

Andrea Brisben

Mar 2

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Please send me a photo of Dr. King in its frame.

Yours, Andrea

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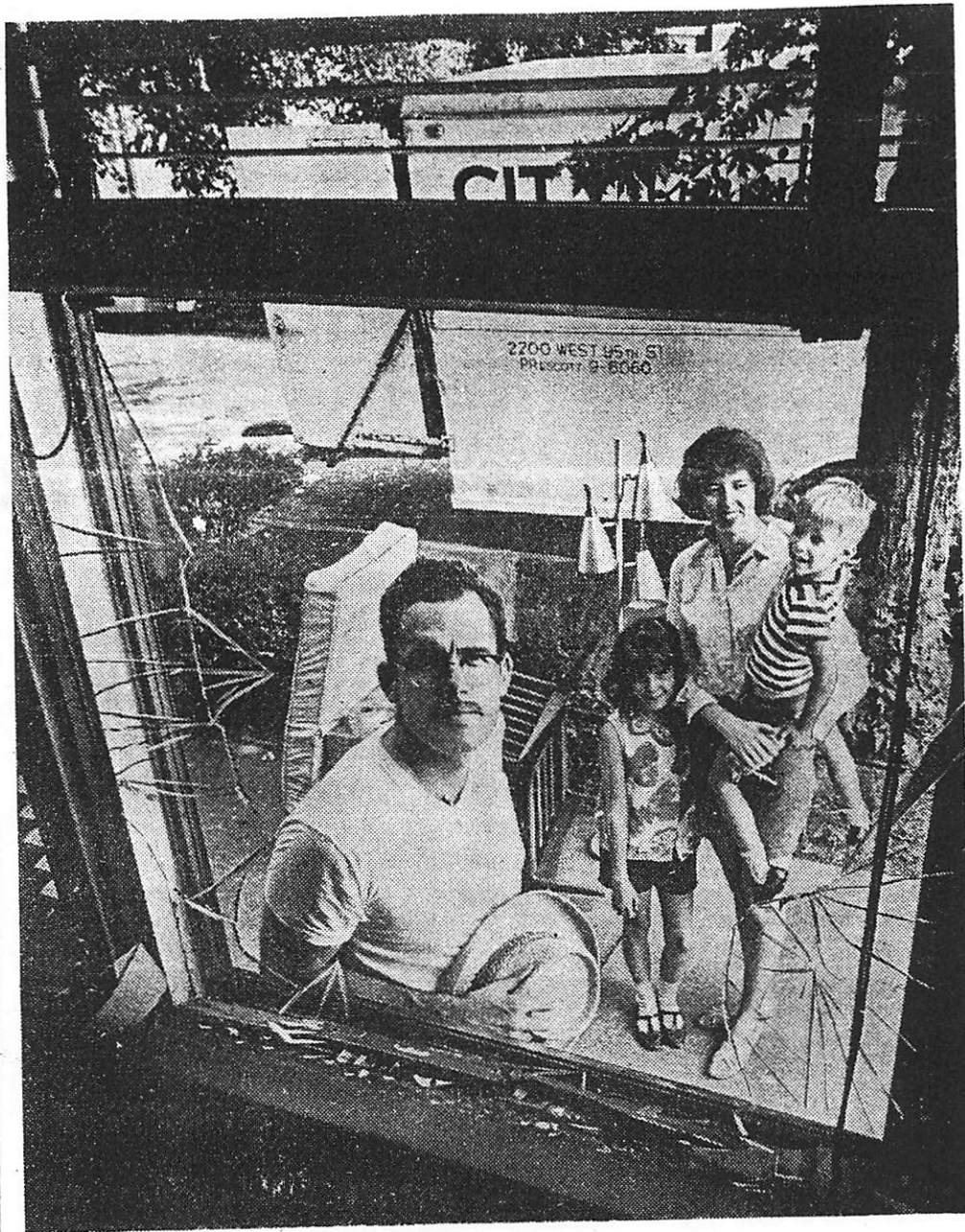
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Yours, Andrea

