

Preface

This book had its origin in 1993 when I started to write a feminist memoir of the Sixties. I wanted to describe the rise of feminist consciousness through my own experiences and observations in the three social movements in which I participated – the Berkeley Free Speech Movement, the Southern civil rights movement and the early women’s liberation movement. That project changed as I wrote to become more of a history and less of a memoir. What was supposed to be part I became *At Berkeley in the Sixties* which was published in 2004. In this sequel I continue my original intent of examining the emergence of feminist consciousness, at least in myself, even though it is a minor theme of the book. When I went South in 1965 I had an incipient feminist consciousness, enough to make me watch what women were doing and saying, and to look for analogies between the status of blacks and that of women. I knew that the 19th Century woman rights movement had been started by those who had worked in the abolitionist movement and thought something similar might happen in my day.

I learned from writing *At Berkeley* that I am at heart a scholar and not a memoirist. I like writing history and politics, not personal reminiscences. I want to state facts and analyze them, not relate what remains of my impressions from a 50-year-old memory or the letters I wrote at the time. As much as possible, I am dedicated to accuracy. As a scholar, I want to see the forest. As a participant I had only seen the trees – indeed I was a tree. Knowing that I needed to put my own experiences into historical context, I spent many years reading *about* the civil rights movement and a lot of Southern history, both in original documents and secondary sources. I also sought out other civil rights vets, only some of whom I had known in 1965. This book benefits from reading their diaries, letters and e-mails and includes many of their stories. The *Berkeley* book was about equally written by the scholar and the student. Most of this book was written by the scholar, with help from some of the other trees.

I have allowed the memoirist to limit the scope of what I cover. I worked for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1965-66; this book emphasizes what SCLC did. To this end I spent years reading the *SCLC Papers* on microfilm in the Library of Congress. Other civil rights organizations – the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Student Non-Violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) – are bit players in my rendition, though they were central to the civil rights movement itself. I went South with SCOPE – SCLC’s 1965 summer project. SCOPE has barely been mentioned in other books on the civil rights movement; it gets a lot of attention in mine. Indeed, this is probably the most comprehensive book on SCOPE, though it doesn’t include all of it. In 2015 – the 50th anniversary year of SCOPE – I helped organize a reunion of SCOPE volunteers and SCLC staff. Starting with lists and individual forms I found in the *SCLC Papers* I spent almost a year trying to find about 450 people whose last known addresses dated from 1965. With help, I found about half of them, living and dead. Corresponding with the living alive enabled me to learn some of their stories, many of which made it into this book. After the summer ended I joined the SCLC staff and, with a couple breaks, stayed until the end of 1966. During my time with SCLC its primary focus was on voter registration. The Voting Rights Act (VRA) became law on August 6, 1965 and guided our work for the next year. Thus, my emphasis is on voter registration, even though the civil rights movement covered a much broader range of issues.

We all bring our past experiences into our new ones. Mine were forged mostly in

California where I grew up in Los Angeles and spent my college years in Berkeley. Nonetheless, I knew more about the South than most SCOPE volunteers because my mother was born and raised in Marion County, Alabama, as was her mother and her mother before her. I spent nine months living with my grandmother and an aunt when I was three, plus the summer of 1955 when I was nine going on ten. There were other times when we drove to Alabama for short visits. I didn't meet or even see many Negroes during those trips because Marion is a white county in northwest Alabama. My Negro acquaintances were my mother's friends, fellow teachers from her days teaching on the east side of Los Angeles, and occasional fellow students. I spent second grade in a black school next to the junior high where she taught, and was involved in the Bay Area Civil Rights movement in 1963-64. (Freeman, 2004, 90-92) The Negroes I met in California were middle-class; the ones I met in the South, for the most part, were not. Their culture was quite different from what I knew in California and like most Northern white volunteers, I had a lot to learn about the black community in which I lived and worked.

There are several groups of "activists" in this book. Unlike other books on SCLC, Dr. King plays only a minor role in this one. I have much more to say about Hosea Williams, SCLC's director of Southern projects and head of SCOPE, because he was my boss. I also write about many on the SCLC staff, whom Dr. King characterized as the "ground crew without whose labor and sacrifices the jet flights to freedom could never have left the earth" in his speech accepting the 1964 Nobel peace prize. Then there is the infantry, that legion of people who went door-to-door in Negro neighborhoods all over the South, urging people to register to vote and arranging for them to do so. These were largely southern black high school students with a heavy dusting of mostly white college students. Although the former were far more numerous, the names of the latter are more likely to be recorded someplace. I have compiled what I could of both and included them when it didn't create long lists that few would read. Last, but hardly least, are the people I have come to view as the infrastructure of the civil rights movement. These were the local people who provided the support structures which made our work possible – places to sleep, food, work space, transportation and property bonds to get us out of jail. Some of them were local leaders; most were local workers. The infrastructure was largely made up of women, while most of the local leaders were men. Many had jobs, which they risked losing by taking care of us. Some had their own businesses or stores which gave them some protection from white retaliation. But, as I have learned from the other SCOPE volunteers, often our hosts were retired and living off of Social Security, which came from the federal government and couldn't be touched by the local white power structure. Indeed, those social security checks may have been as important as the civil rights acts in changing the South.

The civil rights movement was one of the greatest movements in our country's history. It was the mother of most of the Sixties social movements, initiating profound cultural changes which are still rippling through our society fifty years later. Like most of my fellow activists, I was raised on civil rights. The movement occupied the news during the most formative years of my childhood and provided opportunities for action when I was still young enough to pursue them. What I learned and what I did shaped the rest of my life.

Introduction

Race has been a continual theme throughout our country's history, but historians like to demarcate eras. The civil rights movement of the mid 20th Century brought profound change, entitling it to its own era. The general consensus is that it began on May 17, 1954, when the Supreme Court held that segregated education was unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education*, and ended on April 4, 1968 when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated. Notable civil rights activity both before and after those dates, but the bulk of what we think of as the civil rights movement took place in those 14 years. It was the actions of this era that transformed the social consensus from one favoring separation by race to one emphasizing the value of integration and diversity.

Before that fateful Supreme Court decision, there were decades of legal cases to dismantle segregation, lots of lobbying, more than a few protests, and an occasional riot. There was also a lot of backlash. Even though the focus of this book is on the years 1965-66, I've included considerable history of these prior events to provide context. Occasionally I've written past those years so readers will know what happened later. The long-term consequences were often better than the short-term.

