

I've been back to Selma many times since that fateful Sunday afternoon. Normally I'm with a large crowd, gathered for one anniversary or another of that '65 march. The town is alive with noise and excitement on such days, but the rest of the time it remains today what it was back then: a sleepy, dying little Southern community. Many of the storefronts along its downtown Broad Street are boarded up, with handwritten FOR LEASE signs taped on the windows. The businesses that are left—Rexall Drugs, the El Ranchero cafe, Walter Craig Sportsman's Headquarters ("TONS OF GUNS" is its slogan)—point more to the past than they do to the future.

The Dallas County Courthouse is still there, its steps that same pale green, though the building itself has now been painted the color of cream. Brown's Chapel, of course, still stands as well, with the same arched white-washed ceiling inside, the same rows of folding, theater-style seats up in its U-shaped balcony.

There's a monument in front of the church, a bust of Dr. King, which, on my most recent visit there, was coated with a thin dusting of snow. The unlikely snowfall had brought out children by the dozen in the dirt yards of the Carver projects, across the street from the church. They were hooting and hollering, trying valiantly to make snowmen out of the sprinkling of powder that lay on the ground. A couple of them were having a snowball fight, hiding from one another behind the streetside markers that commemorate the history that was written here in 1965.

None of those children were alive back then, but most of them know better than any historian the details of what happened on March 7 of that year. They've heard the story so many times, from parents and grandparents, from neighbors and friends—from the people who were there.

How could anyone ever forget a day like that?

It was brisk and breezy, a few puffs of purplish clouds scattered across the clear blue sky. By the time I arrived at Brown's Chapel, about half past noon, there were already close to five hundred marchers gathered on the ballfield and basketball courts beside and beyond the church. Some of the SCLC staffers were holding impromptu training sessions, teaching the people how to kneel and protect their bodies if attacked.

Hosea and Bevel were off to the side, huddled with Andy Young, the three of them talking animatedly, as if something was wrong. And there was something wrong. Dr. King, it turned out, had decided late the day before to postpone the march until Monday. He'd missed too many preaching commitments at his church in Atlanta, he explained. He needed to deliver his sermon that weekend. The march from Selma, he decided, would have to wait a day. That was the message Andy Young had been sent to deliver.

Hosea was clearly upset. So was Bevel. The people were here, and they were ready. There was no way to turn them back home now.

This was the first I'd heard of this news. Later I would learn that there were other factors that had affected Dr. King's decision, the most serious being a death threat, of which there had been several during the previous two months. Dr. King was initially leaning toward still coming, but his staff talked him out of it.

Or so the story goes. There is still disagreement and speculation today among many people about King's decision not to march that day. There is still resentment among a lot of people, especially SNCC members, who saw this as nothing but abandonment, a cop-out.

I don't feel that way. First of all, I can't imagine anyone questioning the courage of Martin Luther King Jr. Beyond that, in terms of the specific circumstances of that Sunday, no one in SNCC was in any position to criticize Dr. King. As far as I was concerned, they had lost the right to pass judgment of any kind on this march the moment they decided not to take part in it.

After seeing that the march could not be stopped, Andy Young went inside the church and called Dr. King in Atlanta. They talked over the situation, and King instructed Andy to choose one among them—Andy, Hosea or Bevel—to join me as co-leader of the march. The other two would remain behind to take care of things in case there was trouble.

Andy returned with that news, and the three of them proceeded to flip coins to see who would join me. The odd man would march; the other two would stay.

The odd man turned out to be Hosea, and so that little slice of history was settled—by the flip of a quarter.

It was mid-afternoon now, and time to assemble. A team of doctors and

nurses from a group called the Medical Committee for Human Rights had arrived the day before on a flight from New York and set up a makeshift clinic in the small parsonage beside the church. We expected a confrontation. We knew Sheriff Clark had issued yet another call the evening before for even more deputies. Mass arrests would probably be made. There might be injuries. Most likely, we would be stopped at the edge of the city limits, arrested and maybe roughed up a little bit. We did not expect anything worse than that.

And we did not expect to march all the way to Montgomery. No one knew for sure, until the last minute, if the march would even take place. There had been a measure of planning, but nowhere near the preparations and logistics necessary to move that many people in an orderly manner down fifty-four miles of highway, a distance that would take about five days for a group that size to cover.

Many of the men and women gathered on that ballfield had come straight from church. They were still wearing their Sunday outfits. Some of the women had on high heels. I had on a suit and tie, a light tan raincoat, dress shoes and my backpack. I was no more ready to hike half a hundred miles than anyone else. Like everyone around me, I was basically playing it by ear. None of us had thought much further ahead than that afternoon. Anything that happened beyond that—if we were allowed to go on, if this march did indeed go all the way to Montgomery—we figured we would take care of as we went along. The main thing was that we do it, that we march.

It was close to 4 P.M. when Andy, Hosea, Bevel and I gathered the marchers around us. A dozen or so reporters were there as well. I read a short statement aloud for the benefit of the press, explaining why we were marching today. Then we all knelt to one knee and bowed our heads as Andy delivered a prayer.

And then we set out, nearly six hundred of us, including a white SCLC staffer named Al Lingo—the same name as the commander of Alabama's state troopers.

We walked two abreast, in a pair of lines that stretched for several blocks. Hosea and I led the way. Alben Turner, an SCLC leader in Perry County, and Bob Mants were right behind us—Bob insisted on marching because I was marching; he told me he wanted to be there to "protect" me in case something happened.

Marie Foster and Amelia Boynton were next in line, and behind them, stretching as far as I could see, walked an army of teenagers, teachers, undertakers, beauticians—many of the same Selma people who had stood for weeks, months, years, in front of that courthouse.

At the far end, bringing up the rear, rolled four slow-moving ambulances.

I can't count the number of marches I have participated in in my lifetime, but there was something peculiar about this one. It was more than disciplined. It was somber and subdued, almost like a funeral procession. No one was jostling or pushing to get to the front, as often happened with these things. I don't know if there was a feeling that something was going to happen, or if the people simply sensed that this was a special procession, a "leaderless" march. There were no big names up front, no celebrities. This was just plain folks moving through the streets of Selma.

There was a little bit of a crowd looking on as we set out down the red sand of Sylvan Street, through the black section of town. There was some cheering and singing from those onlookers and from a few of the marchers, but then, as we turned right along Water Street, out of the black neighborhood now, the mood changed. There was no singing, no shouting—just the sound of scuffling feet. There was something holy about it, as if we were walking down a sacred path. It reminded me of Gandhi's march to the sea. Dr. King used to say there is nothing more powerful than the rhythm of marching feet, and that was what this was, the marching feet of a determined people. That was the only sound you could hear.

Down Water Street we went, turning right and walking along the river until we reached the base of the bridge, the Edmund Pettus Bridge.

There was a small posse of armed white men there, gathered in front of the *Selma Times-Journal* building. They had hard hats on their heads and clubs in their hands. Some of them were smirking. Not one said a word. I didn't think too much of them as we walked past. I'd seen men like that so many times.

As we turned onto the bridge, we were careful to stay on the narrow sidewalk. The road had been closed to traffic, but we still stayed on the walkway, which was barely wide enough for two people.

I noticed how steep it was as we climbed toward the steel canopy at the top of the arched bridge. It was too steep to see the other side. I looked down at the river and saw how still it was, still and brown. The surface of the water was stirred just a bit by the late-afternoon breeze. I noticed my trench coat was ruffling a little from that same small wind.