Wednesday, August 31, 1966

Third
Page

*Quinn Brisben
his wife, Andrea
Chicago, Ill.
600 8*



Quinn Brisben, his wife, Andrea, and their children, Michael, 4, and Rebecca, 7, take a last look at one of the broken

windows of their house at 2756 S. Komen-sky before moving to new home. (Photo by John Jaqua)

West Side Aftermath

Why a Tall Man Left 'Little Village' Home

By Robert Gruenberg

Quinn Brisben, 31, stands six-feet-two in his boots and Stetson and hails from Oklahoma. It is probable that he never had stepped back from any man.

But Tuesday he finally did. He and his wife, Andrea, loaded the two kids, Rebecca (Becky) 7, and Michael 4, into

One of the neighbors came by the next day to remark, "Oh, they missed the attic window, didn't they?"

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rights marches, and a participant in the Negro voter registration campaign of 1965 in Montgomery, had expected a this, of course, he tried to explain to his children, especially Becky, what might happen.

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Quinn Brisben, 31, stands six-feet-two in his boots and Stetson and hails from Oklahoma. It is probable that he never had stepped back from any man.

But Tuesday he finally did. He and his wife, Andrea, loaded the two kids, Rebecca (Becky) 7, and Michael 4, into their old beat-up green 160 Valiant, and headed for the South Side of Chicago, address unspecified.

They followed the moving van.

Of course, the old car wasn't completely beat up. It had a new windshield, to replace the one smashed by a 15-pound, heart-shaped rock just 11 days ago.

The one that was smashed had, in turn, replaced a windshield that was knocked out by a brick only three weeks before.

BY NOW, Quinn, his attractive red-head wife, and the kids are accustomed to the crash - thud - shatter - and-tinkle of bricks and broken glass, even when it takes place in the middle of the night.

It went on for nearly two months in their asphalt-sheet covered house at 2756 S. Koenensky. That's in a neighborhood that used to be called—before the West Side's troubling changes started—South Lawndale.

Now the folks around here call it "Little Village." There are cozy little signs saying so on 26th St., nearby.

THE CLIMAX for the Brisbens in their rented \$70-a-month, cracked-plaster-wall, five-room home came at a quarter after 3 in the morning on Aug. 20.

That was the night that someone—or maybe a gang—t hard.

The living room window, which already had a small hole in it, was smashed completely. The topmost window

the wooden front door went too, and so did the lower window in the outside screen door. And of course, the windshield on the car.

One of the neighbors came by the next day to remark, "Oh, they missed the attic window, didn't they?"

IT ALL took place only hours after the Brisbens had seen two guests—whom they had entertained in the home for eight weeks—to the train, for their trip back to Montgomery, Ala.

The guests were Gladys Williams, 17, and Gloria German, 16. During their stay both had attended classes at Lindblom High School, where Brisben teaches social science.

Miss Williams and Miss German are Negro.

THEY HAD never in their lives seen anything like the Field Museum of Natural History, the Shedd Aquarium, the Museum of Science and Industry, the Adler Planetarium, a Grant Park concert, State Street, beaches, or a James Baldwin play.

They did it all while they were here. Mrs. Brisben recalls the Grant Park concert night, one of the last events, when voluble, talkative Gloria exclaimed:

"I didn't know culture could be so much fun!"

But while all this was going on, the Brisben kids, when they went out, were called "nigger lover" and worse, by the other youngsters.

QUINN, a veteran of civil

rights marches, and a participant in the Negro voter registration campaign of 1965 in Montgomery, had expected all this, of course, he tried to explain to his children, especially Becky, what might happen.

But there was no explaining the "peeping Jills" who peered in at the windows nightly until the cops started patrolling outside the house.

There was no explaining the fire that started from kerosene-soaked boards against the garage in back of the house.

There was no explaining why the nearby church never was able to invite the two girls to the youth club.