Preparing the ground for a social movement often takes a long time, but once it is done people are usually galvanized into action by a triggering event. Often that event is an atrocity, which crystallizes longstanding grievances. It turns people from a collection of individuals with common experiences into a mass of people acting collectively. For the Southern civil rights movement the triggering event was the brutal murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till on August 28, 1955 in Mississippi. Photographs of his mutilated body were published throughout the black press. The trial and acquittal of his killers was publicized around the world for months, resulting in protest rallies in the North and letters from all over. The killers' unremorseful confession was published in the *Look* magazine of January 24, 1956 as well as in a mass-market paperback by the same author. Many young boys who later became civil rights activists identified with Till; they could easily see themselves bludgeoned to death for what was at worst a little flirting with a white woman. The older generation of Negroes could see Till as their son. When Rosa Parks was arrested on December 1, 1955 for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man, Till's murder was still fresh in her mind. That atrocity motivated Montgomery Negroes to endure the 13-month bus boycott, which ended only when the Supreme Court confirmed that its desegregation decision applied to buses as well as schools. (Whitfield, 1988, 17-19, 90-97; Huie, 1956; Frazier, 2011, 138, 148-53; Travis, 2018, 16-16; *Browder v. Gayle*, 1956)

The Court's 1954 decision on schools was the triggering event for the backlash. It's unusual for the backlash to come before the movement, but it occasionally happens when a major threat to the status quo has been building for some time. Although a series of court decisions told Southern elites that change was coming, *Brown* precipitated "a tidal wave of racial hysteria" throughout the white South, prompting mobilization. (Klarman, 1994, 92) On July 11, 1954 the first Citizens' Council formed in Indianola, Mississippi. Composed of white elites to formally oppose desegregation, chapters were commonly known as the White Citizens' Councils (WCC)

even though White was not in the formal name. The organization spread rapidly throughout the South, reaching several hundred thousand members. (Dittmer, 1994, 45) A speech given by Mississippi judge Tom Brady in October denouncing the Court and its support of integration was so popular that it was expanded into a little book. *Black Monday* became the segregationists' Bible. (Muse, 1964, 42-43, 47-48) On February 24, 1956 Sen. Harry Byrd (D. VA) called for "massive resistance." A Southern Manifesto, known formally as "The Declaration of Constitutional Principles," was soon drafted and signed by 101 Southern Members of Congress. It said that through this "clear abuse of judicial power... the Supreme Court...undertook to exercise their naked judicial power and substituted their personal political and social ideas for the established law of the land...." (Lewis, 2006; Muse, 1964, 21, 65)

For Negroes, the high Court's declaration that segregated schools were unconstitutional wasn't a precipitating event so much as a form of elite legitimation. The Court's decision confirmed what they already believed, but without sufficient certainty to act in the face of resistance. The *Brown* decision provided armor for the sustained battle that soon began. It heightened morale among Southern blacks and increased their hopes for change. Elite legitimation didn't begin with the 1954 Supreme Court decision but it was *very* important. For Southern whites, the outpouring of opposition by elected officials, especially the Southern Manifesto, provided elite legitimation for those who wanted to resist the Supreme Court's desegregation order – which at that time was all but a handful of the white population. (Muse, 1964, 62-65) Elites can't lead masses in directions that they do not wish to go, but they can put on the brake or push the accelerator. In the mid 1950s, significant elites on both sides of the integration battle hit the accelerator. This increased the resolve of those who listened to them.

Not until 1965 did the South make a serious, albeit reluctant, effort to desegregate its schools. By then it had moved from *massive* resistance to *passive* resistance. It was pushed to include at least some Negro students in its schools because new laws provided federal funds to deserving school districts but only if they had a desegregation plan. I will report on some of those efforts, because many of the students we worked with were getting ready to go into those erstwhile white schools. However, implementation of the Voting Rights Act in 1965-66 is my dominant topic. Some of the other arenas get attention in this book, but it is primarily about what we did to implement the Voting Rights Act in order to turn the vote into political power.

A second topic is "justice" or the "equal protection of the laws." Negroes had long been outside the protection of the justice system. The "rule of law" just did not apply in the South when one party was white and the other black. It only applied some of the time when both parties were black. White judges and jurors looked at white on black crime as a combination of white privilege and social control measures to keep Negroes in their place. Black on white crime, while rare, was seen as a threat to the social system that had to be stopped by any means necessary. Black on black crime as seen as like a pack of scrabbling dogs; undesirable but not really stoppable because it was in the nature of the beast. As long as it didn't spill over into the white world or impair the availability of labor, it could be ignored.

White on black crime escalated as the civil rights movement gathered steam. Negroes who protested their status and whites who protested with them were particular targets. Even

when the evidence was overwhelming, white juries would not convict the perpetrators of these crimes. SCLC wanted the murder of a civil rights worker to be a federal crime and wanted the Southern practice of excluding Negroes from juries to end. This issue didn't get the national publicity that desegregating the schools, integrating public accommodations, and restoring the right to vote received, but it wasn't for lack of trying. This book will recount what SCLC did to get the issue of "equal justice" into the public eye.

The primary thesis of this book is that bringing radical change to Southern institutions regulating race required a two-pronged effort: grassroots pressure by Southern blacks, as organized by the civil rights movement, and legal coercion by the federal government, as reflected in the laws passed by Congress and enforced by the administration, especially the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department. Those CRD lawyers were the secret sauce of the civil rights movement, but they have been largely ignored in histories of the era. Even more crucial were federal judges. They did not rule alike. Some conscientiously sought to follow the Supreme Court's lead while others tried to find ways around it. Consequently I have a lot to say about specific federal judges and what they decided even though those of us who worked in the field were mostly oblivious to them at the time. The fact that *who* decided the civil rights cases was essential to the outcome is not fully appreciated even by legal scholars. In the many books and articles I've read on this topic the tendency is to refer to "the court's decision" as though all courts (at least the federal courts) were monolithic, in which the only variables that mattered were the facts and the attorneys' legal arguments. Having read hundreds of legal decisions in civil rights cases, it's obvious that *who* decides a case is just as important, if not more so. Judges weigh the facts, decide which witnesses are credible and which not, and interpret the law. Personal predilections will prevail if there is any wiggle room, and sometimes even when there isn't. The judicial appointment process has far-reaching consequences.

