your needs."

Intellectual and intense, Jane Stembridge was a poet and writer. An English literature major in college, she was not the kind of person you would expect to find juggling all the administrative details inherent in starting up and running an organization. But, then again, SNCC was not anyone's typical organization. In her early twenties, Stembridge was small and blonde, with hypnotic blue eyes. She had been part of the student civil rights movement since its beginning, taking a couple of days off from her graduate studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York to attend SNCC's founding conference in Raleigh. Soon after, she was recruited by Ella Baker to come down to Atlanta and take charge of the SNCC operation, much as Baker had done for SCLC.

The daughter of a Baptist minister who had been forced to leave several pastorates in the South because of his liberal beliefs on race, Stembridge grew up as a good Southern white girl was supposed to—making

good grades in school, joining the right clubs. But she always felt stifled, as if she'd been poured into a mold that was squeezing the life out of her. "I fit exactly. I was made to fit," she wrote about her upbringing. "Sometimes I wiggle and stretch. I get smashed. . . . [F]reedom is a kind of historical concept about people and governments, unrelated to me."

Unlike Jane Stembridge, Connie Curry, on the surface at least, never seemed to have any trouble fitting in. Tall and dark-haired, with lively brown eyes and a strong chin, Curry was outgoing and warm, and possessed of a quick, dry wit. She had been student body president at Agnes Scott College, a woman's school in Atlanta hardly known for its political liberalism. "We were a finishing school," Curry said. "At Agnes Scott, people were mostly trying to get pinned or engaged by the time they were seniors—or death was imminent." In truth, Curry was much more a tangle of contradictions than most of her Agnes Scott classmates: an attractive young woman who adored men but refused to pretend she did not have a mind or a strong will.

Curry's parents were émigrés from Northern Ireland, and the family was considered "different"—even worse, Yankees—by the folks in Greensboro, North Carolina, where Curry spent much of her childhood. Her mother, unlike many white women in the South, was "totally straightforward," Curry said. "She was very independent, very outspoken." Hazel Curry tried her best to instill those qualities in Connie and her sister, Eileen. "My mother never taught me to play the game," Curry said. "I never knew how to be quiet or be the power behind the throne. I don't think I ever learned to flirt." She also never learned to be a racist. One day, when she was in fourth grade, the boy ahead of her in the cafeteria line referred to one of the cafeteria workers as a nigger. Connie told him off, saying the woman was just as good as his mother. At recess, he got his revenge, knocking her into a mud puddle.

But she really didn't get involved in civil rights until college, when she joined the National Student Association, a confederation of student governments founded in 1947. She initially signed up because of the men, she confessed later: They were so much more interesting than the Southern good old boys she met during mixers at Emory and Georgia Tech. Since its founding, NSA had been a strong supporter of integration, and its meetings had always been interracial. In 1953, Curry was elected chair of NSA's Great Southern region, which consisted of only one white college—Agnes Scott—and several black schools, including Morehouse and Spelman.

After graduation from Agnes Scott in 1955, Curry went to France on

a Fulbright scholarship and then worked for the Collegiate Council of the United Nations in New York. In late 1959, NSA asked her to return to the South to organize a series of intensive race relations seminars for Southern students of both races backed by the Field Foundation. Curry had just opened her new office in Atlanta when the sit-in movement was launched in her hometown of Greensboro. She realized that the thrust of her project would have to change: "It just wasn't important anymore to hold integrated tea parties or conferences or anything; it was a whole new thing." She attended SNCC's organizing conference in Raleigh and was elected an adult adviser, along with Ella Baker. Later Curry was named to the organization's executive committee, the only white woman to serve on it. Then in her mid-twenties, Curry was not much older than the students she was supposed to be advising, but she had already graduated from college, had a job, and, perhaps most important, had access to Field Foundation money.

From that point, she threw herself into the student movement, paying SNCC's telephone and other bills, and conferring and debating for hours at its executive committee meetings. She traveled the South recruiting white students for the movement, observing their sit-ins and marches, and reporting on them to the NSA, which was helping to coordinate sit-ins in the North against national store chains that refused to serve blacks in the South. "Connie was a bridge between the overwhelming number of black sit-in students and white students who were predisposed to join with us," said Julian Bond, who became a good friend. "She got us into the NSA network. It was an invaluable resource for recruiting money and political support."

