

Some of King
 proud comrades
 on Church
 Faith

The Silent Fifties: McCarthyism and Racism; White Resistance; Black Resistance

In Jackson, state capitol of Mississippi, in the fall of 1954 I entered Millsaps College, a white liberal arts school of the Methodist Church. Here I found teachers who fostered an atmosphere of freedom with open comments and discussion on all topics, especially race relations. Here, among the 900 students, mostly native Mississippians, I found friends, especially Sam Tomlinson, Don Taft, and Bert Ward, who had differing views on the racial problem but were always willing to talk. From some teachers students could hear intelligent arguments against traditional racism, placed in a context of American and Southern history, or sociology, or philosophy and religion.

Some teachers had long maintained close ties with the nearby black school, Tougaloo College, where until recently some, like my freshman English teacher, Marguerite Goodman, had been part time faculty. Interracial student activities, originally sponsored by the YWCA and YMCA, had begun in the Depression and brought black and white students together from all the colleges in the state in the Intercollegiate Fellowship for speakers and discussions. Millsaps faculty encouraged students to attend such activities and other lectures at Tougaloo College in the Social Science Seminars organized by Dr. Ernst Borinski, the Sociology chairman, who was to be a major influence in my life, as a teacher, and, later, comrade, leading me into a new world of radical politics and action.

Ernst Borinski had taught at Tougaloo since 1948. An attorney and judge in Germany, he had escaped Hitler and moved to America just before the War started. He was born to a Jewish family on the shifting German-Polish border; most of his family perished in the Holocaust. He served with U.S. forces and became a citizen. After the war he studied

sociology and deliberately moved to the Deep South to be a participant-observer in the struggle against prejudice and racism. The unmarried man lived in a simple campus faculty apartment, with pottery owls on the coffee table, medieval prints on some walls, and the dominating art, a large, signed Kathe Kollwitz self portrait in black and white. There were no family pictures and he politely refused to discuss family.

We called Borinski's classroom and office, the "Den." In one of the oldest campus buildings he ruled a basement, almost subterranean, space expanded into a kind of second living room-dining room, with small kitchen nearby. Behind the long tables covered with books and newspapers was the cave of wisdom. In the classroom space he could have over 50 black and white guests, arranging things so they had to sit next to each other. His inner room he would hold just a few folks. Here this short, stout, bald little man with the heavy German accent was host. His table featured a spread of coffee, spiced cider or tea, cheeses, pickled fishes, herring with cream, and other exotic items. Perhaps the strange food made the interracial nature of the conversations less strange. Everything seemed to say, "This is my home. Mississippi does not rule here. Here is Freedom. You are welcome. All are welcome. Come in, come in."

Ernst Borinski was a gentleman. He knew evil but quietly affirmed the good that was also in humanity. He was a realist and an optimist. Those who shared this table knew a moment of Freedom that meant Mississippi could not overcome. Conversations might be weighty but his laughter and his deliberately preserved accent kept things from being too serious. To be at his table was a time of delight. Like a happy little gnome in his cave, the walls decorated with maps of the world and photographs of the people of the world, Ernst

Borinski spread his fare and talked about everything.

Borinski accepted Millsaps students in German and Russian classes at Tougaloo and offered seminars on the Millsaps campus, sometimes even bringing black students to Millsaps. As fear and pressure for conformity grew in the white community Borinski welcomed and befriended us as he maintained at Tougaloo College the only place in the state for interracial contact and dialogue. Students at other colleges in the state did not live in an atmosphere this open. I had friends at most of the white colleges and they, too, were questioning and searching, seeing guidance in understanding racism. Almost every campus in 1954 had some openly liberal faculty. Such a climate did not survive long.

Beyond their campus students could rarely discover any dissident voices. Even the few major white moderates (or liberals) who did have courage to speak offered little help to young white Mississippians. The voice that mattered the most to us college students was William Faulkner, Mississippi's most famous citizen, but little respected. Speaking at the mythical capitol of Mississippi, the Peabody Hotel in Memphis in 1955, Faulkner criticized segregation in logical, human, and humorous terms:

To live anywhere in the world of A.D. 1955
and be against equality because of race or
color, is like living in Alaska and being
against snow. 1

Oh how we laughed and loved that remark. We were Americans; we were not Eskimos. We were still loyal white Mississippians; we were not damn yankees. For a loyal descendant of the Confederacy like me, born and raised not in any briar patch, but on the

hills of the battlefield of Vicksburg, this was an identity I did not want to deny, even as my mind and heart were changing to be against traditional racism.