AS THE Brisbens packed their last few paintings, reproductions of Miro, Klee, Dali, Gauguin and a couple of originals by Mrs. Brisben, they left, saying they weren't angry at anybody, either.

"I lived in this neighborhood four years," said Brisben, "and I have nothing against my neighbors. Maybe it has been an educational experience for us all."

that was, as usual, lucid, filled with facts, and effective despite the absence of oratorical fireworks. He is terrifically concerned about the fate of his city and his planet. No political party in this country today has a greater champion.

On November 19, shortly after returning from Iraq and after hearing of my granddaughter Rosie Brisben's maiden protest at the School of the Americas in Georgia, I went to Montgomery, Alabama, to help celebrate the ninetieth birthday of Idessa Williams Redden. Gwen Patton, who keeps the archives of Idessa and other civil rights pioneers at Trenholm State College, had arranged a great party there. "I don't do things for honor," Idessa said, "I just do things," but admitted on reflection that she agreed with the rest of us that the honors were deserved.

She opened "Idessa's Beauty Nook" behind her house in 1949 after years of working in a shirt factory. This gave her the economic independence to buck the system sufficiently to try to register to vote. She passed the difficult examination because the registrars figured that she would not pay twenty-five dollars in back poll taxes for the privilege. They were wrong. In December 1955, she attended the first mass meeting of the Montgomery Improvement Association after the arrest of Rosa Parks and heard Dr. Martin Luther King speak after being chosen the organization's president. Idessa is a Catholic and not accustomed to being emotional in church, but that night she shouted at the top of her voice "Lord, you have sent us a leader." She helped organize a telephone tree to help co-ordinate alternative transportation for the bus boycotters and joined Rufus Lewis in the association's effort to register more voters.

In the wake of the publicity generated by the Selma to Montgomery march in 1965, she decided that Montgomery was safe enough to invite outsiders there to help with the registration project. I joined two dozen Chicago and Detroit teachers who spent our spring vacations helping out. That August my wife and I returned for more registration work. Few prospective African American voters were passing the arbitrarily administered voting test, but evidence of that was needed to compel passage of the Voting Rights Act which would bring in federal registrars. We would get laundry workers who worked near the courthouse to line up to take the test on their lunch hour. Only six were allowed to take the test at a time, and another six could not apply until everyone in the earlier group had finished. My wife popped a flashcube showing the waiting line and a clock every five minutes to show that the line was not moving. The line tended to move faster after that even when she had no film in her camera.

Our first night at Idessa's house someone threw a pop bottle through the front window. Idessa tried to call the police but could only get backchat in the station house, for the police switchboard was already monitoring her line. After calling from her business phone, Lieutenant Dumas, in charge of monitoring the movement and the outside agitators it attracted, showed up. He was rather hostile to me, perhaps assuming that Idessa and I were lovers, until my wife finished her bath and joined us. When I returned to Montgomery in 1975 to celebrate the twentieth

anniversary of the bus boycott, I learned that Lieutenant Dumas had become sympathetic to the movement and suffered a nervous breakdown. When he recovered he moved to Houston to help Rep. Barbara Jordan.

I worked with Idessa again during my spring vacation in 1966 when I helped set up an African American history teaching program for the Tuskegee Institute Community Education Project. That June we met at the Meredith March in Mississippi where we helped plan a Chicago summer for two Montgomery teenagers who were to be among the first African Americans to attend Sidney Lanier High School where George Wallace's children went. In 1967 I stayed with Idessa while helping out some of her comrades in neighboring Autauga County.

In June 1989 we planned to stop off in Montgomery on our way back from a family reunion in Florida. Our great Socialist comrade H. L. Mitchell, co-founder of the racially integrated Southern Tenant Farmers Union in 1934 and hero of dozens of organizing battles, was living in Montgomery. He had never met many of the leaders of the bus boycott and voting rights battles of the 1950s and 1960s, and we decided to introduce them. Gladys Williams, who had upgraded her cooking skills under my wife's supervision in Chicago in 1966, fixed us a magnificent spread and Idessa and her friends spent a glorious evening exchanging war stories with Mitch. Mitch died shortly after that, and we treasure the memory of his last great party.