Although Curry was never arrested or jailed (the NSA made clear that was not in her job description), she did not escape harassment. She was evicted from her apartment because one of her roommates had invited a black man there, she received threatening phone calls, and her sporty red-and-white Karmann Ghia was spray-painted with KKK symbols. (Mary King, who later joined SNCC, was astonished at Curry's boldness in zipping around Atlanta and the rest of the South in a car that King considered "outrageously racy for someone under surveillance.")

During a trip to Austin in March 1960, Curry recruited a University of Texas graduate student named Sandra Cason, called Casey by her friends. Though beautiful and blonde, Cason was, nonetheless, an anomaly at this university noted for its football team, beauty queens, and hard partying. She had emerged as one of the leaders of Austin's sit-in movement, and lived with an interracial group called the Christian Faith and Life Com-

munity, an oasis of liberalism on the UT campus. Cason, who called herself a Christian existentialist, termed the Community "a lay seminary," a place of intense study and worship, whose members read the works of theologians like Tillich and Niebuhr and existentialists like Sartre and Camus, then debated how to use their tenets in the fight for social justice. Dorothy Dawson, a fellow member and close friend of Cason's, remembered the Community as "the most intellectually alive" place at the university. It was also one of the few places where blacks and whites could live under the same roof.

Like most of the black students and many of the white women who joined the civil rights movement in the early days, Cason came from a strongly religious background. She grew up in Victoria, a small town in southeastern Texas, near the Louisiana border. Her father, a labor organizer, was an alcoholic, and her parents divorced when she was six months old. She was raised by her mother, whom Cason described as self-supporting, intellectual, and liberal and who encouraged her daughter to think for herself.

Cason also was heavily influenced by the YWCA, whose longtime fight against segregation, crucial in its day, has been pushed into the remote shadows of history. Black women first became YWCA members in 1893, but for half a century they were confined to all-black chapters, despite decades of opposition to the policy by prominent black women. Finally, in the 1940s, well before any other white-led women's organization, the YWCA committed itself to fighting for the full integration of black women into "the mainstream of association life" and launched a campaign against segregation and discrimination in general. Many women, both black and white, who would become active in the civil rights movement, had close ties to the Y. While Ella Baker worked with SNCC for no pay in the early 1960s, she was on the YWCA payroll as director of a Y campus race relations project in the South. Cason and Mary King worked on the project at different times before joining the SNCC staff. Anna Arnold Hedgeman, a prominent black government official and civil rights activist, got her start as a YWCA official, as did Dorothy Height, who later became president of the National Council of Negro Women.

The student YWCAs were particularly active in the fight for racial equality and justice. They sponsored integrated conferences and discussion groups and invited black speakers to white campuses as early as the 1920s. Centers of social activism on many campuses in the years leading up to the 1960s, student Y's also helped develop leadership skills in young women like Cason and Dawson. Even before the sit-in movement began

in February 1960, the university Y in Austin, a joint YMCA-YWCA operation, had started a campaign of its own. Cason and Dawson led Y picket lines at local segregated restaurants and, along with other students, went to the restaurants in integrated groups, sitting down and asking to be served. When told to leave, they did so, but the whites among them left behind cards reading *I'll patronize this restaurant if you integrate*. When Connie Curry came calling that March, Cason had already been "introduced to the stuff that the student movement was putting forward—but through the Y . . . I already had my orientation to it. I already had been there."

That summer, at Curry's invitation, Cason attended the annual NSA congress in Minneapolis. A group of SNCC members appeared before the hundreds of mostly white student delegates to describe the sit-ins and their nonviolent philosophy and to ask for NSA's support. Such backing was crucial for SNCC. It would help the students raise badly needed funds and also would bring to the movement a network of white supporters. But a number of NSA members opposed any expression of support and demanded to appear on a panel to explain their reasons. Concerned that the antimovement delegates might persuade the rest of the convention, Curry asked Cason to take part in the discussion. A story about Cason's performance appeared in the next day's *Minneapolis Tribune*, headlined WHITE COED BACKS SIT INS, GETS OVATION. The article began: "A beautiful University of Texas coed with honey blond hair and a southern voice so soft it would not startle a boll weevil made a statement of ethical principles on the Negro sit-in movement Thursday."