By itself, neither the Southern civil rights movement nor enforcement efforts by the federal government would have been successful in bringing more than token change. White Southerners were devoted to white supremacy and well-schooled in resistance to outside interference. Without grassroots protest, the federal government would have had neither the will nor the resources to desegregate Southern institutions and enfranchise Negroes. But without the federal government backing it up, especially federal judges, the civil rights movement would have been decimated. That's what happened to black protest in previous decades and it would have happened again. The white South was a formidable foe. Popular sentiment, civil society, political, social and economic elites, and state and local governments all worked together to maintain white supremacy. Those white Southerners who dissented from that consensus were attacked, ostracized and often run out of town.

The federal government stepped into the civil rights fray in the 1930s. It did so cautiously, but by including the Negro in New Deal programs to the extent possible it added a major force to the struggle. (Myrdal, 1944, I-74; Sitkoff, 1978) Timid at first, that force would grow stronger with each passing decade. In 1940 the first bills were introduced into Congress to prohibit employment discrimination. FDR created the Fair Employment Practices Committee in 1941. The Supreme Court abolished the white primary in 1944. The 1947 report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights, *To Secure These Rights*, provided the template for

federal action for decades to come. In 1948 President Truman signed two Executive Orders desegregating the federal government and the armed forces. Eisenhower was not much of a civil rights supporter, but few realize how big a debt the movement owes to Herbert Brownell, his first Attorney General. Brownell's DoJ persuaded the Interstate Commerce Commission to ban segregation aboard interstate passenger trains and buses, screened proposed federal judges to fill Southern vacancies with an eye toward supporting and enforcing the Court's desegregation mandate and drafted what became the first federal civil rights act in 82 years. None of these were done in isolation from demands by Negro organizations; many were done with sympathy for those demands.

The marches, rallies and sit-ins of the civil rights era made the papers and are remembered in the history books, but the more important work of the movement was under the radar. Going door-to-door to talk to people about registering to vote, holding small meetings in people's homes to talk about what needed to be done, convincing opinion leaders such as ministers to talk up registration, getting black parents to send their children to white schools despite threats, convincing local Negroes that change was possible but required action; this is what civil rights workers really did. To get people to act differently, they had to think differently. They had to see that change was possible.

Words

As a child I often heard the ditty:

Sticks and stones may break my bones
But words can never hurt me.

I never quite knew what it meant. I suppose its purpose was to provide a balm to the taunts of other children, but the reality is that words do hurt, sometimes more than sticks and stones.

Nowhere was this more apparent than among activists in the South during the civil rights movement. Words that had been in common use for years were banned or discouraged because they caused pain. Other words or terms were developed precisely to cause hurt – at least mildly. Part of becoming a civil rights worker was to learn the vocabulary – not just new words but new contexts. Words took on different meaning depending on how they were used, and who used them. Some people could use some words, some of the time, in some contexts. Others couldn't use them at all.

Start with nigger – a word that has become taboo. I think the first time I heard that word was when I learned that Brazil nuts were called “nigger toes.” I don't remember the context. At some point in my childhood I learned that “nigger” was a bad word that I should not use – not even for Brazil nuts. I never heard my Alabama relatives say nigger; they said “colored.” My fellow students at Berkeley, many of whom used “fuck” and “shit” so frequently that they lost their impact as “bad words,” would have choked before saying “nigger,” even if quoting someone else. About the only context in which “nigger” could safely be used was when citing the title of Dick Gregory's autobiography.

Thus I was more than surprised, in fact quite shocked, to hear that word regularly punctuate speech among SCLC staff. Everywhere, I heard “nigger this” and “nigger that,” but only from the Negro staff. The other white SCOPE volunteers were also surprised to hear that forbidden word uttered so frequently and casually. We didn't know what to make of this. The senior white staff – i.e. those who'd been around for more than a few weeks – didn't appear shocked, but they didn't use the word either. The few whites who tried to imitate black speech in their effort to fit in quickly learned that there were some things that were off-limits to whites. In all my time in SCLC I heard exactly one white staff person use “nigger” in conversation and not get shot down. That person was Dana Swan, and I only heard him use it once.

Etymologically, nigger descended from “niger” – the Latin word for black – via “negro” – the Spanish word for black, used by the early Spanish and Portuguese explorers of Africa. Its initial use referred to slaves but was not derogatory. In colonial letters and documents it has various spellings, including negar, neggar and neger. Since slaves in the US were black and most blacks were slaves, the word became used for both without distinction. As is common for many words, social status determined linguistic status. Well before the War calling someone “nigger” who was not a slave, or black, became an insult.

After I got over my shock at hearing nigger uttered so often, I recognized it as an in-group term. It's common for groups to develop their own lingo; words that have meaning inside the group that are different from generic use. It's less common for words to be *exclusive* to an in-group. Although there were a lot of in-group words in the black community, which we tried to learn as part of our effort to fit in, nigger was an exclusive term. Some white SCOPERS didn't understand that they couldn't talk like the Negro staff until they got shot down. They thought that fighting for the rights of a group meant that they could act and talk like one of the group. It took them a while to realize that it didn't.

I heard nigger used by the Negro staff in two different ways. One was simply as a substitute for "person" or "guy." Where I might say "those guys" they would say "those niggers" (or "dem niggahs" or "dat niggah"). "Hey nigger," was a common form of greeting, and "li'l nigger" a common referent (that li'l nigger did X). The other was as a form of mild put-down. I heard "jive ass nigger" so often that it became embedded in my mind. While that phrase never came out of my mouth, it certainly floated in my head more times than I can count.

One learns language by hearing it and imitating what is heard. Put an ordinary person in any environment with new words and eventually that person will use them. It's part of normal adaptation. When I was transposed out of the Valley into the Berkeley student environment, I too started to use "fuck" and "shit" in normal conversation even though I was still basically a good girl who didn't use "bad words." I used those words before I fully understood what they meant. I also knew not to use them in front of my mother.

Whether quickly or slowly, white staff and SCOPERS all learned to practice self-censorship. This was rather hard to do. It's one thing to change language styles when you change environments. It was not difficult for me to suppress studentspeak when I visited my mother because she did not use that language. But when in an environment where you repeatedly hear words that you are not allowed to use, you have to consciously bite your tongue. The one other time I practiced self-censorship was years later at anti-war demonstrations, and that was by choice. When you are in a chanting crowd, it's hard not to chant along. One of the common chants in the anti-war movement was "Off the pigs" – slang for "Kill the cops." Whatever my feelings about police, death was not something I wanted for them and the purist in me wouldn't let me say something I thought was wrong. When that chant started, I clamped my teeth shut. But it was hard, just as it was hard not to say "that jive ass nigger" when those around me were saying it all the time.