Idessa Williams Redden began working as a Family Service Worker with the Montgomery Community Action Agency in 1970. She retired in 1998 but has never really stopped serving her people. She would have been one of my Alabama electors in 1992 if the Socialists had been able to get on the ballot there. She still gives my wife and me a holler anytime something interesting is happening in Alabama.

The Socialist Party ought to start a regular program of honoring our longtime members who have reached significant milestones. It would have been both educational and fun to honor the late Ernest Morgan, one of the people who kept the flame of Socialism alive in North Carolina, now the home of our party press. Mae Briggs in California, Jane Peters in Pennsylvania, and Merle Bigenho in Florida, are among our many distinguished senior members who deserve honors, and there are doubtless many others who will write me angry notes when they find out that I did not include their names. Our revolutionary tradition is a living one and can be one of our most valuable educational tools.

---J. Quinn Brisben 10 MAR 2003

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My Partner Was Born in a Japanese-American WWII Concentration Camp

My partner was Gil Kimura, a Chicago teacher of Japanese ancestry, then in his early twenties. The store owner came out and accused me of being an outside agitator. I explained that we were working under the direction of the local blacks and that I had two uncles and six first cousins in Alabama and, thus, was not really an outsider. He thought on that awhile, and then said the whole bunch of us ought to be put in concentration camps.

Kimura remarked that he had been born in a concentration camp where his parents had been sent by the U.S. government but that he was still insisting on equal rights for all. The store owner thought some more, then kicked me. His bad manners turned the sympathies of many white passers-by in our favor, and several of them politely asked for leaflets.

August, 1965: My wife and I were guests in the home of the Montgomery Improvement Association's head of voter registration, Idessa Williams, now Idessa Williams Hadden. A pop bottle thrown from a passing car smashed the front window. We tried to call the police but could not reach them at first because the police switchboard was plugged into the Williams line to monitor her conversations, and we could nothing but station house chatter when we tried to raise the alarm.

When the police finally did arrive, they stared at my bare feet and the bit of my pajamas showing beneath my trousers. They relaxed a bit when my wife came down from upstairs. Our hostess was a generation older than I and we had serious work at hand, but the police had automatically assumed that a white person in a black person's house late in the evening must be there for interracial sex.

August, 1965: One of the few air-conditioned places open to civil rights workers in Montgomery was the court house, and my wife enjoyed spending her noontime there. We would get many workers from a nearby laundry to try to register to vote during their lunch break. The registrar would slow down the process as much as possible and most workers had to return to their jobs before they could even attempt to register.

My wife took a picture of a wall clock and of the long, unmoving line. When the officials saw the flash of the camera, they moved the line forward. My wife popped a flash cube every few minutes after that to keep the line moving. It always worked, even when she had no film in the camera.

March, 1966: Much of King's Chicago campaign was financed from the proceeds of a big concert held in the Amphitheater. Mahalia Jackson, Sidney Poitier, Dick Gregory, and Harry Belafonte were featured. The best seats went for \$100. My family sat in \$20 seats, the best we could afford. The

worse seats, above and behind the stage where little could be heard, were \$1 apiece. Al Raby had asked for some seats in that price range so that the poor of Chicago could be part of the event.

I had taken 20 such tickets, sold some to my West Side night school students, and gave the rest away to mothers of large families in that neighborhood who could not spare even a dollar. Someone told Belafonte about this group, and he turned around, looked up, and sang a whole song just for them. Those dollar seats were the best audience Belafonte ever had.

August, 1966: Cannery started the crowd chanting "Kill Brisben." He was a John Birchler and an enthusiastic police informer with many relatives in the school bureaucracy. We were teaching at the same high school that summer. He thought it outrageous that a teacher should advocate school integration and open housing against the clearly expressed wishes of our bosses.