"I cannot say to a person who suffers injustice, 'Wait,'" Cason declared. "Perhaps you can. I can't. And having decided that I cannot urge caution, I must stand with him. If I had known that not a single lunch counter would open as the result of my action, I could not have done differently than I did. If I had known violence would result, I could not have done differently than I did." She described a visit by Ralph Waldo Emerson to his close friend Henry David Thoreau, who was in jail for refusing to pay taxes to a government that supported slavery. "Henry David," Emerson said, "what are you doing in there?" "Ralph Waldo," replied Thoreau, "what are you doing out there?"

Cason paused, gazing out at the hundreds of students before her. "What," she asked, "are you doing out there?"

For a moment, those in the audience seemed transfixed. Then they leaped to their feet on a wave of applause. Afterward, the congress voted by an overwhelming margin to endorse the sit-ins and support them

nationally and on a local level. "There is no question," said Curry, "that [Cason's speech] was a personal turning point for many of the white delegates and probably a decisive moment in the history of NSA's civil rights activism."

Among those mesmerized by Cason's message and by Cason herself was a University of Michigan student leader named Tom Hayden. The editor of the university's student newspaper, Hayden had been much impressed with the cool courage of all the SNCC students who had spoken, but like a number of other male delegates, he was especially dazzled by Cason, and he followed her wherever she went. "I idolized her," he later said. She had clarified for him the dilemma he was facing—whether to pursue his ambition to become a foreign correspondent, and thus remain an observer, or to follow the lead of the SNCC people and throw himself into full-time social activism. He admired how the black students, impatient with their elders, had assumed moral leadership. They were living, Hayden thought, "on a fuller level of feeling than any people I'd ever seen, partly because they were making modern history in a very personal way, and partly because by risking death they came to know the value of living each moment to the fullest." Once he saw them in action at the NSA congress, once he had heard Cason, he made up his mind about his future. "Here were the models of charismatic commitment I was seeking—I wanted to live like them."

Back in Michigan, he wrote about Cason's speech for the *Michigan Daily* and exchanged letters with her. She sent him a copy of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, by James Agee and Walker Evans, which he read "urgently." More and more, he found himself pulled toward the South, the civil rights movement, and "the most interesting woman I'd ever met." In October, he flew down to Atlanta for the big SNCC conference organized by Ella Baker and Jane Stembridge. Hayden was ready to become involved in the student campaign, but he was even more eager to become better acquainted with Cason.

In Atlanta for the same conference was a sixty-four-year-old woman whose entire adult life seemed to have been directed toward that moment. Lillian Smith was seriously ill, had been battling breast cancer for seven years, but she was not about to let illness keep her from savoring this, her ultimate triumph. For two decades, she had carried on her lonely campaign for racial equality, enduring vilification, ridicule, threats, and terrorist campaigns. In the late 1950s, as her strength ebbed, she called on young people of the South, both black and white, to take up the fight. "We need a fresh

approach," she wrote to a friend. "Something younger, more vital, more risky, full of fun and ardor. We need to get the youngsters involved. . . . The rest of us have broken down walls, filled up ditches, defined problems, put a sharp edge on dilemmas, we've shaken everybody's souls with the moral issue—now something more has to be done. And what we who are more experienced, more aware, can do is encourage the young ones to try, to take over, TO DO SOMETHING . . ."

Three years later, when the sit-in movement was ignited, she summoned all the energy she still possessed to support it. She gave speeches, wrote letters, hosted gatherings of students at her home on Old Screamer Mountain. She paid for a full-page newspaper advertisement taken out by the Atlanta student movement to explain its purpose and activities, and raised money for SNCC and CORE, as well as donating some money of her own. She demanded that Atlanta's department stores integrate their lunchrooms, threatening to cancel her accounts with them unless they did, and urged the city's newspapers and television stations to support the student demonstrators. She became a mentor and friend to Jane Stenbridge, as she had to Pauli Murray almost two decades earlier.