But soon the world heard a more traditional Southern attitude from Faulkner:

I don't like enforced integration any more than enforced segregation. If I have to choose between the U.S. Government and Mississippi, then I'll choose Mississippi... If it came to fighting, I'd fight for Mississippi against the U.S., even if it meant going out into the street and shooting Negroes. 2

I did not know what I would do. My friends talked about Faulkner. He sounded a little like Robert E. Lee, against slavery but for states' rights, for honor and duty. But Lee was sober and we comforted ourselves with the rumor that Faulkner had been drinking when he made the battle statement. Some friends said there was no good choice, no answer, no place for people like Faulkner or like us. I began to understand my friends who saw the only answer to such a dilemma as fleeing from Mississippi and the Deep South as soon as we finished college.

But for the time being I stayed in Mississippi. As a sociology major I was encouraged by liberal teachers to observe the rising racial hysteria in the state by attending many of the major segregationist political rallies, hearing leaders like Sen. Jim Eastland urge defiance of the Supreme Court and attacking the NAACP and supporters as Communists. Students were encouraged to analyze and criticize the politicians, to make sociological

observations of the crowds. Teachers gave us careful instructions to behave, to applaud and cheer as if we were good racists, and to do nothing to show our disagreement. Some of these liberal teachers were too well known to risk attending such rallies.

At first I waited and watched for white moderates to speak up and counter this madness but they remained silent even as black voter registration leaders and Emmett Till were killed. Amazed, confused, and a little frightened, college students talked with each other. We compared notes from our classes and what we heard from our hometowns.

A few months after the Emmett Till killers were freed in a trial that was a farce I was visiting in the Delta at the home of fellow student. Three Millsaps men were with me. The town was close to the murder scene. Some how the story came up in a living room conversation. Some of us commented on the case, indicating our disapproval. The lady of the house said she thought it was just terrible that this little colored boy had been killed. Her husband, a leader of the local church, quickly shut her up and, literally, ordered her to go into the kitchen and supervise the maid in supper preparation. When she was out of the way he spoke to us in a sort of man-to-man way, apologizing for the womanly sensitivities of his wife, but saying, knowingly, that we Southern men had to understand these things. Of course it was unfortunant that this colored boy had been killed, but it was necessary, Emmett Till had to be killed. The gentleman concluded with scripture, "But everything is not all bad, not at all. When you men get older you'll understand these things. You know, we have to kill off one every now and then. Its all they really understand. Why, do you know, this county has not hasn't been this peaceful in several years. We haven't had a single bit of trouble out of any of our nigras in months now, not since that Till business. Yes, it is a sad

thing, but, you know, all things work for good to them that love the Lord." 2b

I had not thought of the Till murder in terms of defense of white civilization much less "back to the Bible" terminology. But the idea of civilization itself being threatened by desegregation was a popular theme for most white Mississippians. Judge Tom Brady, a product of Yale and Ole Miss, gave a speech which he called "Black Monday" in reference to the Monday decision of the Supreme Court against school segregation, given on May 17, 1954. The speech became famous and was circulated as pamphlet and book by the White Citizen's Council of which Brady was a leader. In the first speech the Judge sounded all the popular themes--God, Communism, biology (blue birds and red birds don't mix), the "Law," and history.

The historical thesis was that only segregation could prevent race mixing and the contamination of the purity of white blood. The fall of ancient civilizations was the product of impure blood, of mixing, from Egypt on, as Judge Brady explained:

... wherever the white race has mingled its blood
with the negroid (and I am not here as an exponent of
race superiority -- I am telling you the facts)...
wherever you see this integration and comingling, you
see the resultant deterioration. It is the same old
story. The jungle, the black blood swallows up, and
with it goes this deterioration. It blows out the
light within a white man's brain. 2c

Such scholarship was being openly taught in many white public schools by 1956.