When we reached the crest of the bridge, I stopped dead still. So did Hosea.

There, facing us at the bottom of the other side, stood a sea of blue-helmeted, blue-uniformed Alabama state troopers, line after line of them, dozens of battle-ready lawmen stretched from one side of U.S. Highway 80 to the other.

Behind them were several dozen more armed men—Sheriff Clark's

posse—some on horseback, all wearing khaki clothing, many carrying clubs the size of baseball bats.

On one side of the road I could see a crowd of about a hundred whites, laughing and hollering, waving Confederate flags. Beyond them, at a safe distance, stood a small, silent group of black people.

I could see a crowd of newsmen and reporters gathered in the parking lot of a Pontiac dealership. And I could see a line of parked police and state trooper vehicles. I didn't know it at the time, but Clark and Lingo were in one of those cars.

It was a drop of one hundred feet from the top of that bridge to the river below. Hosea glanced down at the muddy water and said, "Can you swim?"

"No," I answered.

"Well," he said, with a tiny half smile, "neither can I."

"But," he added, lifting his head and looking straight ahead, "we might have to."

Then we moved forward. The only sounds were our footsteps on the bridge and the snorting of a horse ahead of us.

I noticed several troopers slipping gas masks over their faces as we approached.

At the bottom of the bridge, while we were still about fifty feet from the troopers, the officer in charge, a Major John Cloud, stepped forward, holding a small bullhorn up to his mouth.

Hosea and I stopped, which brought the others to a standstill.

"This is an unlawful assembly," Cloud pronounced. "Your march is not conducive to the public safety. You are ordered to disperse and go back to your church or to your homes."

"May we have a word with the major?" asked Hosea.

"There is no word to be had," answered Cloud.

Hosea asked the same question again, and got the same response.

Then Cloud issued a warning: "You have two minutes to turn around and go back to your church."

I wasn't about to turn around. We were there. We were not going to run. We couldn't turn and go back even if we wanted to. There were too many people.

We could have gone forward, marching right into the teeth of those troopers. But that would have been too aggressive, I thought, too provocative. God knew what might have happened if we had done that. These people were ready to be arrested, but I didn't want anyone to get hurt.

We couldn't go forward. We couldn't go back. There was only one option left that I could see.

"We should kneel and pray," I said to Hosea. He nodded.

We turned and passed the word back to begin bowing down in a prayerful manner.

But that word didn't get far. It didn't have time. One minute after he had issued his warning—I know this because I was careful to check my watch—Major Cloud issued an order to his troopers.

"Troopers," he barked. "Advance!"

And then all hell broke loose.

The troopers and possemen swept forward as one, like a human wave, a blur of blue shirts and billy clubs and bullwhips. We had no chance to turn and retreat. There were six hundred people behind us, bridge railings to either side and the river below.

I remember how vivid the sounds were as the troopers rushed toward us—the clunk of the troopers' heavy boots, the whoops of rebel yells from the white onlookers, the clip-clop of horses' hooves hitting the hard asphalt of the highway, the voice of a woman shouting, "Get 'em! Get the niggers!"

And then they were upon us. The first of the troopers came over me, a large, husky man. Without a word, he swung his club against the left side of my head. I didn't feel any pain, just the thud of the blow, and my legs giving way. I raised an arm—a reflex motion—as I curled up in the "prayer for protection" position. And then the same trooper hit me again. And everything started to spin.

I heard something that sounded like gunshots. And then a cloud of smoke rose all around us.

Tear gas.

I'd never experienced tear gas before. This, I would learn later, was a particularly toxic form called C-4, made to induce nausea.

I began choking, coughing. I couldn't get air into my lungs. I felt as if I was taking my last breath. If there was ever a time in my life for me to panic, it should have been then. But I didn't. I remember how strangely calm I felt as I thought, This is it. People are going to die here. I'm going to die here.

I really felt that I saw death at that moment, that I looked it right in its face. And it felt strangely soothing. I had a feeling that it would be so easy to just lie down there, just lie down and let it take me away.

That was the way those first few seconds looked from where I stood—and lay. Here is how Roy Reed, a reporter for *The New York Times*, described what he saw:

The troopers rushed forward, their blue uniforms and white helmets blurring into a flying wedge as they moved.

The wedge moved with such force that it seemed almost to pass over the waiting column instead of through it.

The first 10 or 20 Negroes were swept to the ground screaming, arms and legs flying, and packs and bags went skittering across the grassy divider strip and on to the pavement on both sides.

Those still on their feet retreated.

The troopers continued pushing, using both the force of their bodies and the prodding of their nightsticks.

A cheer went up from the white spectators lining the south side of the highway.

The mounted possemen spurred their horses and rode at a run into the retreating mass. The Negroes cried out as they crowded together for protection, and the whites on the sidelines whooped and cheered.

The Negroes paused in their retreat for perhaps a minute, still screaming and huddling together.

Suddenly there was a report like a gunshot and a grey cloud spewed over the troopers and the Negroes.

"Tear gas!" someone yelled.

The cloud began covering the highway. Newsmen, who were confined by four troopers to a corner 100 yards away, began to lose sight of the action.

But before the cloud finally hid it all, there were several seconds of unobstructed view. Fifteen or twenty nightsticks could be seen through the gas, flailing at the heads of the marchers.

The Negroes broke and ran. Scores of them streamed across the parking lot of the Selma Tractor Company. Troopers and possemen, mounted and unmounted, went after them.

I was bleeding badly. My head was now exploding with pain. That brief, sweet sense of just wanting to lie there was gone. I needed to get up. I'd faded out for I don't know how long, but now I was tuned back in.

There was mayhem all around me. I could see a young lad—a teenaged boy—sitting on the ground with a gaping cut in his head, the blood just gushing out. Several women, including Mrs. Boynton, were lying on the pavement and the grass median. People were weeping. Some were vomiting from the tear gas. Men on horses were moving in all directions, purposely riding over the top of fallen people, bringing their animals' hooves down on shoulders, stomachs and legs.

The mob of white onlookers had joined in now, jumping cameramen and reporters. One man filming the action was knocked down and his camera was

taken away. The man turned out to be an FBI agent, and the three men who attacked him were later arrested. One of them was Jimmie George Robinson, the man who had attacked Dr. King at the Hotel Albert.

I was up now and moving, back across the bridge, with troopers and possemen and other retreating marchers all around me. At the other end of the bridge, we had to push through the possemen we'd passed outside the *Selma Times-Journal* building.

"Please, no," I could hear one woman scream.

"God, we're being killed!" cried another.

With nightsticks and whips—one posseman had a rubber hose wrapped with barbed wire—Sheriff Clark's "deputies" chased us all the way back into the Carver project and up to the front of Brown's Chapel, where we tried getting as many people as we could inside the church to safety. I don't even recall how I made it that far, how I got from the bridge to the church, but I did.

A United Press International reporter gave this account of that segment of the attack:

The troopers and possemen, under Gov. George C. Wallace's orders to stop the Negroes' "Walk for Freedom" from Selma to Montgomery, chased the screaming, bleeding marchers nearly a mile back to their church, clubbing them as they ran.

Ambulances screamed in relays between Good Samaritan Hospital and Brown's Chapel Church, carrying hysterical men, women and children suffering head wounds and tear gas burns.