Since "Negro" was the socially polite term for persons of African descent in the mid twentieth century, pronunciation made a great deal of difference. On those occasions in which SCOPERS spoke with local whites, we tried to correct their pronunciation. Southern whites certainly knew by the mid-1960s that nigger was a no-no word, but couldn't quite bring themselves to *say* Negro, let alone capitalize it. When they tried, it came out as nigra or neegra. "KNEE" - "GROW" we would say to courthouse clerks, registrars, or others whose job it was to interact with the public. "NIG" — "GRA" would finally come out.

Most white Southerners, including my relatives, still used "colored" as the proper polite term. All the signs I saw on Southern doors, restrooms and fountains said COLORED. I never

saw any printed with Negro, or negro, or black, or any version of African. Colored was the socially proper term during the decades of 1890-1920 when most of the segregation laws were passed which necessitated such signs. In the 1890s some organizations put “Afro-American” in their name, but that trend only lasted about a decade. Club women founded the National Federation of Afro-American Women at an 1895 Boston conference. The following year it brought some smaller organizations under its tent and changed its name to the National Association of Colored Women. Of those early organizations to use “Afro” in their name, the only one to survive was a newspaper, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, founded in 1892.

Negro as a referent for persons of African descent has a much longer history. Its use has waxed and waned since the Portuguese and Spanish explorers first arrived in western Africa. Applied to persons brought from Africa, slaveholders usually referred to their negroes rather than to their slaves. The two terms became somewhat interchangeable. Freed slaves were called free blacks, or sometimes free people of color. After the War “African” became popular among whites as a way to designate persons of darker skin. It was a way of saying that they were aliens, not really part of “our” community. In the 1890s the newly formed Negro Press Association of Georgia urged the use of Negro rather than colored, black or Afro-American in order to “promote race pride.” (*ADW* 3-17-60, 4) It was slow to catch on. Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1914. W.E.B. DuBois published *The Negro* in 1915. That same year Historian Carter G. Woodson adopted it for the new organization he co-founded, the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH). He started *The Journal of Negro History* in 1916. In 1926 ASNLH promoted Negro History Week in February because that was the birth month of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. However, “Negro” did not become common until the 1930s. *The Journal of Negro Education* was started in 1932 and the National Council of Negro Women was founded in 1935, as was the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women. In 1930 the *New York Times* announced that it would now capitalize Negro “in recognition of racial self-respect.” Other Northern newspapers followed suit. The South never quite caught up. (*NYT* 3-7-30, 20)

Words become “bad” or “good” because of their associations. The phonemes themselves are meaningless. Black was seldom used in polite speech before the 1960s. When used by white Southerners, it was mildly pejorative. Indeed Negro newspapers often used “tan” as an adjective; a decade later they would use black. “Black” was reclaimed in 1966 and promoted as a neutral term to replace Negro, which the younger generation of activists thought was antiquated. Reflecting the success of this effort, *The Black Scholar* was founded in 1969 and *The Journal of Black Studies* in 1970. In 1973 Negro History Week was expanded to Black History Month. In the 1980s many urged the use of “African-American.” They were returning to a label that had been largely discouraged by the Abolitionist Movement of the early 19th Century but reappeared among whites in the post-reconstruction era. The Alabama Constitution of 1875 says “separate schools shall be provided for the children of citizens of African descent.” (Art. XIII) The white supremacists who re-wrote their state constitutions in the 1890s to disfranchise Negroes talked about “Africans” in their debates to make it clear that they were a foreign people. Nonetheless, that longer term has become the favored one in the 21st Century. ASNLH became ASALH – the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. *JNH* was renamed the *Journal of African American History* in 2001. Some journals have undergone multiple name changes as the socially proper term has shifted over time. What started as *The Negro American Literature*

Forum in 1967 became the *Black American Literature Forum* in 1976 and then the *African American Review* in 1992. However, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, founded in 1909/10, has remained the NAACP. It may be ahead of its time. At some point in the recent past “persons of color” began to creep into linguistic usage. While use of this term is not currently widespread, eventually we may go back to “colored.”

In this book I mostly use Negro and black because those were the terms we used at the time. An exception is my use of numbers from the US Census. For the most part, Census uses “white” and “non-white” in designating racial groups, at least for 1960 and before. In this book NVAP stands for Non-white Voting Age Population and WVAP is short for White Voting Age Population. In all but three states, the voting age population was 21 and over. I frequently computed the percentage of NVAP who were registered to vote and often compared it to WVAP. Note that the latter percentage is sometimes more than 100, even though that should be impossible. Registrars were slow to purge their lists where it wasn’t required by law, with the result that the dead and departed stayed on the voting rolls. For larger populations Census provided numbers for smaller groups of non-whites, one of which is Negro. For all but a couple of the Southern counties I’m writing about, the number of non-whites who are not Negro is very tiny. Using the count of non-whites to compute NAVP instead searching for Negro saved a lot of time and didn’t result in any significant differences.

I have occasionally used “colored” when describing the views of Southern whites. Indeed, the Supreme Court was still using “colored” in 1965 (*United States v. Mississippi*), as were many black newspapers. I haven’t used “tan” though that term appears in the latter (especially the *Baltimore Afro-American*). In the early 20th Century “black and tan” was one faction of the Republican Party; another faction was called the “lily-whites.” I’ve occasionally used “nigger” when the context requires it. This gives readers the flavor of the times and is consistent with quotes and references. Superimposing modern words on the past doesn’t do this.

There was no equivalent word to “nigger” for whites. As a child I heard the term “cracker” used for po’ whites or disreputable persons with a white skin. It was said with derision but was not so bad that my mother would have pounced on me if I had used it, though she might have raised an eyebrow in disapproval. That term has been around as long as nigger, as a referent to backwoods white Southerners without culture or morals. In Georgia it was reclaimed by two minor-league baseball teams, the Atlanta Crackers, which played from 1901 to 1965, and the Atlanta Black Crackers, which played from 1919 to 1952. It floated around SCLC as a generic term for whites, but the most common word was “honky.” That was a new word for me, and I never quite knew where it came from. Everyone used it; white staff even used it occasionally to refer to themselves (as in “us honkies”). I occasionally heard the term “redneck.” It was used for the same type of white as “cracker” but wasn’t perceived as quite as derisive. We did not use that word for ourselves, even in jest.

“Nigger-lover” was the term white Southerners used for white civil rights workers. Long before the civil rights movement, any white person who worked to advance Negroes was called nigger-lover. Sometimes they used it to our face; they certainly used it among themselves. Many Southern whites who did not know that “nigger” was a pejorative certainly knew that about “nigger-lover.” That’s why they used it. White civil rights workers were also called white

niggers.