The day's march came near Kelly High, where I had taught, and many of my former students took up the "Kill Brisben" chant, mostly as a joke. A marshal was sent back to move me up to the front of the line where there were celebrities, cameras, and relative safety. I took the opportunity to move up beside King and Raby, although I felt in no particular danger. I marched into hostile areas many times that summer, but that was my only time at the head of the line.

December, 1975: Idessa Williams had invited me to the 20th anniversary celebration of the Montgomery bus boycott but was unable to meet me at the airport. My seatmate from Atlanta to Montgomery had been Andy Young, then in Congress, and he kindly offered me a lift to the rally in the



Norman Thomas

Controlling Their Own Destiny

had barely begun and will be a valuable ally to socialists until the struggle is complete.

The PBS television series "Eyes on the Prize," produced by Henry Hampton's Blackside group, and the Juan Williams book based on it consider the movement in a broader focus, beginning with the extraordinary group of activists and lawyers who won the 1954 desegregation case. The film makers have located a remarkable amount of contemporary footage and have skilfully interwoven this with a wide variety of eyewitness interviews. The program ends with the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, but there are indications that the series might be continued, which it should be.

The emphasis of the series, quite properly, is on the very brave but quite ordinary black people who insisted on controlling their own destiny. The only trouble is that the television cameras were most often at the head of the line or looking for drama, preferably violence. Although the movement was, in one of its aspects, an attempt to get publicity for a situation that the majority of Americans were all too willing to ignore, the most important part of it, the changes in the

attitudes of millions of blacks and whites, is ignored or distorted by the camera record. A lot of very important people who deserve to be remembered never got their pictures taken, never taped an interview, and never wrote anything down.

In recent years reactionaries have attempted to rewrite the history of the 1960's, and the works cited are an important counterblast to that attempt. George Orwell's Ministry of Truth was not alone in believing that those who control the past control the future.

It has been good to share some of my memories and to recommend the study of an important period. It will be even better to know that many of you are looking to the monstrous inequalities which persist in American life and asking yourselves "What can I do?"—J. QUINN BRISBEN.

David J. Garrow, "Bearing the Cross," Morrow, 800pp., \$19.95.

Juan Williams, "Eyes on the Prize," Viking, 305pp., \$24.95.

The Question Should Be: 'What Can I Do?'

limousine the city had provided him. Our driver was a black police lieutenant whose duties included keeping a watch on visiting notables.

I had known his white predecessor, Lt. Dumas very well and so had Andy Young. Dumas had been in charge of shadowing civil rights activists and keeping their affectiveness to a minimum. The tide of history was flowing against him, but he had done the best he could. Like many cops he came to have a good understanding of his opposition and an appreciation of their personal worth. I remember that he once made a special point of telling me that he considered my wife a lady, which cost him something to say, and I appreciated that.

In the late 1960's he had a mental crack-up and, when he re-surfaced, was working with Barbara Jordan's organization in Houston. I saw many old friends during the next few days and could not see others because they had become casualties of social change in one way or another. I wished I could talk with Dumas again, but I never had that opportunity.

* * *

I could write of 50 such incidents without running short and without duplicating material published anywhere so far. So could thousands of other movement participants and observers. No human mind could encompass every detail of what we variously experienced. Nor could anyone determine with complete certainty the exact degree of misrepresentation, accidental or purposeful, that our memories contained. Even if all the survivors of those days could yield up all their memories and every scrap of documentary evidence could be located, countless important details must be irretrievably lost. This is the perpetual dilemma of the historian.

Nevertheless the past must be reconstructed. New generations must have role models and must emulate the achievements and avoid the mistakes of their predecessors. Historians have evolved procedures for collecting evidence and weighing it, but none of these guarantee objectivity. The very act of deciding that one aspect of the past is more important than another makes ideologists of us all.