Judge Brady's most famous line, in the opinion of my fellow college students, was better than satire:

The loveliest and the purest of God's creatures,
 the nearest thing to an angelic being that treads
 this terrestrial ball is a well-bred, cultured
 Southern white woman or her blue-eyed, golden-
 haired little girl. 2d

This man's judicial power as a member of the State Supreme Court was not satire. College students did get needed satire and insight from P. D. East, editor of The Petal Paper, a small town weekly that survived for a few years fighting racism and conformity with editorial comments like:

I am cautious to know which minister is going
 to bless the organizational meeting of the Citizens
 Clan next Thursday night.
 It boils down to this: Mississippi's second class
 citizens are on the way down another notch or two. 2e

The newly organized White Citizen's Council, based in Greenwood and led by upper and middle class gentlemen, and the State Sovereignty Commission, state secret police agency to preserve segregation, took control of most communities forcing some outspoken liberals, especially ministers and college teachers, to flee the state and forcing the moderates to remain silent. Some moderates initially tolerated the Council as a way to prevent the growth of hot heads in the lower classes in a revival of the KKK.

While Mississippi with the organization of the White Citizens Councils and repressive laws passed by the Legislature led the South in resistance to the desegregation in the 1950's two major struggles broke out in our neighboring states. Moderate white students watched in fascination and some horror.

The first was in Montgomery, Alabama where Mrs. Rosa Parks, local black NAACP officer, refused to give up her seat on a segregated bus. Her arrest led to the initial major grass roots united community effort of Southern blacks and the successful year long bus boycott. In one of the first news reports of this in the Jackson "Daily News" there is no mention of the young minister, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., chosen to lead the campaign. But on the same front page there is a reference to the Past that was so much a part of the Present in Mississippi. On Dec. 6, 1955 these two captions appeared on the front page:

Montgomery Hit By Squabble Over Jim Crow Seating 3

and, a few columns away,

Last Eyewitness To Vicksburg Siege Dies. 4

In the year that followed there was much news from Alabama, although no such boycott attempts spread to Mississippi. Soon there was news and pictures of Alabama violence with the bombing of Dr. King's home and the 1956 Christmas night bombing of the home of the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, black protest leader in Birmingham.

Mississippi had its time of bombing and battles in the years of the War and Reconstruction. Vicksburg was the symbol for all that. Mississippi could have told any Americans that the time of any true change in race relations in this nation, but especially in this state, would be another time of bombing and battles, whoever won.

The Montgomery Movement showed the possibility and necessity of a united black community. The willingness of the Federal government to enforce the new desegregation court rulings was shown in nearby Little Rock, Arkansas after the defiance of Gov. Orville Faubus and the white mobs kept black children out of Central High School until President Eisenhower sent in Federal troops. Everyone in the South, whatever their race, whatever their beliefs, had to think of the Union troops invading a century earlier. On my college campus many conservative students supported Faubus and many moderate students decided, almost Faulkner like, that they could not support desegregation if it could only be forced by bayonet. Whites talked of "occupied Arkansas" and resistance if Mississippi was ever challenged. I looked away from Arkansas and towards Alabama, towards the Gandhian nonviolence of a Christian minister, Martin Luther King.

I was appalled at the hatred and the violence but even more so at the collapse of the white moderates, the decent Christians, the good Americans. I knew many did not agree with the new climate but all organized resistance disappeared. Within a few years there was no free place: no free press, pulpit, classroom, forum, no free conversation even between friends. Public schools openly taught racism. Local press supported the racists. Local television censored national news by editing out progressive items or controversial speakers. All social institutions supported racism. By not openly and in an organized way resisting the rising police state the moderates lost their chance.

By my senior year of college there were student and faculty spies turning over the names of suspect liberals to the racist authorities, all the way from Ole Miss in Oxford even to Millsaps College in Jackson. By 1958 the madness had even taken over at Millsaps,

which agreed to censor controversial pro-integration speakers at the demand of the Citizens Council. I knew change could only come from outside the white world, from the black world and from outside the state. As I grappled with that understanding I realized I had moved from my conservative roots to a kind of religious oriented moderation that now seemed irrelevant. But what place for me was there in the Methodist Church as a minister, or anywhere in Mississippi, if I became a liberal --or worse? But everything, everyone was leading me in a new direction.