The one word I got shot down for using was “boy.” Generically, a boy is an underage male and has no negative shadings. Because Negro men were so often called “boy” – implying that they didn’t deserve to be called men – addressing any Negro man as “boy” was seen as pejorative. I knew not to do that long before I joined the movement. In other contexts “boy” was OK. My erroneous use was casual, in a context that didn’t trigger any warning signs for me that it wasn’t OK. I remember the scene, though I don’t remember the month, which would tell me whether I had been around long enough to know better. There were five of us in a car. The driver was male, but I don’t remember if he was black or white. I was in the front passenger seat. In the back seat were three male staffers; two blacks and one white. We were all joshing around and at one point I alliteratively referred to the “boys in the back.” I was politely put in my place.

“Girl” did not have the same sting as “boy” even though it was traditionally used for Negro women in much the same way “boy” was used for Negro men. But girl was also used for white women, as in the “girls in the office,” or “my girl” to mean one’s secretary. If I had referred to “the girls in the back” (assuming they were female) I don’t think anyone would have thought it inappropriate (though hardly alliterative).

More important was the use of courtesy titles: Mr., Mrs. and Miss. When I was growing up, I was taught to always use a title when addressing adults. First names could only be used with other children. When one became an adult knowing when to first-name was trickier. First names were used with friends and colleagues, but not for strangers or in professional relationships. Southern whites called all Negroes by their first name (when they didn’t use boy). If the situation really required a title, whites would use something other than Mister (or Mrs. or Miss). They would call a Negro man Doctor, Counselor or Professor – or even invent a title such as Lawyer or Preacher – before they would call him Mr.¹ What was a common title for any adult in the North was reserved for white adults in the South. Southern whites clung to Mr., Mrs. and Miss with an almost pathological determination. Negroes who were overheard referring to a white person without the title, even when in casual conversation with other Negroes, could find themselves under attack. In courtrooms, judges would insist on titles for whites while calling Negroes by their first names. In 1964, the juvenile court judge in Selma, AL found black children in contempt of court for referring to a black woman as “Mrs. Boynton” rather than “Amelia.” (Symposium, 2013, 20) In Wilcox County, a judge told a young defendant “don’t you ‘missus’ no nigger woman in my courtroom.” (Quote cited in Gitin, 2014, 179)

SCOPErs learned very quickly to always use titles as a sign of respect in our work in the Negro community, even in the homes where we lived. Better to over-use than under-use. Uncertainty arose as to when we could use first names, or even last names without a title, for black staff, especially senior staff, or the local Negroes we worked with who were our age. There were no common practices, at least none that I saw at the time. In retrospect I can see that distance had a lot to do with naming practices. At the time I just did what I heard others do. Some SCLC executive members were addressed by their first names and some weren’t. Some

¹ For a good essay on segregated nomenclature, read Chapter 4 of Harkey, 1967.

might be first-named among ourselves, but not to their faces. Hosea Williams was always Hosea, to his face and among ourselves. Rev. Andrew Young was always Andy among ourselves; to his face I addressed him as Rev. Young, as did others, but not everyone. I never heard Rev. Ralph Abernathy called Ralph, though we might refer to him as Abernathy. I once referred to Dr. King as King and was quickly corrected. Dr. King was always Dr. King. Quite a few people were referred to by last name only, but not Dr. King. His father, MLK Sr., was called Daddy King among ourselves. To his face he would be Rev. King. In this book I will use the name and title (or not) that was most common among staff talking to each other at the time. If there are some inconsistencies (e.g. the use of “Rev.”) it’s because we weren’t consistent.

I’m making an exception for Hosea Williams. His name was pronounced as HO-zay. It almost sounded like the Spanish name José, so much so that I’ve seen his name spelled that way in newspaper stories and transcripts. In Spanish the emphasis is on the second syllable. For Hosea, the emphasis was on the first, and there were only two syllables. In my written text, I’ve spelled out his formal name even though we never used it. He was always first-named. I never heard him called Mr. Williams by anyone in SCLC at any level.

I also heard Dr. King referred to as “The Lord” (Da Lawd) among staff, even when speaking about him to an audience. This name originated with SNCC as a term of derision. By the time I arrived in 1965 it had migrated to SCLC, but was said respectfully, even reverentially. It was not acceptable to refer to Dr. King as “King” but it was OK to refer to him as “The Lord.” A few others had nicknames. Occasionally I heard Andy Young referred to as The Saint or Saint Andrew, but not always respectfully. I doubt anyone called him that to his face. Hosea, on the other hand, was happy to be called “Leader” to his face. Ben van Clarke, his right-hand man, was known as “Little Leader,” though he liked being called “Leader” when Hosea wasn’t around. When one of us wanted something from Ben, we’d say “Hey, Leader,” to get his attention before making our request.

Those of us at the bottom – volunteers, field staff and office staff – used first names with each other, even when we didn’t know each other very well, even for the few who were much older. We also used nicknames (e.g. Sunshine and Big Lester) and occasionally last name only (e.g. Gibson) or initials only (e.g. R.B. or J.T.). When the black staff wanted to put down a white staffer or SCOPER, they would call us “Mr. Charlie” or “Miss Ann.” Or tell us that we were acting like “Mr. Charlie” or “Miss Ann.” That was a throwback to plantation usage, with the underlying implication that we were assuming an air of superiority. Those of us who were white never used those terms to refer to ourselves, but did so as a generic reference to Southern whites, or sometimes to a specific Southern white. “The Man” was also a generic reference to whites, especially the white power structure. “The Woman” didn’t exist.

“C.P. time” was short for colored people’s time. It was an in-group term, but not an exclusive one. White staff and volunteers used it once we got used to hearing it and weren’t put down for doing so. Although we would not have normally said “colored,” properly used it wasn’t seen as a pejorative. Sometimes it was used descriptively and sometimes as an excuse to explain perpetual lateness. (He’s running on C.P. time). I eventually realized that normative lateness was more rural than racial, despite the racial overtones of “C.P. time.” It dated from the pre-industrial era when accurate time was both hard to tell and not really necessary. Making the trains, and

everything else, run on time, was a change in human behavior necessary to achieve efficiency in the industrial age. The South of the Sixties was still a rural culture. Even those who lived in the big cities brought rural attitudes and habits with them.