Even then, the possemen and troopers, 150 of them, including Clark himself, kept attacking, beating anyone who remained on the street. Some of the marchers fought back now, with men and boys emerging from the Carver homes with bottles and bricks in their hands, heaving them at the troopers, then retreating for more. It was a scene that's been replayed so many times in so many places—in Belfast, in Jerusalem, in Beijing. Angry, desperate people hurling whatever they can at the symbols of authority, their hopeless fury much more powerful than the futile bottles and bricks in their hands.

I was inside the church, which was awash with sounds of groaning and weeping. And singing and crying. Mothers shouting out for their children. Children screaming for their mothers and brothers and sisters. So much confusion and fear and anger all erupting at the same time.

Further up Sylvan Street, the troopers chased other marchers who had fled into the First Baptist Church. A teenaged boy, struggling with the possemen, was thrown through a church window there.

Finally Wilson Baker arrived and persuaded Clark and his men to back off

to a block away, where they remained, breathing heavily and awaiting further orders.

A crowd of Selma's black men and women had collected in front of the church by now, with SNCC and SCLC staff members moving through and trying to keep them calm. Some men in the crowd spoke of going home to get guns. Our people tried talking them down, getting them calm. Kids and teenagers continued throwing rocks and bricks.

The parsonage next to the church looked like a MASH unit, with doctors and nurses tending to dozens of weeping, wounded people. There were cuts and bumps and bruises, and a lot of tear gas burns, which were treated by rinsing the eyes with a boric acid solution.

Relays of ambulances sent by black funeral homes carried the more seriously wounded to Good Samaritan Hospital, Selma's largest black health-care facility, run by white Catholics and staffed mostly by black doctors and nurses. One of those ambulance drivers made ten trips back and forth from the church to the hospital and to nearby Burwell Infirmary, a smaller clinic. More than ninety men and women were treated at both facilities, for injuries ranging from head gashes and fractured ribs and wrists and arms and legs to broken jaws and teeth. There was one fractured skull—mine, although I didn't know it yet.

I didn't consider leaving for the hospital, though several people tried to persuade me to go. I wanted to do what I could to help with all this chaos. I was so much in the moment, I didn't have much time to think about what had happened, nor about what was yet to come.

By nightfall, things had calmed down a bit. Hosea and I and the others had decided to call a mass meeting there in the church, and more than six hundred people, many bandaged from the wounds of that day, arrived. Clark's possemen had been ordered away, but the state troopers were still outside, keeping a vigil.

Hosea Williams spoke to the crowd first, trying to say something to calm them. Then I got up to say a few words. My head was throbbing. My hair was matted with blood clotting from an open gash. My trench coat was stained with dirt and blood.

I looked out on the room, crammed wall to wall and floor to ceiling with people. There was not a spot for one more body. I had no speech prepared. I had not had the time or opportunity to give much thought to what I would say. The words just came.

"I don't know how President Johnson can send troops to Vietnam," I said. "I don't see how he can send troops to the Congo. I don't see how he can send troops to Africa, and he can't send troops to Selma, Alabama."

There was clapping, and some shouts of "Yes!" and "Amen!"

"Next time we march," I continued, "we may have to keep going when we get to Montgomery. We may have to go on to Washington."

When those words were printed in *The New York Times* the next morning, the Justice Department announced it was sending FBI agents to Selma to investigate whether "unnecessary force was used by law officers and others." For two months we'd been facing "unnecessary force," but that apparently had not been enough. This, finally, was enough.

Now, after speaking, it was time for me to have my own injuries examined. I went next door to the parsonage, where the doctors took one look at my head and immediately sent me over to Good Samaritan. What I remember most about arriving there was the smell in the waiting room. The chairs were jammed with people from the march—victims and their families—and their clothing reeked of tear gas. The bitter, acrid smell filled the room.

The nurses and nuns were very busy. Priests roamed the room, comforting and calming people. When one of the nurses saw my head, I was immediately taken through and X-rayed. My head wound was cleaned and dressed, then I was admitted. By ten that night, exhausted and groggy from painkillers, I finally fell asleep.

It was not until the next day that I learned what else had happened that evening, that just past 9:30 P.M., ABC Television cut into its Sunday night movie—a premiere broadcast of Stanley Kramer's *Judgment at Nuremberg*, a film about Nazi racism—with a special bulletin. News anchor Frank Reynolds came on-screen to tell viewers of a brutal clash that afternoon between state troopers and black protest marchers in Selma, Alabama. They then showed fifteen minutes of film footage of the attack.

The images were stunning—scene after scene of policemen on foot and on horseback beating defenseless American citizens. Many viewers thought this was somehow part of the movie. It seemed too strange, too ugly to be real. It *couldn't* be real.

But it was. At one point in the film clip, Jim Clark's voice could be heard clearly in the background: "Get those goddamned niggers!" he yelled. "And get those goddamned white niggers."

The American public had already seen so much of this sort of thing, countless images of beatings and dogs and cursing and hoses. But something about that day in Selma touched a nerve deeper than anything that had come before. Maybe it was the concentrated focus of the scene, the mass movement of those troopers on foot and riders on horseback rolling into and over two long lines of stoic, silent, unarmed people. This wasn't like Birmingham, where chanting and cheering and singing preceded a wild stampede and scattering. This was a face-off in the most vivid terms between a dignified, composed, completely nonviolent multitude of silent protestors and the truly

malevolent force of a heavily armed, hateful battalion of troopers. The sight of them rolling over us like human tanks was something that had never been seen before.

People just couldn't believe this was happening, not in America. Women and children being attacked by armed men on horseback—it was impossible to believe.

But it had happened. And the response from across the nation to what would go down in history as Bloody Sunday was immediate. By midnight that evening, even as I lay asleep in my room over at Good Samaritan, people from as far away as New York and Minnesota were flying into Alabama and driving to Selma, forming a vigil of their own outside Brown's Chapel. President Johnson, who had been contacted by the Justice Department almost immediately after the attack, watched the ABC footage that evening. He knew he would have to respond. Dr. King, too, was informed of what had happened as soon as the President—Andy Young called King in Atlanta, and the two agreed that now there would be a march. They made plans to file a request the first thing in the morning, asking for a federal injunction barring state interference in a massive Selma-to-Montgomery march.

That request arrived the next morning, Monday, in Montgomery, on the desk of Federal District Judge Frank Johnson—the same judge who had issued the injunction four years earlier providing us with safe passage out of Montgomery during the Freedom Ride.

Banner headlines, with four-column photographs—many showing the trooper clubbing me as I lay on the ground with my arm upraised—appeared that Monday morning in newspapers around the world. By midday I was receiving telegrams and cards and flowers from total strangers. A wreath arrived from an elderly woman in Southern California: "A FORMER ALABAMIAN," the card read, "WE ARE WITH YOU."

Dr. King and Ralph Abernathy came to see me. They told me what was going on outside, that people all across the country were with us, that they were going to have this march. "It's going to happen, John," Dr. King told me. "Rest assured it is going to happen."

John Doar, from the Justice Department, came to interview me about the attack, to take a deposition of sorts. The federal government was now very involved in this thing.

The hospital staff kept the press away from my room, except for a UPJ photographer, who was allowed in to shoot a picture. I saw no reporters at all.

I was in a lot of pain that day. And I felt very strange lying in that bed. With all my arrests and injuries over the years, I had never actually been admitted to a hospital before. I'd been treated, but never admitted. And I did not like it. I felt very restless and a little bit frightened. Maybe it was the drugs,

but I had visions of someone slipping into the room and doing something to me. I felt vulnerable, helpless.