That memorable day in late 1955 at Tougaloo when Ernst Borinski introduced Medgar to several of us from Millsaps was crucial. Evers, the newly named state director of the NAACP, a young man of about 30, greeted us in his quiet and friendly manner. I had come to support some moderate, gradual desegregation, but still thought the NAACP was a dangerous organization and, as a moderate, I had learned to condemn "extremists of either side." I assumed this organization and, especially this man, must be radicals of the worst sort who probably hated all white people and who certainly were pressing things too rapidly. They were not good moderates. But in that first short meeting Medgar did not fit my preconceptions. He did seem to be strong and determined but he was no wild man, no hater. There was plenty of anger in his voice when he spoke of the horrors of the time but this man was not consumed by bitterness.

We spoke only for a few minutes but I realized I was not afraid of this man, that I had not been judged and condemned nor rejected by this man, that I could like this man. My strongest impression of Medgar Evers was that he was a gentle man. He accepted me and my friends. At the close of our conversation he invited us to come to his office some

time for further talking. That invitation did frighten me and probably my friends. We were all polite but evasive.

Months later Sylvia Elliott, Ted Lampton, and some other Sociology students and I found enough courage to visit Medgar in his office, in the lair of the devil, as Don Taft, a conservative friend, joked, warning us to look for pictures of Stalin. Medgar Evers talked to us in detail about the repression in the state and of the reality of poverty and discrimination. He gave us copies of a new pamphlet describing the events of 1955: "M IS FOR MISSISSIPPI AND MURDER" ³ Some friends thought this was too strong, too sensational. I found myself arguing with them on the way back to campus that, perhaps, things in our state really were so terrible that this awful statement could serve to describe not just 1955 but any year in Mississippi. I had moved beyond moderation. Soon I found that I was returning alone to talk with Medgar. He became a needed teacher, guide, and friend to a lost and confused young Southern white man.

College graduation was the spring of 1958. I had stayed active in Methodist Church youth affairs including a national student conference that winter where I met black and white Southerners trying to overcome prejudice. I also met the Rev. Glenn Smiley, staff member of the pacifist religious group, the FOR, Fellowship of Reconciliation, who had worked with Dr. King in the Montgomery bus boycott and the Rev. James Lawson, black pacifist and advocate of Gandhian tactics. They were preparing a tour of Southern colleges that spring to promote nonviolent direct action against segregation. Tougaloo College was their destination in Mississippi but I invited them to also come to Millsaps. They did visit all the Southern states, except Mississippi.

Ernst Borinski gave a lecture at Millsaps on religious perspectives on social issues and commented that segregation was incompatible with Christianity. The White Citizens Council and the state legislature attacked Borinski as a Communist and attacked Millsaps College for allowing such an idea to be expressed. The student newspaper defended the speaker and the idea. By this time Millsaps was the only white college left in the state which did not let the racists censor speakers and classroom lectures. In the furor over the Borinski speech the press discovered that Glenn Smiley of the F.O.R. was to lecture at Millsaps the next week about Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi. Hysteria triumphed and the college, fearing loss of financial support and violence, canceled the visit of my new friends from the F.O.R. President Ellis Finger, whom I so admired, publicly apologized for the offending speech by Borinski and announced that self imposed censorship (satisfactory to the totalitarian state and the mob) would now be practiced and such errors would not be repeated. Students were forbidden to visit Tougaloo and faculty were forbidden to even let Borinski visit their homes, much less their classes. This was the best the moderates and liberals could do. I was no longer one of those. My chief decision that spring was the choice of graduate school. I had long planned to me a Methodist minister and so looked at seminaries, choosing Boston University, because of its progressive reputation and partly influenced by one of my Millsaps teachers, Bob Bergmark, an alum of Boston University. Bergmark, a member of the F.O.R., had helped in the failed lectures. We both knew quite well that the most visible current graduate of Boston University School of Theology was the Dr. Martin Luther King.

