

# We Were There: The Marchers

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**MY SOUL IS RESTED: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered.** By Howell Raines. Putnam's. 472 pp. \$12.95

By THEODORE ROSENGARTEN

**T**HIS IS A SUPERB oral history of the civil rights movement in the Deep South. It is about enormous courage, exultation, despondency, and desire. Howell Raines, a Birmingham newspaperman, now political editor of the St. Petersburg Times, has dug deeper into the recollections of civil

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rights combatants than anybody yet. His book contains about a hundred interviews with veteran organizers, native heroes, opponents of black rights, reporters, politicians. People with sharply conflicting views trusted their words to Raines. He proved to be a profound listener.

The interviews follow the chronology of the movement. Raines begins in Montgomery, in 1955-56, where a boycott by blacks succeeded in integrating the city buses. But the meaning of the civil rights movement lies as surely in the feelings it aroused as in the number of facilities desegregated. And when Raines picks up the story at the Greensboro, North Carolina sit-ins in 1960, we learn from Franklin McCain how ecstatic and liberating nonviolent struggle can be. "If it's possible to know what it means to have your soul cleansed—I felt pretty clean at that time. I probably felt better on that day than I've ever felt in my life." Fred L.

Shuttlesworth told Raines that the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) looked forward to facing Bull Connor in Birmingham, in 1963, "to see if it is true—and it is true; I don't think I should say it like that—to really prove that where sin did abound, Grace did much more abound, where darkness is, then light can overcome it."

In these beautiful passages religious feelings are secularized but not diminished. Indeed, the movement is perceived as a challenge to the scriptures as well as to human beings and the law. This kind of historical evidence—what people are thinking and feeling at the time they act—would be lost without first-person accounts. It is crucial to understanding the faith that sustained the long fight for so many black Christians in the South.

Not everyone in the movement believed in nonviolence, and not everyone who did arrived there theologi-

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cally. Randolph Blackwell, who was working with the Voter Education Project in Atlanta when SCLC hired him away, told Martin Luther King in the job interview that he became committed to nonviolence "as a social sci-

lieved in meeting the white man "with ever what he pose with. If he pose with a smile, meet him with a smile, and if he pose with a gun, meet him with a gun." This was country wisdom designed to keep you alive.

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entist." For some, nonviolence was a philosophy; for others, one tactic among many. Hartman Turnbow, a Mississippi farmer drawn to the movement when "a fella come in here talkin' 'bout redish [registration] and vote to become a first-class citizen," be-

Nonviolence overcame Bull Connor, his dogs, water hoses, and head-busting police in Birmingham in 1963. It defeated tear gas and more beatings in Selma, Alabama in 1965. One week after state troopers attacked voting rights marchers on a bridge in Selma,

President Johnson announced that he would submit a Voting Rights Bill to Congress.

The Selma-to-Montgomery march was SCLC's idea. Some people in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) felt that SCLC was invading its territory. Generally, SNCC and SCLC did not compete for constituencies—there was enough injustice to go around. SNCC bore the brunt of organizing in rural Alabama and Mississippi. Amzie Moore, a native of Cleveland, Mississippi, credits SNCC with getting the movement moving in his state. "SNCC was an organization of strong, intelligent, young people who had no fear of death and certainly did not hesitate to get about the business for which they came here." The NAACP, he says, wouldn't make a move without a lawyer's advice. SCLC was too ministerial for him, though he

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insists, "I think the world and all of ministers, I don't have anything against ministers . . ."

SNCC, SCLC, CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), and the NAACP joined forces in 1964 to form the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) in Mississippi. COFO took the radical step of bringing in white volunteers to work with blacks for Freedom Summer. Dave Dennis, a COFO field director, knew that the country just would not respond to blacks alone losing their lives; whites had to be put on the firing line, too. "That's cold," he tells Raines, but it was "speaking the language of this country."

Dennis is anything but cold himself. He recalls with pain the deaths of James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner near Philadelphia, Mississippi, in June of 1964. He had assigned Schwerner to the area, and the car that the three men were taken from was his. The Klan had been look-

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ing for him. And with a lingering vexation he recalls the search for their bodies. Almost every day a body or two would be found, but it wasn't them. While others expressed relief, Dennis was outraged. "They were finding people, black people, floating in rivers and every place else, and nothing was being done about it."

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Other folks were strengthened by the movement and delivered from lesser things they might have done with their lives. Some have achieved great personal and social success. John Lewis, James Farmer, Julian Bond, Andrew Young—all grew in and through the movement. *My Soul is Rested* rotates around the unique success of Martin Luther King.

"One name has to characterize a movement, a time, a period," says Fred

L. Shuttlesworth. Ask people today the name they most identify with the civil rights movement and nine out of ten will say King. Since his death in Memphis in 1968, hardly any American has achieved his visibility. The anticipation of his presence at a march or a rally could bring thousands into the streets, fix the eyes of television and the press on the event, and attract sympathy and money from distant places. Dr. King was one of the very few blacks whose life, and possible death, interested white America.

Dr. King seemed born to lead. But sometimes he hesitated and had to be pushed by his colleagues to catch up to the people. He was a craftsman of non-violence and, in Bayard Rustin's phrase, "a spiritual intellectual." But it was not he who introduced nonviolent tactics into the fight for civil rights. James Farmer, talking to Raines about early sit-ins in Chicago in 1941, describes the group's studied application of Ghandi's method. Franklin McCain, one of the North Carolina A&T College students who held the first sit-ins in the South in 1960, says that King was not the man they had "upmost in mind," but Ghandi was.

The movement had diverse beginnings, in diverse places. *My Soul is Rested* reveals that pieces of the movement existed in the aspirations of thousands of black southerners. These pieces came together where patience wore thin, when one or a few people refused to obey a segregation law, and the community with its leaders responded with support. This takes nothing away from Dr. King or from other black leaders, but rather places them deeper into the mainstream of their people.

Enemies of the movement believed that if they cut off the head the body would die. The F.B.I. believed it. But that wasn't the case. In Mississippi, reports Amzie Moore, "If 'leven people went to jail this evening who the power structure considered leaders, tomorrow morning you had 'leven more out there." Local whites blamed "outside agitators," communists, the press—anybody but the people in front of them—for mounting the challenge to their rule. Former Alabama governor John Patterson debunks the Freedom Riders because they weren't "bona fide interstate travelers." What they were doing, he tells Raines "was not a civil rights thing. It was a law enforcement problem . . ." He is right in more ways than one.

The problem was the law, bad laws, the laws of racism and segregation. Justice and law parted ways long ago when it came to race relations. Democratic society owes a huge debt to the movement for trying to reconcile the two. □