Worst of all, though, was the sense of being cut off. I was hearing about everything secondhand, if at all. It was killing me not to know what was going on outside that hospital, because I knew there was plenty going on.

And I was right.

Several carloads, and a truckload as well, of SNCC field workers from Mississippi had rushed in that day, along with a chartered plane of staff people from Atlanta—Forman and others. All told, more than thirty SNCC people had arrived in Selma by that afternoon.

They came with a mixture of hurt and outrage and shame and guilt. They were concerned for the local people of Selma, and also for one of their own. I had been hurt, and they didn't like it. It made them mad. It got them excited, too. This was an emergency, a crisis, something to *respond* to. It was like firemen who hadn't had a fire to put out in a long time. Now everyone wanted to be the first to get to the blaze.

None of them came to see me in the hospital, except for Lafayette Surrney, whose purpose was to collect information for a press release. I really wasn't hurt about that. I guessed that they were probably very busy.

And I was right. Word came from Judge Johnson that Monday afternoon that he would not grant an injunction without a hearing, and he would not be able to hold a hearing any sooner than Thursday. That evening the SCLC and SNCC leadership—Dr. King, Andy Young and others of the SCLC; Forman, Willie Ricks and Fay Bellamy of SNCC, along with Jim Farmer, who'd come on the scene to represent CORE—argued over whether they should risk losing the judge's support by staging a march before getting his approval, or risk losing credibility and momentum by waiting patiently until he issued his injunction.

Unlike two days earlier, when he had been dead set against SNCC's participation, Forman was now pushing hard to march, and to march now. Hosea was with him, as was Farmer. Most of the others leaned toward accepting Judge Johnson's terms. If I had been there, I would have said we should march and let the courts do what they would—what they *should*. I wouldn't have gone as far as Forman, who was furious that this judge was telling us to wait—he called Judge Johnson's offer "legal blackmail"—but I would have said this was no time to stop and sit still.

Our SNCC people were even more fed up with the SCLC than they had been two days before. King's staff had prepared a fund-raising ad to be placed in *The New York Times*, showing a photograph of me being beaten on the bridge. That really bothered a lot of our people. The way Julian later put it to one reporter, "It was *our* chairman who was leading the march. . . . SCLC was

hogging all the publicity and all the money and doing very little to *deserve* it. . . . We just resented SCLC's ability to capitalize on things we thought we were doing."

I understood that resentment. But again, I felt that SNCC had lost the upper hand completely, along with any right to complain, by not being part of that march. When Julian said it was "our chairman" leading the march, he was ignoring the fact that our leadership had pointedly decided the night before that I would march *not* as the chairman of SNCC but as myself. There was something wrong with trying to have it both ways now. I had played the role of a go-between up until this point, bridging my roles with both SNCC and the SCLC, but clearly that was going to be harder to do from here on out.

The final decision at that Monday night meeting was left up to Dr. King, and he decided there would be no march on Tuesday. Then he left with the others to attend a rally at Brown's Chapel. The place was packed; the atmosphere was overwhelmingly emotional, and apparently it overwhelmed Dr. King as well, who stunned everyone who had been at that meeting by announcing to the crowd that there would be a march the next day.

Late that night and on into the next morning, the SNCC and SCLC leaders met at the home of a local black dentist, Dr. Sullivan Jackson, to hash out the plans for the Tuesday march. State and federal authorities had issued official statements forbidding it. George Wallace actually claimed he had "saved lives" by having Lingo and Clark and their men stop us that Sunday afternoon—the counties ahead, the places we would have to pass through to get to Montgomery, said the governor, were much more dangerous than anything we faced in Selma. Those same dangers, he now claimed, were too great to allow us to march on this day.

Dr. King and the others were up until 4 A.M. trying to work out some sort of compromise with government officials in the face of a restraining order against this march issued by Judge Johnson. King spoke by phone early that morning with Attorney General Katzenbach in Washington. Then, after a few hours' sleep, King met with several federal officials, including John Doar and former Florida governor LeRoy Collins, who was now director of the Justice Department's Community Relations Service and who had been sent by President Johnson to mediate this situation. After Collins met with King that morning, he went to talk to state and local officials, including Lingo and Clark, who were once again stationed with their troops at the east end of the bridge.

No one besides Dr. King and a few of his closest staffers knew exactly what was decided by those early-morning phone calls and meetings. When a column of two thousand marchers led by Dr. King left Brown's Chapel early that afternoon, walking the same route toward the same bridge we'd tried to cross that Sunday, they all assumed they were headed for Montgomery. When

they were stopped at the bridge by a U.S. marshal who read aloud Judge Johnson's order against this march, they assumed this was just a formality. And when Dr. King then led the column over the crest of the bridge to the bottom of the other side, where the armed troopers were massed once again, the marchers steeled themselves for another attack.

This time, though, the troopers stood still and simply watched as Dr. King brought the column to a halt and led the marchers in prayer. Then they sang "We Shall Overcome." And then, as the troopers moved aside to open the way east to Montgomery, Dr. King turned around and headed back to the church.

The marchers were shocked and confused. They had no idea what was going on. They had come to put their bodies on the line, and now they were backing down, retreating, going home. They followed Dr. King—what else could they do? But they were disappointed. Many were openly angry.

Jim Forman was absolutely livid. When he—and everyone else—learned that Dr. King had made an agreement with federal officials that morning to march only to the bridge, as a symbolic gesture, and then to turn back and await Judge Johnson's hearing later that week, he exploded, denouncing Dr. King's "trickery" and saying that this was the last straw. SNCC had had enough. There would be no more working with the SCLC. There would be no waiting for any judge's injunction. SNCC was finished with waiting, finished with Selma. It was time to do something on our own, said Forman. Within twenty-four hours he shifted our manpower and focus from Tuskegee Institute and Alabama State University began laying siege to the state capitol with a series of demonstrations more overt and aggressive than anything seen in Selma. Taunting, provoking, clashing with mounted policemen—the SNCC protests that week in Montgomery would prove to be nothing like our non-violent campaign in Selma.

All this news hit me like a windstorm when I was released from the hospital that Tuesday night. I was still in great pain—my head was pounding. My skull was fractured. I'd had a serious concussion. The doctors told me I needed more treatment and suggested I see some specialists up in Boston. But there was no way I was going to Boston. There was no time. I'd already lain in that hospital long enough. It was driving me crazy.

One good thing about the three days I spent in that hospital bed was that it gave me a lot of time to think, to reflect. I had every reason to be discouraged. My feelings and philosophy about the movement, about our strategies and tactics, my commitment to nonviolence, my loyalty to Dr. King were all increasingly putting me at odds with many of my SNCC colleagues. We even

differed about the events of that Tuesday, about Dr. King's "double-dealing," as some of them called it. I had no problem with what Dr. King did. I thought it was in keeping with the philosophy of the movement, that there comes a time when you must retreat, and that there is nothing wrong with retreating. There is nothing wrong with coming back to fight another day. Dr. King knew—we all knew—that Judge Johnson was going to give us what we were asking for if we simply followed procedure, followed the rules.