On one of my final days at Millsaps College I talked to my teacher-friend, Dr. George Maddox. He knew me well. He was responsible for some of my understanding of

many things, including race. I asked if he thought I could come back to Mississippi after I completed my seminary education in the North. He said that it would never be possible for me to return to Mississippi thinking the way I did. I could never adjust and would only be forced to leave the state soon after returning should I attempt it. I knew that many of my classmates had no intention of returning to Mississippi after graduate school; they knew their thinking was too liberal for the state. Maddox seemed to think this was wise; he thought there was little anyone could do about the situation in Mississippi. (A few years later Maddox moved to North Carolina as did James Ferguson, academic dean of the college, another liberal. It was a familiar pattern for white Mississippians who did not conform and could find no acceptable way to resist.)

After my depressing conversation with Maddox I talked with Jeannette Sylvester, another sociology major and a Methodist youth leader from the Jackson area. (We were dating and two years later would be married.) She was planning on starting graduate school in Social Work in Florida. Jeannette and I, on our last night at college, defied the Millsaps rules prohibiting contact with Tougaloo and drove out there to see Dr. Borinski.

We were welcomed by our friend and invited back to his den to share spiced cider, strange cheeses, herring and cream. Dr. St. Elmo Brady, black chemistry teacher, joined us. We all talked of how many times Jeannette and I and other Millsaps students had come to this room to this table, for words, and wisdom, and laughter. We explained our problem about returning to the state and the advice we had been given. Dr. Brady said that we could come back, that no one could predict the future, that in four years or so things might be better. He was polite. Dr. Borinski told us again of the rise of the Nazis he had witnessed

in Germany. He said that things, some day, would be better in Mississippi, but only if people from the state, black and white, did come back, deliberately to work for change. Borinski said that we must come back home again. And he knew far more of what troubles and what opportunities might come to troubled Mississippi than our Millsaps teachers. His manner was almost evangelical. It was the advice we needed and wanted.

Over the next six years all old white friends and advisors urged me never to come back to the South. In the same period only two voices said I must return--my militant friends, Ernst Borinski, the scholarly refugee from Hitler, and Medgar Evers, black leader and fellow Mississippian.

My transition in racial attitudes and eventual willingness to become an activist, a radical, was made possible by having the right friends, all of whom understood that the starting point of my questions was my religious faith and not a political perspective. My roots in traditional American Protestantism and Christianity both inspired me and yet left me very confused and disappointed at the failure of the religious institutions to take a stand or give leadership to a society in crisis. This ineffectiveness amazed me until I began to understand as I watched ministers driven from their pulpits for moderate statements against segregation, that the ultra conservative racists were not hesitant in using the church, in providing leadership and control. This collapse of the moderates was not inevitable. Older friends, especially Ernst and Medgar, helped me understand. Not all my guides shared my religious outlook, but they respected that in me. The conversations with fellow students was always in a traditional religious framework, of wondering how Biblical teachings could apply to the racial scene. The sense that there was a Christian responsibility to be a good citizen

as well as a good neighbor had always been part of my life. Now I had to find new ways to understand and apply that.

I had some helpful summer experiences outside the South in those days. In 1956 I attended summer school at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. In the summer of 1957 I lived in Detroit and learned of the world of labor unions that had hardly touched by state. I worked at the River Rouge Ford Factory and became a proud member of Local 600 of the United Auto Workers, an organization most white Mississippians considered to be Communist. For the first time I heard Dr. Martin Luther King in a speech to the national convention of the NAACP in Detroit. I knew Medgar was in the crowd. In many ways I gained perspective on myself and on my state.

In 1956 I attended the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. I was given guest passes by friendly (and conservative) members of the Mississippi delegation. Adlai Stevenson's speech thrilled me. I left the Stockyards and soon was on a bus bound for Mississippi. I noticed that the bus was integrated all the way from Chicago to Memphis. I assumed the blacks would prudently segregate themselves and go to the back of the bus when we left Memphis and crossed the nearby Mississippi state line. Most did. But one young black woman with an infant in her arms did not move. At the first stop inside Mississippi two uniformed white policemen boarded the bus. They ordered the woman to move to the rear. She hesitated but moved when an officer began tapping on the armrest with his night stick. The procedure was carried out by the policemen as if were a routine and they were normal border patrol guards.