But there was a measure of sadness mixed with Smith's enthusiasm. The students were finally doing what she had been calling for since the early 1940s, but she was too old and too sick to become an active member of their community. In her visits to Old Screamer, Stenbridge said, "what I mostly did was listen. Because she needed to talk about what she'd done and what she'd been through and the [lonely] stands she had taken. She was eaten up with the whole thing, with never having really been understood and appreciated. . . . There wasn't a SNCC around her; there wasn't a group support system." Connie Curry, who went with Stenbridge on one of her visits, was struck by Smith's "yearning to have been part of a movement where people believed and marched and sang for freedom."

As the final speaker at SNCC's conference, Smith looked out at Stenbridge, Curry, Diane Nash, Sandra Cason, Bob Moses, John Lewis, Julian Bond, and dozens of other young activists, many of whom had never heard of her before the sit-in movement began. She talked of their journey toward freedom and justice, talked of how she and others had made the first steps down that road years before. "We of the older generation cannot go on that great journey with you," she said. "But there is something we can do: We can make of our lives, our knowledge, our experiences, our wisdom . . . a bridge, a strong, sure bridge over which you can cross into the new, unmade world."

Like Ella Baker and Septima Clark and many others before them, Smith had passed on to the students a precious legacy. Listening to her poignant valedictory address in Atlanta was another Southern white woman who had contributed to that legacy—but, at the age of thirty-six, Anne Braden was still very much on the front lines. For Diane Nash and Jane Stenbridge, as for other young women activists who would come later, Braden served as both a role model and a source of comfort and support. Defying the upper-class culture in which she had been raised, she had opposed racism and had withstood the intimidation of mobs, death threats against her two toddlers, and a stint in jail on a sedition charge. After her jailing in Louisville in 1954, a steady stream of friends and relatives, bearing flowers and covered dishes for supper, had come to console Braden's heartbroken parents in Anniston, Alabama. It was, Braden said, as if they were mourning her passing, ignoring the fact that the "corpse . . . was alive and healthy."

When she was four or five, Anne Gambrell McCarty used the phrase "colored lady" in front of her mother. "You never call colored people ladies, Anne Gambrell," her mother reproved her. "You say colored woman and white lady—never a colored lady." In Anne's household and in the circles she was part of, everyone used the word "nigger," except when one was talking directly to a black person, and then the term was "colored." It was not until Anne was a teenager that she discovered the word "Negro."

Growing up in Anniston, the adored daughter of a genteel Old South family, she was raised to believe she was better than most people because of her superior bloodlines. But even when she was small, she sensed that something was wrong with this life she was expected to lead. "I was so horribly well-brought-up and polite and reared in the 'best' Southern tradition of smoothing over all the rough edges of things," she recalled. "Actually, I think that is one of the worst aspects of Southern life—the phoniness of it, the smearing of sweet sugar over ugliness . . ."

She would see occasional flashes of that ugliness. As a teenager, she had a discussion with an old family friend, a man known for his kindness, about the antilynching legislation then being debated by Congress. When Anne argued in favor of the law, the friend replied, "We have to have a good lynching every once in a while to keep the nigger in his place." Anne was speechless. "To the day I die I think I will hear those words ringing in my ears. Words of murder from one of the gentlest people I ever knew."

But she was far more conscious then of her society's attitude toward its women than its racism. As she got older, she realized that "[t]he whole idea of settling down in a small Southern town and being a Southern white woman was just the most appalling, boring life that I could possibly think

of. I did not intend to spend my life just waiting on a man who treated me like a toy or a plaything . . ." In 1941, Anne went away to college, first attending Stratford, then finishing up at Randolph-Macon. Both were elite women's schools in Virginia, known for putting the finishing educational and cultural touches on well-bred Southern ladies. For Anne, these institutions nonetheless managed to provide an intellectual excitement she had never experienced before and gave her "an inkling of what it is to seek the truth." She discovered Lillian Smith, and saw *Strange Fruit* when it was produced as a Broadway play. Reading Smith's work, Anne finally was able to articulate what had been bothering her most of her life—the discovery that Southern white women were prisoners and, at the same time, oppressors.