But I was in the minority. Most of the people in SNCC were sick of procedure, sick of the rules. Some were sick of me. By all rights, I should have been despondent when I came out of that hospital, but I wasn't. Quite the opposite. I guess I've always been a person who looks at the big picture rather than focusing on little details. That's probably a curse as much as it is a blessing. But that's what I saw that Tuesday night as I emerged from that hospital—the big picture. And it looked wonderful. I was convinced now more than ever that we would prevail. The response we had gotten nationally in the wake of that Sunday attack was so much greater than anything I'd seen since I'd become a part of the movement for civil rights. It was greater than the Freedom Rides, greater than the March on Washington, greater than Mississippi Summer. The country seemed truly aroused. People were really moved. During the first forty-eight hours after Bloody Sunday, there were demonstrations in more than eighty cities protesting the brutality and urging the passage of a voting rights act. There were speeches on the floors of both houses of Congress condemning the attack and calling for voting rights legislation. A telegram signed by more than sixty congressmen was sent to President Johnson, asking for "immediate" submission of a voting rights bill.

Yes, we had serious problems within SNCC. They would have to be worked out, and I had no doubt they would be. But meanwhile, the movement had an incredible amount of momentum. When I came out of the hospital that Tuesday night, despite all the buzz among my SNCC colleagues about the "betrayal" that afternoon, I was exhilarated.

There was a rally that night at Brown's Chapel, and I was overjoyed to be there. People in the press were pushing and pushing about the "split" between SNCC and the SCLC. They asked me openly about it. I told them, no, there was no split. How could there be a split, I said, between two groups that have never pretended to be one?

"I am not going to engage in any public discussion of organizational problems," I stated. "SCLC is not the enemy. George Wallace and segregation are the enemy."

Ivanhoe Donaldson put it a different way. "Within the movement," he told one reporter, "we are a family. Arguments take place in any family."

He couldn't have put it any better. And the wisest families, he might have added, keep their arguments to themselves. Yes, we had problems among ourselves and with the SCLC, but I wasn't about to discuss them with the press.

That night, after the rally at Brown's, I went home with one of the families in the Carver project, the Wests, and slept like a baby. It was not until the next morning that I heard what had happened while I was asleep.

More than four hundred out-of-town ministers—most of them white—had taken part in the march that afternoon. After the rally that evening, three of them went and had dinner at Walker's Cafe, the diner that was such a favorite among movement people. After their meal, as they walked back toward the church, they lost their way and wound up passing through a poor white section of town. As they went by a little bar called the Silver Moon, a crowd from inside the bar came out and surrounded them. Before they knew what was happening, one of the three, a thirty-eight-year-old Unitarian minister from Boston named James J. Reeb, was clubbed in the head by a full baseball-style swing of a bat. He was so badly injured that the local emergency room staff put him in an ambulance and sent him on to Birmingham University Hospital, where he was listed Wednesday morning in critical condition with a large blood clot in his brain.

Thursday, with the Reverend Reeb's condition headlined in the newspapers, I went to Montgomery for the beginning of the federal court hearing on the SCLC request for an injunction to block state interference and allow a Selma-to-Montgomery march. Walking back into Frank Johnson's courtroom, where I'd testified four years earlier during the Freedom Ride, felt familiar in some ways, but different in one hugely important one. Four years earlier, the governor of Alabama was John Patterson. He was the figure of state authority who was squared off against the federal figure, Judge Johnson. Now the governor was George Wallace, a man whose clashes with Judge Johnson went back for years and years.

Frank Johnson and George Wallace had been classmates at the University of Alabama in the 1930s, but other than that they had next to nothing in common. While Wallace was from the same southeastern, deeply Confederate part of the state as I, Johnson grew up in north Alabama, near Tennessee, in a county that had actually sided with the Union during the Civil War. Early in his career Johnson established a reputation for fairness and reason in the face of racists. During the Montgomery bus boycott he was a member of a three-judge panel that handed down a decision in favor of desegregation. Later, he sat on another panel that struck down Alabama's poll-tax law. In 1958 he ordered the voter registration records of Barbour County to be turned over to the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. The Barbour County circuit judge who held those records refused to give them up. Only after Johnson

threatened him with a contempt charge did the circuit judge relent and give up the records. That judge was George Wallace.

In the wake of that episode, Wallace famously called Johnson an "integrating, carpetbagging, scalawagging, race-mixing, bald-faced liar." Now, seven years later, the two were squaring off again, this time with Wallace sitting in the governor's mansion.

We had spent several days meeting with our lawyers—Fred Gray, Arthur Shores, Orzell Billingsley and J. L. Chestnut—preparing our case, which was to establish that our rights had been repeatedly violated during our two-month campaign in Selma, often through violent means, and that this march, as a method of demonstrating our right to those rights, should be allowed.

We expected the hearing to extend over several days, which it did. I testified, describing in detail my experience the Sunday of the attack on the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The FBI agents who witnessed that attack also testified. A film clip of the attack—three minutes of footage shot by Larry Pierce for CBS—was shown, and when the courtroom lights were turned back on, Judge Johnson stood silently, shook his head, straightened his robe and called for a recess. He was visibly disgusted.

On the third day of the hearing Colonel Lingo testified and indicated that the order to use force that day came straight from George Wallace. He didn't come right out and say it then, but years later, when Lingo was running for sheriff of Jefferson County, he was explicit. "I was ordered to cause the scene that the troopers made," he said. "Who ordered me? The governor! Governor George C. Wallace ordered me to stop the marchers even if we had to use force, to bring this thing to a halt. He said that we'd teach other niggers to try to march on a public highway in Alabama. He said that he was damned if he would allow such a thing to take place."

Whether Wallace actually ordered it or not, he certainly condoned the attack that took place that Sunday. And he never criticized it. In fact, even as Judge Johnson's hearing was moving into its third day, Wallace was on his way to Washington to meet with President Johnson and try to convince the President to step in and stop us from marching. That meeting wound up backfiring on Wallace. Not only did Johnson not agree to help Wallace, but he emerged from the meeting and made a stunning announcement to the reporters waiting outside:

The events of last Sunday cannot and will not be repeated, but the demonstrations in Selma have a much larger meaning. They are a protest against a deep and very unjust flaw in American democracy itself.

Ninety-five years ago our Constitution was amended to require

that no American be denied the right to vote because of race or color. Almost a century later, many Americans are kept from voting simply because they are Negroes.

Therefore, this Monday I will send to the Congress a request for legislation to carry out the amendment of the Constitution.

That was Saturday, March 13. The Reverend Reeb had passed away two nights earlier, prompting even more demonstrations across the country in support of our efforts in Selma. That Sunday, Forman and I flew to New York for a march in Harlem protesting the events in Alabama. Several thousand people, most of them black, a great many dressed in white Masonic uniforms, paraded, then listened as I told them what had happened and what was going to happen in Selma.

Meanwhile, down in Montgomery, as well as in cities across the country, SNCC-led demonstrations were heating up. There were sit-ins at the Justice Department and protests outside the White House. I heard later that President Johnson actually complained at a meeting that Sunday night that his daughter Luci couldn't study because of all the noise outside.

The next day, Monday, I was back in Montgomery for the fourth day of the hearing. It was clear now that Judge Johnson was going to give us the injunction we wanted. He asked us that day to submit a plan for the march we wanted to make. We went back that afternoon—Andy Young, Hosea Williams, Jack Greenberg, who was head of the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund, several other SCLC people and I—to the Albert Pick Motel in Montgomery and drew up details of the number of people we expected to march, the route we would follow and the number of days it would take.