What is meant by “the South” is not consistent in the literature. I’ve tried to be a little more specific, though I don’t always succeed. Deep South refers to five states: South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. Add six more and you get the 11 Confederate states which seceded. There were an additional four slave states, which practiced slavery extensively but didn’t secede: Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland and Delaware. Then there are West Virginia and Oklahoma. WV practiced slavery until it seceded from Virginia, becoming a state in 1863. Oklahoma was Indian Territory in the 19th Century, becoming a state in 1907. Many Native American tribes kept slaves and supported the Confederacy. Both Oklahoma and West Virginia enacted segregation laws, making a total of 17 segregation states. Slavery was also extensive in the District of Columbia, until an Act abolishing it was signed on April 16, 1862. Congress wrote the laws for the District, including segregation laws. Southern culture was strongest in the Deep South; it fades and blends as one fans out into the other states. Of course both black and white Southerners emigrated, taking their culture with them to northern and western states. That’s a different story. Suffice it to say that cultural norms were not identical every place, which is why it’s important not to use “Southern” as a generic unless that is what is meant.

Other terms describe the Southern way of life. “Jim Crow” loosely meant segregation, as in Jim Crow laws, but it could have a broader meaning as well. “Jim Crow” was a character in a 19th Century minstrel show. It was widely used in the 19th Century as segregation practices were being institutionalized and segregation laws were passed. (Perman, 2001, 246) At a later time I would hear the term “Crow Jim” – sometimes meaning reverse racism and sometimes meaning that white staff should step back and let the black staff take the lead.

We also learned about “oreos” – meaning black on the outside and white on the inside. This was a mild pejorative that kids or teenagers would call each other who spoke, acted, or dressed like whites. While whites favored those who learned to act or sound like them, among blacks such behavior was disparaged.

Although I use it in the book, I did not hear the phrase “race man,” let alone “race woman,” when I was working in the movement. Historical research done much later brought those terms to my attention. They were used before the 1950s civil rights movement to identify someone for whom promoting and protecting the Negro race was a priority concern – someone who was the equivalent of a civil rights worker but without the context. For example, Rosa Parks was a race woman long before the Montgomery bus boycott made her famous. So was Amelia Boynton, referred to previously. As I learned from that research, doing race work without the support of an organization often meant traveling a lonely road but it was absolutely crucial to laying the foundation for later movement activities. Counties with identifiable “race men” (and women) in them were much more likely to support local movements decades later than counties without such persons.

Gestures are also part of one’s vocabulary; I added “skinning” to mine. As a form of

emphasis, one would stick out one's hand, palm side up, and say "gimme some skin." A slap on the hand was the appropriate response. Often the hand shot out without the words once we understood what this meant. I had never seen this gesture in the white world, but within a few decades "skinning" would enter it as "high fivving" with the hand held up rather than out.

Uncle Tom was what all staff called a Negro who acted in a subservient manner, or otherwise sought to ingratiate himself with whites. I only heard the term applied to men. Calling someone an Uncle Tom was generally a referent to a type of person who was automatically subservient toward white authority. Used as a verb, to say that someone was tomming, was only a referent to a specific act. I watched and heard Hosea and other Negro staff tom when the occasion demanded it, not because they felt subservient but as a form of deceit used to get information or something else they wanted from whites in authority. All of us sometimes tommed to each other in a kind of parody when we wanted something, with exaggerated head scratching, foot shuffling and a downward gaze. In that context no one took it seriously. It was a form of mild humor.

I recognized from my anthropology courses that tomming was a form of appeasement behavior, common to all primates as well as many other species. Used to avert hostility, it was a pre-emptive symbolic surrender to a stronger member of the species. Southern Negroes learned to tom at an early age because Southern whites expected Negroes to use gestures, facial expressions and voice tone to continually acknowledge white superiority. Those who didn't tom properly were called "uppity." "Uppity nigger" was a Southern white term for a Negro who really needed to be taught a lesson. Emmett Till's killers said that they intended to only beat him until he acted uppity. Then they decided to make an example of him by killing him. (Huie, 1956) Growing up in Chicago, he hadn't learned how important it was to tom to whites. Southern whites often viewed what would be normal behavior in the North as "uppity" when engaged in by those they knew were civil rights workers, black or white. Southern blacks knew this. Northerners, even the Negroes among us, did not always know when they were acting "uppity," which sometimes led to unnecessary clashes. This was more of a problem for (northern) guys than girls, who easily slipped into "feminine" behavior to dispel hostility. As I became a feminist, I realized that what were called feminine wiles was the female form of tomming.

Why I Became a Civil Rights Worker

On Sunday, June 13, 1965, the day after I graduated from the University of California at Berkeley, my mother packed my stuff into her car and drove us to her house in Northridge, one of many suburban communities in the San Fernando Valley, north of Los Angeles. The next day I phoned the L.A. office of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference looking for a ride to its Atlanta office. Within a week I was on my way to join SCLC's summer project, called SCOPE.

Going to work for the Southern civil rights movement after graduating from college was just as natural for me as going to college after graduating from high school. I didn't think about it. I didn't have to. I knew it was what I was meant to do. I have thought about it in the years since, and wondered why so many white youth, with nothing obvious to gain, were so committed to the cause of racial justice.

A Generation of Missionaries

A missionary impulse ran through my generation. Appearing first among a few of those who went to college in the 1950s, it gathered force and spread, becoming at times a roaring river which flooded its banks and eventually changed the shape of the social and political landscape. This impulse incubated in our nation's colleges, though it wasn't restricted to them. The GI bill led to a vast expansion of higher education, with the result that a far greater proportion of American youth were exposed to new ideas hatching on college campuses.

The cohort born around WWII was exposed to the same propaganda which mobilized our parents to fight in that war. Those born earlier heard it directly as young children; those born later heard it indirectly, through our parents and the weekly war movies that we watched at local theaters. As we moved through elementary and high school, it was Cold War propaganda which we absorbed. While many of us learned to distrust its overt message – that there was an international Communist conspiracy out to destroy America – its covert message subtly penetrated to our inner core. The message was that personal sacrifice for a larger social good was the most important thing we could do with our lives. Giving the utmost was what our parents had done to defeat the Axis powers and what we should do in turn. When John F. Kennedy, after being sworn in as our 35th President, said “my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country,” his words were heard by a generation eager to do just that. We answered the call to national service like our parents before us, but we did it in our own way.