I was sitting directly across the aisle from this black woman. The police business

greatly upset me. I was still wearing my Stevenson buttons from the Convention but now that world of America was far away. I could see empty seats in the now white section of the bus. The woman found a seat in the back but several black men were left standing with no seats. I hated myself because I did nothing. Finally, many miles and many minutes down the road into the Delta, I got up and walked to the rear of the bus and tried to say something apologetic to the woman. But my few words I'm sure made no sense. For the next few hours of the night I remained standing in the rear. No one, black or white, said anything to me.

The following summer I again made a bus trip from the North back to Mississippi. This was an "express" bus and made its first stop in Mississippi deep in the Delta at Greenville. Here the white police-guards entered the bus and ordered several young black men and women to the rear. At first I thought they might refuse to obey. But all retreated. I had deliberately taken a seat near the back of the bus when we left Chicago. A black man had taken a seat next to me after politely asking if he could. Now that we were in Mississippi this man started to move. I whispered that it was alright if he stayed. He looked at the police and moved. A white policeman looked at me and told me to move on up front. But I pretended to be asleep and kept my head turned towards the window. I was very frightened and would have shouted, "Yes, SIR," and moved immediately had the man given another order. But the policeman paid no more attention to me. I kept up the pretense of being asleep the only way I could think of to resist. But there were other ways to resist. Medgar Evers refused to move from a Trailways bus in Meridian and was beaten. On my bus I might have mentioned the law of the land (USA), but that would have been too much

action. Sleep or blindness was best. But the black man next to me could not pretend. He obeyed and moved.

Late in the summer of 1959 I took another bus trip, this time from New York to Mississippi. I had finished a year of seminary in Boston and even had training in nonviolence from Quakers and the pacifists with the Fellowship of Reconciliation (F.O.R.) which I had joined. This time the integrated bus passed through segregated Maryland and paused in Washington before crossing into Virginia and the Upper South. We got all the way to the Georgia line before we met the border guards. In Augusta, Georgia, white police boarded the bus and ordered whites forwards and blacks to the rear. I remembered my F.O.R. training in nonviolence and my religious convictions as a seminarian. I stayed in my seat in the back of the bus. But I said nothing; again I pretended to be asleep. A policeman shouted at me to move then shined a flashlight in my face from outside the bus. I pretended to wake up, turned another direction, and pretended to go back to sleep. The policeman and the bus driver whispered together for several minutes. I was very frightened. Again, one more nod from the officer and I probably would have obeyed. But the policeman finally left and the bus drove off into the night. We soon reached Atlanta where I had to change buses for Mississippi and from there on I sat in the middle. I realized that one of these times I was bound to have enough courage or stupidity to get myself in a situation that would lead to jail.

In addition to these trips where my memories of buses are so strong, I made two other trips back into the South from Boston that year. The first at Christmas when a group of Southern theology students, including Richard Deats, a white friend from Texas and Virgia Bartee, a black friend from Canton, Mississippi, drove together to Americus (and

nearby Plains, then unknown to us), Georgia and the radical interracial Christian community at Koinonia Farms, target of bombings and violence. We stayed overnight with the Rev. Clarence Jordan and talked about integration and nonviolence. The room we men slept in was especially cold since the windows had been shot out two days earlier. The next day we attended Sunday worship services at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery to hear Dr. Martin Luther King preach. We had introductions from King's old Boston University teachers, Harold DeWolf, Walter Muelder, and others. Dr. King and Coretta King invited us to their home for dinner and wonderful conversation. They thought all of us should plan to come back home to the South.

In the late spring of 1959 I flew to Mississippi from Boston, accompanying my teacher, Dr. Alan Knight Chalmers, social ethics and homiletics teacher at the seminary and national chairman of the NAACP Legal, Defense Fund, Inc. I was his driver in a rented car as he visited leading white churchmen in the state, seeking a base or even hope of moderate influences from the white church when public school desegregation cases would be pressed in the next few years. We talked with some good men and a few courageous ones. It was depressing. They did not think they or anyone could do anything. I knew some of these men in my own church, and others I knew by reputation. In the summer of 1959 there was little sign of hope in the white church of Mississippi.