Then I headed back to Selma, where a rally was held that afternoon in honor of the Reverend Reeb. More than two thousand people marched through downtown Selma to the courthouse steps, where Dr. King led a twenty-minute service, with Jim Clark's deputies looking on but doing nothing to stop it.

I was in Selma that night when I got word that there had been an outburst of violence earlier that afternoon in Montgomery, where several hundred SNCC demonstrators—mainly the Tuskegee Institute and Alabama State students organized by Forman—had clashed with police and mounted deputies who tried to stop them from demonstrating. When the police began pushing in and physically shoving the students aside, some of the students responded by throwing rocks, bricks and bottles. That brought the mounted possemen forward, swinging clubs and whips. When the students ran, the possemen chased them on horseback, actually riding up onto the porches of private homes. At least one glass door was broken by the charge of a deputy on horseback.

I was horrified to hear this. It was almost surreal. The violence seemed to be getting wilder and wilder each day. I talked to Forman early that evening on the phone and agreed that we should stage a march the next day to protest the extremity of the possemen's attack. I had the final day of Judge Johnson's hearing to attend in the morning, but I would be there for the march after that.

After talking with Forman, I settled in that night at the home of Dr. Jackson, the Selma dentist, to watch President Johnson make a live televised address to Congress. Dr. King and several SCLC staffers were also squeezed into Dr. and Mrs. Jackson's small living room. The President had invited Dr. King and me to come up to Washington that night and join the audience for his speech, but we decided the place for us to be was Selma.

And so, along with 70 million other Americans who watched the broadcast that evening, we listened to Lyndon Johnson make what many others and I consider not only the finest speech of his career, but probably the strongest speech any American president has ever made on the subject of civil rights.

It began powerfully:

At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was a century ago at Appomattox. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama.

It moved toward a climax with a focus on voting rights:

Rarely in any time does an issue lay bare the secret heart of America itself. . . . The issue of equal rights for American Negroes is such an issue. And should we defeat every enemy, and should we double our wealth and conquer the stars and still be unequal to this issue, then we will have failed as a people and as a nation.

And it peaked with the President citing our favorite freedom song, the anthem, the very heart and soul, of the civil rights movement:

Even if we pass this bill, the battle will not be over. What happened in Selma is part of a far larger movement which reaches into every section and state of America. It is the effort of American Negroes to secure for themselves the full blessings of American life.

Their cause must be our cause too. Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.

And we shall overcome.

All told, the speech was forty-five minutes long. It was interrupted forty times by applause, twice by standing ovations. I was deeply moved. Lyndon

Johnson was no politician that night. He was a man who spoke from his heart. His were the words of a statesman and more; they were the words of a poet. Dr. King must have agreed. He wiped away a tear at the point where Johnson said the words "We shall overcome."

Predictably, not everyone was so moved. I was not surprised to hear Jim Forman attack the speech. The President's reference to our anthem was a "tinkling empty symbol," Forman told one reporter. "Johnson," he later said to another writer, "spoiled a good song that day."

We never did have time to discuss the speech, Forman and I. Events were tumbling much too swiftly. The next morning I was back in Montgomery, watching our attorneys hand Judge Johnson the plans for our march. The hearing was now over. Johnson would make his decision by the following day.

That afternoon—gray, overcast, with a steady rain drizzling down—I joined Forman, Dr. King and others at the front of a group of six hundred people marching from the state capitol to the Montgomery County Courthouse to protest the violence of the day before. To this day, photos from that day's march, showing us wearing ponchos and raincoats, are mistakenly presented as if they were taken during the march from Selma to Montgomery, which they were not. That march was yet to come.

That evening, at a rally called by SCLC officials, with Dr. King and Abernathy in the audience, along with dozens of middle-class, mainstream black ministers, Forman stunned everyone with one of the angriest, most fiery speeches made by a movement leader up to that point.

There's only one man in the country that can stop George Wallace and those posses.

These problems will not be solved until the man in that shaggy old place called the White House begins to shake and gets on the phone and says, "Now listen, George, we're coming down there and throw you in jail if you don't stop that mess."...

I said it today, and I will say it again. If we can't sit at the table of democracy, we'll knock the fucking legs off

The fact that he quickly caught himself and muttered the words "Excuse me" was lost on almost everyone there. This was a church. Not only were those pews filled with ministers, but there were women and children in the audience, too. They were shocked. I was not. I'd heard Forman use that kind of language many times at SNCC meetings. But I was dismayed. That was not the language of the nonviolence movement. That was not the message of the movement, at least not of the movement I was a part of. And that was what was most significant to me about that speech, not the fact that Forman's

words were so bold and profane, but the fact that they pointed the way down a road SNCC was headed that I knew I would not be able to travel.

Even Dr. King, when he stepped to the podium after Forman was finished, had trouble restoring calm. People were visibly upset. Several had already gotten up to leave. Then, as if on some sort of cue, one of Dr. King's staffers arrived, approached the podium and had a word with King, who nodded, smiled and waved everyone quiet.

Judge Johnson, Dr. King announced, had issued his ruling. The march from Selma to Montgomery would be allowed.

The judge's written order, officially released the next morning, beautifully and succinctly summarized what we had been through in Selma, and why we had gone through it:

The evidence in this case reflects that... an almost continuous pattern of conduct has existed on the part of defendant Sheriff Clark, his deputies, and his auxiliary deputies known as "possemen" of harassment, intimidation, coercion, threatening conduct, and, sometimes, brutal mistreatment toward these plaintiffs and other members of their class....

The attempted march alongside U.S. Highway 80... on March 7, 1965, involved nothing more than a peaceful effort on the part of Negro citizens to exercise a classic constitutional right: that is, the right to assemble peaceably and to petition one's government for the redress of grievances.

...it seems basic to our constitutional principles that the extent of the right to assemble, demonstrate and march peaceably along the highways and streets in an orderly manner should be commensurate with the enormity of the wrongs that are being protested and petitioned against. In this case, the wrongs are enormous. The extent of the right to demonstrate against these wrongs should be determined accordingly.

We had told the judge the march would begin on Sunday, March 21. This was Wednesday. That gave us five days to prepare. And this time, as compared to our small, spontaneous effort on Bloody Sunday, there would be preparation, as well as the full participation of SNCC, the SCLC, the NAACP, the Urban League and every other civil and human rights organization in the United States. In many ways, this event promised to be as big as the March on Washington. The numbers would be nowhere near that many, of course, but unlike the demonstration in Washington, which was a rally more than an actual march, this was literally going to be a mass movement of people, thousands

and thousands of them, walking down a highway, cutting through the heart of the state of Alabama.

The next five days were a swirl of activity, much like preparing an army for an assault. Marchers, not just from Selma but from across the nation, were mobilized and organized, route sections and schedules were mapped out, printed up and distributed, tents big enough to sleep people by the hundreds were secured. Food. Security. Communications. There were thousands of details to take care of, and thousands of dollars, most of it raised by the SCLC, to be spent. Just a quick scan of the records from that week indicates both the enormity and the tediousness of this undertaking:

- 700 air mattresses at \$1.45 each
- 700 blankets donated by local churches and schools
- Four carnival-sized tents rented for \$430 apiece
- 17,000 square feet of polyethylene for ground cloth, at a cost of \$187
- 700 rain ponchos
- Two 2,500-watt generators for lighting campsites
- 2,000 feet of electrical wiring

Walkie-talkies, flashlights, pots and pans and stoves for cooking... the list went on and on. And so did the manpower. A crew of twelve ministers—who called them the “fish and loaves committee”—was responsible for transporting food to each campsite each evening. Ten local women cooked the evening meals in church kitchens in Selma. Ten others made sandwiches around the clock. Squads of doctors and nurses from the same Medical Committee for Human Rights that had provided the physicians who tended the wounded on Bloody Sunday now geared up for a different kind of casualty, with dozens of cases of rubbing alcohol and hundreds of boxes of Band-Aids, for the marchers’ sore muscles and blistered feet.