For the first time in her life, segregation was no longer a forbidden topic, and she explored it thoroughly in discussions with professors and fellow students. Her awakening, however, carried a heavy price. She had always been close to her mother and father, but her changing views on race were anathema to them, and when she let them know how she felt, "my parents and I could not communicate anymore." Still, it wasn't until after college, when she became a newspaper reporter on the courthouse beat in Anniston, then in Birmingham, that she realized how ugly the reality of race in the South really could be.

She learned that justice for blacks was, more often than not, a contradiction in terms. She covered the trial of a young black man whose crime was passing a white woman on the opposite side of a country road and looking at her in an "insulting" way. He was declared guilty of assault with intent to rape and sent to prison. And for years afterward, Anne would be haunted by the memory of a chat with a Birmingham deputy sheriff, who, making small talk with this attractive young reporter, told her there had been only one unsolved murder in the county in the last two years. She asked what it was, and he said, "Come on, I'll show you." He took her into a room, pulled open a drawer in a filing cabinet, and took out a skull. He laid it on the table. "There it is," he said with obvious relish. "And it never *will* be solved—that man was a nigger and he was killed by a white man." The deputy smiled, obviously thinking she would appreciate the joke. Horror-stricken, she turned and left without a word. This, she thought, was "the end of the road where segregation led—death and decay, death in the skull on the table." She had to get out of the courthouse, out of Birmingham. She decided to move to Louisville, a city with a reputation for racial progressivism, much like Nashville's.

When she arrived in 1947, however, she found that Louisville, like Nashville, was schizophrenic when it came to race. The city buses were

integrated, as were its golf courses and libraries. Blacks could vote. But schools, parks, restaurants, and most other public accommodations were strictly segregated. After being hired as a reporter for the *Louisville Times*, Anne started attending NAACP meetings, and soon found herself on a committee working to end segregation in public parks. She also met Carl Braden.

Their subsequent romance seemed straight out of a Katharine Hepburn-Spencer Tracy movie. She, the well-brought-up, bright, quick-witted career woman; he, the rough-hewn, blunt blue-collar journalist, who, as his future wife would say, "was off somewhere else when they passed out the tact." The labor editor for the *Louisville Times*, Braden came from a working-class, union background. When Carl and Anne started seeing each other, he introduced her to his world of union organizing, and she got him involved in her growing passion, the fight against racial injustice.

Carl and Anne were married in 1948. Soon after, both quit the *Times* to handle public relations for a group of CIO unions. Two years later, with Anne expecting their first baby, Carl got a job as copy editor on the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. But the Bradens continued their battle against racism, working on campaigns to end job discrimination in Louisville, as well as segregation in hospitals, schools, and bus stations.

In 1954, a casual acquaintance of the Bradens', a young black electrician named Andrew Wade, asked them a favor. Wade, a World War II veteran, wanted a bigger house for his growing family—he and his wife had a two-year-old daughter and another baby on the way—but he could not find anything suitable in the black sections of town. While there had been an explosion of home construction in the white areas of Louisville since the end of World War II—eighteen thousand houses in all—only three hundred new houses had been built in black neighborhoods. Wade told the Bradens that he had tried to buy a house in a new all-white subdivision on the outskirts of town but was rejected. Would the Bradens consider buying a house there and reselling it to the Wades?

The Bradens immediately agreed. "[W]e never considered saying 'no' . . .," Anne later said. "He needed a house, and we were the people who, because of the accident of having been born with white skin, could help him." Louisville had never had much racial trouble to speak of, and the Bradens' action was not illegal. In 1948, the Supreme Court had struck down restrictive housing covenants banning blacks from all-white residential areas, even though Louisville, like most American cities, continued to practice housing segregation.

But the Bradens had not reckoned on the fear and hate being stirred up

in the South over the pending *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. *Brown* was handed down four days after the Bradens had transferred the house's title to the Wades and the black family moved in. In retrospect, it occurred to Anne Braden that Louisville's white supremacists saw the house sale as a gauntlet flung down by this young white couple. "The people who were determined to preserve segregation at any cost," she said, "evidently decided that now was the time to teach a lesson to the Negro people and the white people who join with them to oppose segregation."