On July 15, 1960, my mother took me to the LA Coliseum to hear Kennedy accept the Democratic nomination for President. We were fortunate to live in the same city where the Democrats met that year. Our TV had been tuned to the convention proceedings all week but we had gone to the arena only briefly to picket outside for Adlai Stevenson. Adlai inspired her, and through her I caught my only bad case of political hero worship. We had spent a lot of time working for his election when he was the Democratic nominee in 1952 and 1956. But the Democrats didn't give Stevenson a third try for the golden ring and my mother thought the chance to see the man who could be President – even if from high in the stands of a very big

stadium – too good to miss. We took turns watching with binoculars as JFK declared that our country stood “on the edge of a New Frontier – the frontier of the 1960s – a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils – a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats.”

Kennedy was more prophetic than he knew. He was a Cold Warrior, concerned about Communism “90 miles from our shores” who sounded false alarms about Soviet military superiority. The real New Frontier of the 1960s was being staked out even as he campaigned for the Democratic nomination for President, but it wasn't where he thought it was. Our New Frontier was a crusade for racial justice and a campaign against conformity and political repression. Its call to arms was sounded by students, little known at the time, with their actions, not their words. On February 1, four Negro students at North Carolina A&M College sat down at a lunch counter in Greensboro NC and insisted on service. When they were arrested for violating the segregation laws, sit-ins spread all over the South and picket lines appeared in the North. On May 13-15 students from several colleges in the San Francisco Bay Area protested at hearings held in its City Hall by the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities (HUAC). When they refused to leave after being denied admittance they were washed down the marble steps with fire hoses; 67 were arrested. The North Carolina sit-in was publicized all over the country and even internationally. The California sit-down was publicized in California.

Kennedy, on July 15 and subsequently, proclaimed a new generation in the land, one which would bring “new invention, innovation, imagination, decision.” He called for “sacrifice instead of more security... courage – not complacency.... leadership – not salesmanship.” Running for President at the relatively young age of 43 he said the time had come for a changing of the guard. My generation heard his call, even though Kennedy was part of our parents’ generation. His words and his ideas helped create the gulf between our parents and ourselves which soon would be called the generation gap. It was our generation which would provide invention, innovation and imagination for the next ten years as our parents sought to enjoy the peace and prosperity justly earned by their victory in World War II.

While many heard the trumpet call, few enlisted as full-time political missionaries, even for a few years. Those who did find a calling in political activism were a special breed, a little different from those in our political cohort who turned out for demonstrations and then returned to normal lives. What made us different is not something that any of us talked about at the time or could have predicted from what we knew about each other. But over the years, as I have read or remembered the life stories of those who made major commitments of time and energy to social change, I have found a common pattern. I see three factors not only in my own age-mates, but in the lives of earlier generations of political missionaries who are now long dead. These combine in different ways and with different intensities, but all three are present at least in part, sometimes so subtly that it takes distance to see them. They are: parental programming, personal experience, and religion.

In my case the first two were known to me from the beginning, providing a conscious template for my motivations. The third I have come to appreciate only with time and education.

Parental Programming

My mother was born Helen Claire Mitchell, on May 28, 1909 in Hamilton, Alabama, the sixth of twelve children of Charles Erastus and Leota Ford Mitchell. My grandfather was a small town lawyer, often assigned to be the guardian of the “widows, orphans and unfortunates of the county.” He was a budding politician until he served in the Alabama legislature in 1907-11. Something soured him on politics; after one term he never ran for another office.

My grandmother was more typical of her time and place, marrying at age 17 right out of high school. As the daughter of the county probate judge,¹ she started at the top of the small town social structure whereas my grandfather always had to prove himself.

I never met my grandfather; he died four years before I was born. According to my mother he didn't help any of his 12 children go to college. She repeatedly told me that when she graduated from high school he gave her \$5 and a railroad pass (which he got gratis from the railroads he represented in the county courts) and told her she was on her own. She worked her way through Alabama College for Women in Montevallo – not fully accredited until 1925 – by waiting tables in the cafeteria. Nor did her mother encourage any of her twelve children to get a good education or reach beyond their place. Helen frequently told me that her mother forced her to drop out of high school when she was 16 to take care of the younger siblings so her mother could help out in the law office. My mother never forgave her mother for this. She made up for the lost time, graduating in 1927. Indeed her own mother's resistance to her schooling may account for her own reverence for education and the fact that she was always taking classes when I was a child.

Helen graduated in from college 1930, at the start of the Depression, and immediately went to work as a teacher of home economics in a northwest Alabama county high school. Alabama soon ran out of money and began paying its teachers and other civil servants in scrip. The scrip was good for purchases from and paying bills to the state. Helen and several of her older siblings used it help the younger siblings pay tuition to the Alabama state schools. Nonetheless, few made it through. I don't know how many of the Mitchell children started college; I believe only four graduated. Helen was the only one who went on for a graduate degree, and that had to wait until after World War II when her service in the Women's Army Corps made her eligible for tuition-free education under the GI Bill. When we drove to Alabama in the summer of 1954 she took her M.A. diploma with her to show her mother, thinking she'd be proud of her. I later found her crying and when I asked why, she said her mother's only response when she saw the diploma was to tell her that now she'd think she was better than everyone else. Despite all the credits she accumulated over the next few years, Helen never again took another degree. Instead she started selling real estate to supplement her income as a teacher and projected on to me her desire for more degrees.

At the end of WWII she returned to Alabama after three years in service, mostly in Great

¹ In Alabama the Probate Judge was the chief county administrator. It was a political office more than a judicial one, and did not require a legal background. The same person often held office for many years and was generally the head of the county political organization, aka the courthouse gang.

Britain, pregnant with me. She went to the military hospital in Atlanta to give birth and then returned to live with an older sister near Birmingham. We moved to California six months later to join her next younger sister in Los Angeles, who was pregnant with my next younger cousin. Some of the Mitchell children traveled before settling down, especially the eight who served in WWII. All made their permanent homes below the Mason-Dixon line, but spread out from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C. Only five stayed in Alabama and only two in Marion County. This mobility made their lives very different from that of their mother or grandmother, who spent their entire lives in Marion County, for whom the hundred-mile trip to Birmingham was a major excursion.

Helen had a rebellious streak. When young, she defied social customs in little ways, like smoking and wearing pants when proper young ladies just did not do those things. She questioned many conventions, like those on race. I don't know when or how she got "right on race" but I suspect her Army service, education and inquisitive mind had a lot to do with it. While a probationary teacher in the Los Angeles School System, she taught in largely black schools where most of her friends were Negro teachers who, like her, had emigrated from the South. One of them was her best friend. We spent time at their homes. I spent second grade in a black elementary school because it was next door to the jr. high school at which my mother taught. My classes ended an hour earlier than hers. I could walk to my mother's classroom and sit in the back until her day was over watching her teach a classroom of Negro kids.