Meanwhile, state and federal authorities were doing their part to prepare. The two westbound lanes of Highway 80 between Selma and Montgomery would be closed off for the five days of the march—all traffic in both directions would be routed onto the eastbound lanes. At the order of President Johnson, more than 1,800 armed Alabama National Guardsmen would line the fifty-four-mile route, along with two thousand U.S. Army troops, a hundred FBI agents and a hundred U.S. marshals. Helicopters and light planes would patrol the route from the air, watching for snipers or other signs of trouble, and demolition teams would clear the way ahead of us, inspecting bridges and bends in the road for planted explosives.

That Saturday night, the evening before the march would begin, more than two hundred people came to spend the night in Brown’s Chapel. We all

made short speeches—Bevel and Diane, Andy Young and I. Dick Gregory couldn’t help working a little routine into his speech. “It would be just our luck,” he said, looking ahead to our arrival in Montgomery, “to find out that Wallace is colored.”

When we awoke Sunday morning, more than three thousand people had gathered outside the church. Dr. King greeted them with a speech intended to make the local Selmans among them comfortable with the middle-class professionals and out-of-town celebrities who had arrived to join them. We were all very sensitive about this, about keeping the focus as much as possible on the people who had brought this historic day about, the everyday men and women of Selma. We made a point to put them at the front of the march, right behind the row that led the way.

That row included Dr. King and his wife, Coretta, A. Philip Randolph, Ralph Bunche, Ralph and Juanita Abernathy, Andy Young, Hosea, me, Forman, Dick Gregory and Rabbi Abraham Heschel of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, a biblical-looking man with a long, flowing white beard. When he walked up to join us, one onlooker shouted out, “There goes God!”

Someone arrived with an armful of Hawaiian leis, which were placed around each of our necks. Abernathy stepped forward and announced, “Wallace, it’s all over now.”

And then we stepped off, 3,200 people walking in a column that stretched a mile long.

Ahead of us rolled a television truck, its lights and cameras trained on Dr. King’s every step.

Behind us walked an unimaginable cross section of American people.

There was a one-legged man on crutches—Jim Leatherer, from Saginaw, Michigan—who answered each person who thanked him for coming by thanking them in return. “I believe in you,” he said over and over again. “I believe in democracy.”

There was a couple from California pushing a baby in a stroller.

Assistant Attorneys General John Doar and Ramsey Clark were both there, walking among the crowd like everyone else.

Cager Lee, Jimmie Lee Jackson’s elderly grandfather, who had been wounded the night Jimmie Lee was killed, was with us. It was hard for him to do even a few miles a day, but Mr. Lee was bound and determined to do them. “Just got to tramp some more,” he said, nodding his head and pushing on.

Ministers, nuns, labor leaders, factory workers, schoolteachers, firemen—people from all walks of life, from all parts of the country, black and white and Asian and Native American, walked with us as we approached the same bridge where we’d been beaten two weeks before. The same troopers were there again, but this time National Guardsmen were there as well, and

we passed over the river without incident, trailed by two truckloads of soldiers and a convoy of Army jeeps.

And now we were out of the city, the pebble-and-tar pavement of Highway 80 carrying us on into the countryside, through swampy marshland, past mossy Spanish oaks, rolling red clay farmland, and small, twisting creeks and rivers.

There was some jeering from occasional white onlookers gathered here and there along the shoulder of the road. Profanities from passing traffic were pretty constant. A man in a car with the words "Coonsville, USA" painted on its doors drove beside us for several days. And a private plane passed over the first day, dropping a small snowstorm of hate leaflets. But other than a couple of small incidents—one white marcher was hit in the face when he walked over to a filling station for a Coke, and bricks were thrown into a campsite one night, injuring several sleeping marchers—there was no actual violence.

We covered seven miles the first day, accompanied by the constant clicking of cameras as dozens of photographers and reporters circled us all the way. We stopped that night at a prearranged site, as spelled out in the plans we had given Judge Johnson. A man named David Hall, who worked for the Carver housing project as a maintenance manager and who owned an eighty-acre farm at the east edge of Dallas County, offered his land for us to pitch our tents that first night. The father of eight children, Mr. Hall, who was black, was asked whether he feared retaliation from the white community for doing us such a favor. "The Lord," he answered simply, "will provide."

That was basically the same answer a seventy-five-year-old woman named Rosa Steele gave when asked how she felt about letting us stay our second night on her 240-acre farm in Lowndes County. "I'm not afraid," said Mrs. Steele. "I've lived my three score and ten."

It was cold that first evening, below freezing as a matter of fact. More than two thousand of the marchers bedded down beneath three large tents. In the morning they would have to head back to Selma—Judge Johnson's order included a stipulation that we limit the number of marchers the second day to three hundred, since we'd be passing through a section of Lowndes County where the road narrowed from four to two lanes. The marchers that night made the most of their evening together. They clapped hands, built huge fires, sang and soaked in that Freedom High until they finally fell asleep.

The other thousand or so people who had walked with us that day were driven back to Selma that night in a caravan of cars and trucks. I was among them. Before allowing me to make this march at all, my doctors insisted that I sleep in a bed each evening. They did not want me spending the nights on hard ground, out in the cold. My head was still bothering me badly enough that I agreed with them. I would walk that entire fifty-four-mile route, but I

spent each night back in Selma, with a doctor nearby in case something went wrong with my head.

That Monday, the second day, I rejoined the group and put on an orange vest, which we had decided each of the three hundred people chosen to march that day would wear for identification. We moved much more swiftly that day, covering sixteen miles by nightfall. Dr. King left that evening to fulfill a speaking engagement in Cleveland. He would be back two days later for the last leg of the march.

Tuesday the number of marchers swelled back to three thousand as the road widened back to four lanes and we were allowed to lift the limitation. The skies darkened early, and a torrential downpour began that lasted all day. To beat back the rain, we started a song, a little chant written by a guy named Len Chandler:

*Pick 'em up and lay 'em down,  
All the way from Selma town.*

The weather was miserable, but no one complained. No one got tired. No one fell back. To me, there was never a march like this one before, and there hasn't been one since. The incredible sense of community—of *communing*—was overwhelming. We felt bonded with one another, with the people we passed, with the entire nation. The people who came out of their homes to watch as we passed by—rural people, almost all of them black, almost all of them dirt poor—waved and cheered, ran into their kitchens and brought us out food, brought us something to drink. More than a few of them put down what they were doing and joined us.

We covered eleven miles that day as well, and sixteen the next. And now we were just outside Montgomery. We were sunburned, windburned, weary, looking like the "last stragglers of a lost battalion," as one reporter described it. Our final stop was a place called the City of St. Jude, a Catholic complex of a church, a hospital and a school located two miles from Montgomery, operated through charity to serve the black community. Dr. King was there when we arrived, along with a crowd of 1,500 people that swelled by the hundreds every hour, as night fell and the scene turned into a celebration, a festival.