There now began a campaign of terror against both the Bradens and the Wades, a fright-filled period of telephoned death threats and cars driving slowly back and forth in front of both families' houses. It was a time when Anne Braden, who was pregnant with her third child, moved her children's beds into the hall every night to shelter them from possible gunfire, a time when she sat up until three or four o'clock each morning, waiting for Carl to come home from his job on the *Courier-Journal* desk, a gun by her side. (She had hated the very idea of weapons in her house but had finally borrowed one from Andrew Wade after a car forced Carl's car to stop one day and its occupants threatened the life of her son, Jimmy, who was sitting next to Carl.) Physically exhausted, drained emotionally by the tension and fear, Anne lost the baby she had been carrying.

Through it all, she and Carl had few allies. No one in Louisville's white community appealed for tolerance and compassion, no one pricked the city's conscience. The *Courier-Journal*, touted as one of the South's leading liberal voices, decried the violence but blamed the Bradens for indirectly causing it. The paper sympathized with the Wades' neighbors and their concerns about plummeting property values. With no one standing up for the Bradens and the Wades, their enemies were free to go after them with impunity. On the night of June 26, the Wades' house was dynamited. Three months later, with no arrests made, Louisville's district attorney turned the matter over to a grand jury. The Bradens were summoned to testify. In the grand jury room, Anne, to her astonishment, found herself being questioned by the DA not about the bombing or other violence to which the two families had been subjected, but about her membership in alleged subversive organizations. She had never heard of most of the groups, had known of others but never joined them, had belonged to a few. Nonetheless, she indignantly refused to answer any of the questions, telling the grand jury that the queries had no relevance to the bombing, that the DA had no business interrogating her about "matters I had always been so sure were my private business, freedoms I had always been so sure were mine." Carl took the same position.

For the Bradens, Louisville had turned into the kind of world Alice discovered after tumbling down the rabbit hole. It was apparent that *they* were being investigated, not the segregationists who had spent the summer terrorizing both families. The buying of the house, as well as its bombing, were a Communist plot to stir up race trouble in untroubled Louisville, according to the district attorney. The Bradens, he said, were the ringleaders.

Such accusations were not uncommon in the South following the *Brown* decision. The influence of Senator Joseph McCarthy himself might have been on the wane in 1954, but McCarthyism was still virulent and was being used by the anti-*Brown* forces as their chief weapon in fighting integration. Led by James Eastland and his Senate internal security subcommittee, segregationists branded as subversive or Communist anybody with the effrontery to challenge Jim Crow or advocate any other drastic social change. For Eastland, Anne Braden said, the issue was simple: "All who did not support segregation were Communists." White Southerners were the main targets of the smear campaign, whose strategy of harassment and intimidation was brilliantly effective: Victims of the witch-hunt were isolated and often rendered impotent, and other whites, afraid of being called subversive, remained silent, no matter how sympathetic they might be to the cause. Following in Eastland's footsteps, a number of Southern states set up their own committees to ferret out "subversives"—that is, integrationists, and ambitious politicians like Scott Hamilton, Louisville's district attorney, hopped on the bandwagon.

While the *Courier-Journal* disapproved of the Bradens' buying a house for a black family, it could not stomach what Hamilton was now doing to the couple. In an editorial, it supported the Bradens' refusal to answer questions before the grand jury, saying, "Mr. Hamilton has produced not the slightest evidence to uphold his theory of a communist plot. He has paid very little attention to the alternative and much more likely theory that the bombing was the work of hoodlums who resented a Negro's purchase of a house in a white area." Nevertheless, the next day, the grand jury indicted the Bradens, along with four other whites who had supported the Wades, on charges of sedition.

Sitting in a jail cell that night, Anne could not believe what had happened. "What had I done?" she remembered thinking. "Sold a house? How much can they do to you for selling a house? Threaten your life for five months, kill your unborn child, and then put you in jail for twenty-one years? All for one little house?" The next morning, after some sleep and more thinking, she realized she had done more than sell a house. "I had

challenged a whole settled world, a way of life, and this world had struck back. What had I expected?"