Our classic strategy for ordering the past has been to study movements through their representative leaders. Thus thousands of us have indeed gone into history under the name of Martin Luther King, whose birthday is a national holiday and who has more memorials than any other American of this century. Because he was murdered in mid-career, accomplished so many of his short range goals so thoroughly that they are unlikely ever to be undone, and was spied upon so assiduously during his public years, it is possible to write a reasonably complete biography of him less than two decades after his death.

The best attempt at a King biography so far is

David J. Garrow's "Bearing the Cross," subtitled "Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference." This 800-page, scrupulously documented work by a person who was only 2 years old when the bus boycott began and a high school student when King was assassinated, is about as good a job as this generation is going to get. It details many shabby organizational squabbles and shows King with all his personal imperfections, which is a good antidote for our tendency to mythologize our leaders.

The last words in the book are spoken by Diane Nash, who says, "If people think that it was Martin Luther King's movement, then today they— young people—are more likely to say, 'Gosh, I wish we had a Martin Luther King here today to lead us.' . . . If people knew how that movement started, then the question they would ask themselves is 'What can I do?'"

One great advantage of centering attention on King is that he was constantly expanding his goals during his dozen years of fame, moving more slowly than some of us would have liked but bravely and inexorably toward the position that the economic system required major changes before America could become a just society.

King was not afraid to call these changes democratic socialism on occasion. His principled opposition to American imperialism was part of that position. Although King drew ideas from many sources and admired Norman Thomas as the greatest American of his time, his socialist and non-violent beliefs grew naturally from the deeply Christian and American environment in which he was nurtured, and he presented his ideas in terms which most ordinary Americans recognized as their legitimate heritage. He died when his revolution



J. Quinn Brisben in 1966

Can You Pronounce the Word 'Hero'?

decided to integrate the swimming pool as part of that movement. That evening the Cairo police chief blamed the integration effort on "outside agitators."

August, 1963: As Norman Thomas put it, his legs gave out before his voice. He needed help getting onto the speakers' platform near the Washington Monument. He had been almost alone in predicting the massiveness of the turnout and the consequent need for more morning speakers. As we helped him up he said "Did you hear the news from Africa? W.E.B. DuBois died yesterday."

The special issue of Ebony for the march featured a portrait of Frederick Douglass; many old leftists remarked on its resemblance to Karl Marx. Marian Anderson, who had sung before a huge crowd from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in 1939 after being barred from Constitution Hall by the DAR, was late getting to the platform, delayed by the solidly packed crowd of a quarter million; a friendly wedge of young people cleared the way for her.

That evening Bayard Rustin was everyone's hero because his planning for the March had proved a triumph; Sen. Javits invited him to a party that night; Rustin declined, saying he would rather spend the evening with the socialist friends who had been with him from the beginning.

July, 1964: A sidewalk demonstration in Jackson was protesting non-compliance with the recently passed Civil Rights Act. Most of the demonstrators were local blacks courageously defying the White Citizens Council, which tried to see that protesting blacks were fired from their jobs and otherwise harassed.

The Freedom Summer project was represented by a dozen black college students and four white volunteers. One of them was a small woman who was spending the summer organizing Freedom Schools after 40 years of teaching English in Massachusetts high schools. A large policeman was shouting "You niggers move along. Move your asses, niggers."

The English teacher stepped up to the policeman and asked if he could pronounce the word "hero." He said he could do that and said the word for her. "Good," she said, "anyone who can pronounce the word 'hero' can pronounce the word 'Negro.' Let me hear you do that." Their confrontation had drawn a large audience, and the policemen decided that his gun and club were useless against a determined English teacher. "Negro," he said. We kept our laughter friendly enough so that eventually the policeman laughed, too.

August, 1964: After a day and a night on the white side of the Lowndes County Jail I was filthy, but the young black man from Detroit had spent five days on the black side and was, quite literally, lousy. After our federal court-ordered release I tried to ease his discomfort by the classic method of drawing a fine-tooth comb

through his nappy hair, which was worn long as a statement of racial pride and political defiance.