Dozens of celebrities arrived for a massive outdoor concert organized by—whom else?—Harry Belafonte. The entertainers included Tony Bennett, Sammy Davis Jr., Billy Eckstine, Shelley Winters, Ossie Davis, Leonard Bernstein, Nina Simone, Odette, Johnny Mathis, Nipsey Russell, Peter, Paul and Mary, the Chad Mitchell Trio, Anthony Perkins, Elaine May, George Kirby, Joan Baez and Dick Gregory. They all performed that evening on a makeshift stage fashioned from stacks of coffins loaned by a local black funeral home. Yes, *coffins*.

It was a spectacle, a salute to Selma, with more than 20,000 people gathered under the stars for four hours of songs, speeches and sketches. At one point a reporter asked Elaine May if she thought this show and all these celebrities were turning this serious march into a circus. She snapped back, "The only real circus is the state of Alabama and George Wallace."

The next morning—a spectacularly sunny day—we went to see Governor Wallace, 50,000 of us. It was six miles from St. Jude's to the state capitol building. There had been yet another death threat made on Dr. King, and so, as a precaution, several ministers were dressed in the same blue suit he wore that day and marched beside him, to confuse any would-be snipers.

Into downtown we came, around the fountain on Court Square, where slaves had watered their owners' horses in antebellum times, up Dexter Avenue past the church where Dr. King preached when he was a minister in Montgomery and finally out onto the open square in front of the sun-drenched silver-and-white state capitol building. I could see the Alabama state flag flying high above the rotunda dome, along with the flag of the Confederacy. But the American flag was nowhere in sight. Neither was George Wallace, though we learned later that he watched the entire afternoon, peeking out through the drawn blinds of the governor's office.

A podium had been set up on the trailer of a flatbed truck, along with a microphone and loudspeakers. Peter, Paul and Mary sang. Then came the speakers: Ralph Bunche, Roy Wilkins, Jim Farmer, Whitney Young, Rosa Parks, Ralph Abernathy, Fred Shuttlesworth, Jim Bevel, Bayard Rustin and I. And then, finally, Dr. King stepped up to deliver one of the most important speeches of his life. Again, as in Washington, he rose to the occasion:

I know some of you are asking today, "How long will it take?" I come to say to you this afternoon however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, because truth pressed to the earth will rise again.

How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever.

How long? Not long, because you will reap what you sow.

How long? Not long, because the arm of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.

How long? Not long, because mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He has loosed the faithful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on.

Glory hallelujah! *Glory hallelujah!*

Four and a half months after that day, on August 6, after a long, weaving journey through both houses of Congress, the 1965 Voting Rights Act was

signed into law by Lyndon Johnson during a nationally televised midday ceremony at the U.S. Capitol. Earlier that morning I was invited to meet privately with the President in the Oval Office. Jim Farmer was there, along with a military officer—a black Army major named Hugh Robinson. This was my first visit to the White House since the March on Washington, and my first one-on-one visit with a president.

Johnson dominated the conversation, his legs propped on a chair, his hands folded back behind his head. We talked for about twenty minutes, and near the end of the meeting the President leaned forward and said, "Now John, you've got to go back and get all those folks registered. You've got to go back and get those boys by the balls. Just like a bull gets on top of a cow. You've got to get 'em by the balls and you've got to squeeze, squeeze 'em till they hurt."

I'd heard that Lyndon Johnson enjoyed talking in graphic, down-home terms, but I wasn't quite prepared for all those bulls and balls.

The signing that afternoon in the President's Room of the Capitol—the same room in which Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation—was a powerfully moving moment for me. This law had teeth. Among its provisions were:

- the suspension of literacy tests in twenty-six states, including Alabama, Georgia and Mississippi, which had been the focal points of so much of our work
- the appointment of federal examiners to replace local officials as voter registrars
- authorization for the attorney general to take action against state and local authorities that use the poll tax as a prerequisite to voting

"The vote," President Johnson declared that day, "is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustice and destroying the terrible walls which imprison men because they are different from other men."

After signing the bill, Johnson gave pens to Dr. King, Rosa Parks and several other civil rights "leaders," including me. I still have mine today, framed on the wall of my living room in Atlanta, along with a copy of the bill itself.

That day was a culmination, a climax, the end of a very long road. In a sense it represented a high point in modern America, probably the nation's finest hour in terms of civil rights. One writer called it the "nova of the civil rights movement, a brilliant climax which brought to a close the nonviolent struggle that had reshaped the South."

It was certainly the last act for the movement as I knew it. Something was born in Selma during the course of that year, but something died there, too.

The road of nonviolence had essentially run out. Selma was the last act. Even that climactic day at Montgomery, at the end of the march from Selma, was darkened a few hours after Dr. King spoke by the murder of Viola Gregg Liuzzo, a thirty-nine-year-old white housewife from Detroit who had come down as a volunteer for the march. She was driving her Oldsmobile sedan back to Montgomery that night after transporting some marchers home to Selma after the march when she was shot to death on a lonely stretch of Highway 80 in Lowndes County—a stretch of road we had triumphantly walked over just days earlier. Four Klansmen were eventually arrested, tried and, not surprisingly, found “not guilty” of Mrs. Liuzzo’s murder. The same four men were later tried on civil rights charges in Judge Johnson’s courtroom and were convicted and sentenced to ten years in prison, but that was little consolation to Mrs. Liuzzo’s family or to the many people in the movement—especially the younger ones—who saw her death as just one more reason to give up on this notion of nonviolence.

How could I blame them? As I later explained to a writer from *The New York Times* who asked me how I felt looking back on the campaign at Selma:

We’re only flesh. I could understand people not wanting to get beaten anymore. The body gets tired. You put out so much energy and you saw such little gain. Black capacity to believe white would really open his heart, open his life to nonviolent appeal, was running out.

It had been Selma that held us together as long as we did. After that, we just came apart.

## 17 / DE-ELECTION

Less than a week after the Voting Rights Act was signed, six days of terrible rioting began in the Watts section of Los Angeles. By the time the smoke above that black section of the city had cleared, thirty-four people were dead, more than eight hundred were injured and over three thousand had been arrested. The day after those riots began, a similar explosion of violence broke out in Chicago, with flare-ups as well in Cleveland, New York, Jacksonville and South Bend.

There had already been many race riots during the decade, but none on this scale. And this frightened me. Rioting is not a movement. It is not an act of civil disobedience. I think it is a mistake for people to consider disorganized action, mayhem, and attacks on other people and property as an extension of any kind of movement. It is not. It is simply an explosion of emotion. That’s all. There is nothing constructive about it. It is only destructive.

Those riots in the late summer of 1965 bothered me, but they were not surprising. I predicted as much earlier that year, just after the Selma-to-Montgomery march, in an essay I wrote for the *New York Herald Tribune*. The issue I was asked to address was what happens now. What comes after the right to vote? The words I wrote at that time could easily be written today:

People ask what will happen in Chicago and in Harlem this summer. When will the next Selma take place? The civil rights movement cannot give an answer. The lack of concern on the part of the American public and the lack of concern and courage of the federal government breed bitterness and frustration.

Where lack of jobs, intolerable housing, police brutality, and other frustrating conditions exist, it is possible that violence and massive street demonstrations may develop...

Reality now is what happens in the streets of Selma, Ala., and McComb, Miss., and hundreds of Negro communities, north and