She was released on bond a week later, but while she and Carl were in jail, Louisville police raided their house twice, confiscating dozens of books from their voluminous library, books that Scott Hamilton later labeled as seditious. The charges against Anne and four other defendants were eventually dropped, but Carl was tried and convicted on charges of sedition and "conspiracy to destroy property to bring about a political end, to wit communism." Sentenced to fifteen years, he spent eight months in prison, including two months in solitary confinement, until the Kentucky Court of Appeals struck down the statute under which he was convicted and ordered his release. The Kentucky court's decision was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Friends urged the Bradens to leave Louisville and the South, to move to a place where they could free themselves and their children from the hate and enmity that surrounded them. Both Anne and Carl adamantly refused to consider such a thing. They would not be terrorized into silence. "The only way that I was going to leave Louisville was in a coffin," Anne said later. And Carl declared he was "not going to live under a system where a man could be put in prison for selling his house to a Negro. I decided I would spend my life trying to change that system."

Three years after the bombing of the Wades' house and little more than a year after the Montgomery bus boycott, the Bradens were recruited by the Southern Conference Educational Fund to set up, among other things, a communications and support network for those scattered white Southerners courageous enough to confront segregation. SCEF wasn't fearful of hiring people tagged with the "red" label; it, too, had been branded as Communist by none other than Jim Eastland himself.

SCEF had been founded in 1942 as an arm of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. The newer group was created with only one purpose: to eliminate all segregation in the South through the joint action of black and white Southerners. SCEF officials were among Eastland's chief targets (along with Virginia Durr) when the senator from Mississippi went hunting for Communists in 1954. In his committee report, Eastland accused SCEF of being Communism's principal voice in the South.

News of the affiliation between the Bradens and SCEF only increased the anticommunists' ire. In July 1958, the House Un-American Activities Committee scheduled hearings in Atlanta to investigate Communist subversion in the South. The Bradens were among those subpoenaed. In the

end, Anne was not called to testify, but Carl, who *was* summoned, refused to answer any questions, just as he and Anne had done before the Louisville grand jury. Citing the First Amendment, he told the committee that his beliefs and associations were none of its business. The committee cited him for contempt of Congress, and he served ten months of a one-year sentence.

Alarmed by the campaign against SCEF and the Bradens, fearful of too close an association with them, a number of civil rights and other liberal organizations began distancing themselves from their former allies. Anne appealed to them to recognize that they were playing right into Jim Eastland's hands. "*Any* white person in the South who acts for integration (not just talks, but *acts*) is going to be labeled a Communist," she said in an impassioned letter to CORE officials. "... [I]f you adopt a policy of refusing to work with people who have been called Communists, *who* in the South are you going to work with? ... You are urging white people to speak out, to take action, to stand up and be counted. Is it right for you to ask people to do this if you run from people who have been labeled because they did the very thing you are asking others to do?"

Not everyone pulled away. Eleanor Roosevelt remained a supporter of SCEF and wrote a blurb for *The Wall Between*, Anne Braden's book about her family's ordeal in Louisville. Infuriated by the red-baiting of integrationists, the former First Lady was even angrier that the smears were accepted at face value by some of the victims' natural allies. "Like the scream of 'red,' the scream of race has become a political symbol and each man thinks he has to outshout the other to prove his purity," she wrote. Another stalwart champion of SCEF was Ella Baker, who became a close friend of Anne's. Thanks largely to Baker's influence, SNCC sloughed off the warnings of other civil rights leaders and developed strong ties to the Bradens and SCEF, an alliance that would prove invaluable for the student organization in years to come.

For all the red-baiting they endured, the Bradens managed to turn SCEF into a civil rights organization of major importance in the South in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They saw their role as providing financial, psychological, and other kinds of support for movement activists, both black and white, and linking them together in a communications network. Working for SCEF "means defending the people who, alone and on their own, have shown initiative and are getting their heads chopped off...", Anne wrote to Ella Baker. "It means providing a framework to which people can turn, friends who will rally around when they are needed."