Martin Luther King was on television that evening, endorsing the Mississippi Freedom Summer project unequivocally for the first time now that it was nearly over and had accomplished many of its aims. The 1000 volunteers had averaged a bit better than one jailing apiece and many were angry that television was paying more attention to King's endorsement than to our hard work. "We're all going to go down in history under the name of Martin Luther King," the young man said as I pulled the comb, and I knew he was right, and we both thought it was funny.

March, 1965: It was hard to find an Alabama state trooper in Chicago during the Selma campaign, but we located one at the Alabama exhibit at the Boat Show in McCormick Place. Each day one of us would sneak in and chain him- or herself to the exhibit. It took the police about 20 minutes to saw through the chains while the rest of us distributed leaflets at the entrance.

One afternoon the paddy wagon came roaring out after only five minutes. The police had acquired heavy duty chain cutters, beautiful old tools dating from the turn of the century. A policeman explained that they had been found in the basement of police headquarters during a recent renovation. They had been used to free women who had chained themselves to City Hall during a voting rights campaign half a century before.

April, 1965: We handed out voter registration leaflets on the last day of our week-long stay in Montgomery. For that purpose I would have preferred the spot on the capital steps where Jefferson Davis had been inaugurated, but that was heavily guarded by state troopers, so I stood in front of a plaque marking the site of the telegraph office from which Davis sent the order to Beauregard to commence firing on Fort Sumter.

In 1965 the building housed a shirt store owned by a power in the local White Citizens Council.



Edward
Daniel
Nixon

RECONSTRUCTING THE MOVEMENT



August 28, 1963—Washington, D.C.: Leaders of the March on Washington lock arms and clasp hands as they move along Constitution Avenue. A. Philip Randolph, March director, is at far right in front rank, and Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP is second from right. Martin Luther King is in the center leading the march.

Here are a baker's dozen incidents that I remember from the civil rights movement.

May, 1954: The Oklahoma NAACP celebrated the Brown desegregation decision with a party in the Black Dispatch office. Roscoe Dungee, that paper's publisher and head of the state NAACP chapter, held forth at fascinating length about his battles with racists during the previous half century, especially about the Fischer and McLaurin cases, important precedents for Brown. I was 19 years old and had been active in the organization for a year and a half, doing research for the desegregation brief and helping black students assert their right to be at the University of Oklahoma. I remarked that it had been a long fight and that I was glad we had won.

"We haven't won yet," Dungee said. "That court decision is just a scrap of paper. This black and white thing is mixed up with everything wrong in this country and all over the world. It is going to take the rest of my days and yours, too, to even begin to get rid of it. The important thing is to hit them when you can, because the bastards don't give you an opening very often."

December, 1955: E.D. Nixon told me that the first thing he did when Montgomery black ministers told him that they wanted their own organization rather than the "radical" NAACP to direct the protest after Rosa Parks' arrest was to call the head of his union, Philip Randolph. Randolph asked him the name of the church attended by most

of the professors at Alabama State University and the community's other black professionals and the name of its minister.

Nixon said Dexter Avenue Baptist Church; its minister was new in the community, a brilliant young man with an earned doctorate in theology, Martin Luther King, Jr. Randolph told Nixon to make that minister the spokesperson for the protest, that it could not be effective without the support of that congregation and that the minister would be less likely to sell out the movement if he headed it. That evening Nixon seconded King's nomination. "We picked a number out of a hat and got Moses," he told me. He asked me if, being a socialist, I knew what Debs had said when he was compared to Moses. I said I did. He winked.

July, 1961: Associated Press called the Chicago Congress of Racial Equality, which shared the office of the Socialist Party of Illinois, to find if we had organized the attempt of young blacks to swim in the segregated pool of Cairo, Ill. We had not heard about it. Norm Hill called St. Louis to see if Cairo had been organized from there. It had not. A journalist gave us the names of some of the protesting young people, and we reached one of them by telephone.

The Cairo people were delighted to hear from us and asked for a charter and such help as we could give them. They had heard about CORE through the television coverage of the Freedom Rides and had