The initiative for change came from the black church and the black college students of the South. The Sit-In campaigns that began the Student Movement of the 1960s were both spontaneous grass roots activity and the result of long study, careful planning, conspiratorial plotting, beautiful dreaming, and taking a chance. And all of this in the final years of the

silent fifties, the decade, for most Americans, of silence, conformity, and comfort. In January, 1959, I attended a meeting that gave me signs of hope for the South. This was a training conference on the strategic uses of nonviolence in the Civil Rights struggle. It was organized by the Fellowship of Reconciliation (the major nondenominational religious pacifist organization in the country) and held at the F.O.R. center in Nyack, New York. About thirty people, black and white, male and female, from Quaker and many other churches, attended the sessions.

The leaders were men I had met at the Methodist student conference earlier, Glenn Smiley and Jim Lawson. They had toured the South, except for Mississippi, in 1958 at mostly clandestine meetings, talking with black college students and a few whites about the tactics and ideas of nonviolent direct action. Smiley, a white Texan, had been an advisor to Dr. King in strategy for the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Jim Lawson, from Ohio, was now a seminary student at the tokenly desegregated Vanderbilt University in Nashville. He had been national president of the Methodist Youth Fellowship, had served time in prison for his objection to military service, and had lived in India, studying first hand the Gandhian movement and their philosophy and tactics of nonviolent resistance.

At our conference we heard lectures and talked of Gandhi and India; of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and Dr. King; of nonviolent tactics of past twenty years in US used against segregation in the North; of nonviolent action in the US in the 1930s in the labor union organizing efforts, strikes, and the great CIO sit-ins in the factories; even of nonviolent resistance efforts against the Nazis in Denmark and in France with Andre Trocme and others; and of current forms of direct action in the Peace Movement. A. J. Muste, a

wonderful and dynamic man in his early seventies, addressed the group. I had long wanted to meet him, having read some of his articles and long known of his peace protest demonstrations. He spoke to us about Biblical and theological bases for nonviolence, the importance of personal belief and action, of careful planning, and expressed confidence that we, that one person, could make a difference; that difference was an item of faith, we might not see the fruits of our labors.

We learned what, to most of us, were new forms of direct action against segregation such as lunch counter "sit-ins" that had been developed by CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality (which the F.O.R. had helped establish in 1943 specifically to use nonviolence in promoting desegregation, especially in public transportation and accommodations.) These tactics had been used in the North and border states like Maryland, West Virginia, and Missouri, and recently by an NAACP youth group in Oklahoma. Smiley and Lawson and others had many contacts in the South, especially through black ministers with the SCLC, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Dr. King's organization, and many contacts among students at black colleges. F.O.R. was already distributing literature in black communities in the South about Christian pacifism and nonviolent direct action. As well as pamphlets and leaflets, there was the powerful comic book story of Dr. King and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, stressing the role of anonymous grass roots people as well as the leader, and including both a section on Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian nonviolent freedom struggle, with illustrations of the Amritsar Massacre, where British police opened fired on nonviolent demonstrators. There were also several pages of detailed instructions on how to select targets and plan nonviolent demonstrations in the contemporary South.

Conference participants were taught to conduct future workshops in nonviolent techniques and philosophy. We also had some role playing situations where I was uncomfortable. We set up mock desegregation situations such as bus seats. Some took seats as demonstrators while others played the role of white policeman or mob member. The rest of us would critique the scene, participants would explain their actions and feelings, and all of us discuss it. The leaders asked provocative questions. When it was my turn to be a demonstrator I was very pious. When it was my turn to be a white policeman or angry bystander I could not handle it. I insisted that Southern whites, especially policemen, would never curse and beat people just because they were black or were civil rights demonstrators. The officers would jut politely arrest people. Others in the group strongly disagreed with me but continued to treat me with kindness and tolerance. We all did agree that nonviolence had a powerful place in the Civil Rights struggle and, with the help of advocates like Jim Lawson, was sure to become more important.

204/24
in
pious