Drawing on their experience as newspaper reporters, the Bradens

turned the organization's monthly paper, the *Southern Patriot*, into an essential source of information about the budding fight for freedom. They gave publicity to local campaigns and activists at a time when the civil rights movement was not yet in the national headlines and when the local media, hostile to the movement more often than not, either ignored or distorted what was going on. "[I]f it had not been for Carl and Anne Braden, I'm sure I would have been dead already," declared Fred Shuttlesworth, the leader of the Birmingham movement. Whenever Shuttlesworth was threatened or under attack from Public Safety Commissioner Bull Connor and the other racists in his city, he got the word out to the Bradens, who, in turn, would call the Associated Press, or United Press International, or a newspaper outside the South, and suggest they investigate what was going on in Birmingham. "We did that in other places, too," Anne said. "People would be in jail or in trouble, nobody was paying any attention, and we'd sound the alert. It was a whole information program."

SNCC benefited from the network, too. The *Southern Patriot* gave extensive play to the students' activities, and in turn SNCC modeled its own communication and public relations machinery, including its newspaper, the *Student Voice*, on the program developed by the Bradens. For many of the student activists, Anne also served as a surrogate mother. She housed and fed them when they were in Louisville, gave them advice and comfort, tried to find money for them to finish college. They looked up to her and Carl as role models, whose courage and determination seemed unquenchable despite the seemingly endless harassment they had to endure. "There are no adjectives to describe Anne's contribution [to SNCC and the movement]," said Jane Stembridge. "I wouldn't know what to say. I'm absolutely astounded at a person, male or female, who makes that kind of commitment."

Young women, in particular, saw Anne as a mentor. She had made it a point to encourage women, no matter what their age, to participate in the movement, explaining, "I always considered I had a mission in life to get women out of the kitchen and involved in things . . . to get past the husband to the kitchen and get the woman out." (Once, at a meeting at Martin Luther King's home, she literally did that, persuading King to retrieve his wife, Coretta, from the kitchen so that she could join the discussion.)

Anne knew what the young activists, particularly the white women, were going through. She had been there. She knew the difficulty of rejecting the ideal of Southern white womanhood, the pain of severing oneself from one's past and one's family, of wanting to be a good girl and please everybody. She knew, probably better than anybody else, how hard it was

to juggle the conventional woman's roles—wife, mother, cook, housekeeper—with other work. At the time of the October 1960 SNCC conference, she had three small children, nine, seven, and eight months old. The baby, Beth, had been born the week after the sit-in movement started in Greensboro. Describing the frantic rat race of her typical day, Anne said: "I squeeze office work in when I can—after the house is cleaned up in the morning and before it's time to feed the baby again, after the older children get home from school and I've talked to them a little and feel they are settled for a while—and mostly late at night after everybody is in bed. I've sometimes counted up and I usually manage well over eight or ten hours of actual office work in a twenty-four-hour period, but I still don't catch up."

Just as younger women leaned on her as a source of support, she reached out to older women in the movement, friends like Ella Baker and Virginia Durr, for the same kind of solace. In a letter, Anne apologized to Baker for burdening her with talk of her problems, "[c]onflicts I've been living with too long and unable to resolve . . . the principal one the conflict between the demands of being a mother and the demands of being 'a worker in the cause.' . . . I keep feeling that a woman *should* be able to do both these things, but in practice it never quite works out—and I constantly feel I've done a half-way job at both, and at the moment I feel that I have utterly failed to organize my life correctly . . ."

Braden's intense commitment to the movement took a heavy toll not only on her but on her children, who hungered for more of her attention and time, according to Jane Stembridge, who spent considerable time with the Bradens in Louisville. Stembridge recalled how Anne would ignore preparations for Christmas until about 3 P.M. Christmas Eve, when she would reluctantly stop work and embark on an hours-long frenzy of shopping and cooking. "She would take that much of Christmas Eve and all of Christmas Day, and then the day after Christmas she was back to work," Stembridge said.

The traditional expectations of what a woman should be and do, instilled in Anne Braden from birth, haunted her. They would similarly haunt the newer generation of female activists, no matter how hard they struggled to break free.