Whatever awakened her to the ugly realities of race discrimination, it happened before I was conscious of the world around me. By the time that happened those issues were in the national news. *Brown I* in May of 1954, *Brown II* in May of 1955, the murder of Emmett Till in August of 1955, the Montgomery bus boycott that began in December of 1955 and continued for 13 months, Little Rock in the fall of 1957; these were all highly publicized events that made what was happening in the South part of our dinner conversation. She repeatedly said that the South was wrong on race.

I've read a lot of the scholarly literature on how and why kids become "radicalized," or involved in social movements, or sensitive to issues of social justice. But I think my mother nailed it better than any of the academics when she said that *kids act out what they hear their parents talk about*. I was no exception. My first memory of "acting out" on race was in 1957, when I was 12. We drove to Hamilton from California for a large family Christmas gathering. Never before, or since, had I seen so many Mitchells in one place. I had a wonderful time. At my mother's request, one uncle took me into a bare field and taught me to drive, in a car full of screaming cousins. On Christmas Day the family let me play Santa Claus and hand out all the gifts. I loved it.

At age 78, my grandmother, whom everyone called Mama Mitchell, was still the Register of the Circuit Court in Equity of Marion County. I knew that that was an important job. I had spent the summer of 1955 in Hamilton, living with her and Aunt Loy, the maiden aunt who stayed home when the other children left. From them I learned that the Civil War was properly called the War Between the States. In this book I will merge the two and just call it the War. Loy was a legal secretary; her boss, Rankin Fite, was also Speaker of the House in the Alabama legislature. One of my summer jobs was to carry legal papers between the offices of my aunt and

my grandmother. All the lawyers in the county brought papers to my grandmother; it was obvious to me that she was an important person at that courthouse.

Sometime between 1955 and 1957 the Marion County Courthouse was renovated. Soon after we arrived in Hamilton for Christmas, I went to explore. Much more conscious of race in 1957 than I had been in 1955, one of the first things I noticed was that there were four restrooms: white men, white women, colored men and colored women. Segregation! With all the logic of a 12-year-old, I assumed that my grandmother, important person that she was, could have prevented this travesty. I confronted her with this in the parlor one afternoon. Her surprise was more pronounced than her irritation. We began to argue about segregation. As we argued, Mitchells drifted in from other rooms. Soon Aunt Loy took over the argument, while the others provided a chorus of occasional comments. I don't remember what was said, but I do remember the physical layout. There were a dozen Mitchells of all ages on one side of the room. I was on the other, with a big gulf between us. Off to one side stood my mother, arms folded, watching the verbal joust. She said not one word, then or later. Normally she would not have countenanced her daughter talking back to her mother, or any adult, so I interpreted her silence as approval. I still do. She wouldn't confront her family on a touchy issue like race. But she would let her daughter do it.

When I returned to Alabama in 1965 as a civil rights worker, I discovered that Marion County was far more progressive than I had imagined, especially for a county with a non-white population of less than three percent. The typical Southern small county courthouse only had three restrooms: white men, white women, and colored.

Personal Experience

Parental scripts are very powerful, but it's personal experience that sets the dominant themes of one's life. My course was set at LeMay Street Elementary School. At the beginning of 1953 we moved to the San Fernando Valley, where Helen began a permanent job teaching history at Birmingham Jr. High School. A converted World War II veterans hospital named for Brigadier General Henry Patrick Birmingham, it shared facilities with Birmingham Sr. High. I registered in the third grade, having skipped a semester because I scored high on aptitude tests. Although my memories of my prior schools are vague, none are bad, either in the black school or the mostly white neighborhood schools before that one. That changed the day I entered LeMay Street School.

The kids played a game they called cooties. Cooties were invisible creatures that crawled on your bodies. Each classroom designated two or three kids as carriers. The rules of the game said that anyone who touched a kid who had cooties would also become a carrier. The antidote was to immediately blow hard on the contaminated spot so the cooties would return to their source. The best strategy of course, was not to come into contact with a cootie carrier. Baiting was part of the game; many kids used touching as a form of taunting, quickly blowing the cooties back. The rest simply avoided cootie-carriers, marking them as untouchables.

Almost from the moment I stepped into my new classroom I became one of the kids who had cooties. I did not know then why I was chosen for this honor though I was aware that I was a

middle-class kid in a working-class school. It seemed that being the smartest kid in class was bad. The treatment that accompanied this label stuck. It followed me when I skipped another grade and went into another class. It followed me into jr. high when the game was long over. It followed me through high school, even though I skipped two more semesters and changed schools twice as new schools were built. I would always be the kid who had cooties. Not until I was in grad school with an opportunity to read widely did I realize why being smart made me a misfit in primary school. Girls were favored who were pretty and popular. Guys were favored who were athletic. In that world, intellectual gifts were stigmatized. In a different world being smart would have had a different reception. Living life as an untouchable, at least when in school, made me super-sensitive to exclusion. On learning in 1956 that Negroes were protesting being sent to the back of the segregated buses in Alabama I knew which side I was on.

When I asked my mother what to do about the teasing and taunting she told me to ignore it. Kids are cruel, she said; just pretend they don't exist. This turned out to be very good training for practicing non-violence. Many of the white kids who went South had trouble not responding to slurs dished out by local whites. I could walk right pass hecklers as though they were not there; I could look through them as though they were invisible; I could listen while their words flew by rather than penetrated. They were just larger versions of the children who plagued my younger years.

My other school strategy was not readily transferable to civil rights work. That was to shun the kids who shunned me – a version of “you can't fire me, I quit.” This taught me to disregard what others said about me, which made it easier to do things later in life that met with disapproval. Having no peer group immunized me against peer pressure. Instead, I made friends with the other cootie kids, with whom I had little in common beyond our place at the bottom of the classroom pecking order. That taught me not to pre-judge people by the opinion of others.

Civil rights work in the South was dangerous in ways that elementary school was not; the threat of physical violence was ever present. I remember only three incidents of physical assault as a child and only one drew blood. The one I remember best happened when I was eleven. A bunch of kids started to throw rocks at me as I walked home from jr. high. Instead of running, as they expected me to do, I turned around and walked toward them, intending to ask *why* they were throwing rocks at me. Before I could get close enough, they turned and ran from me. That taught me that confrontation could be salutary.

My one semester's reprieve from my status as a social outcast taught me much about the politics of exclusion. In Birmingham Jr. High the students in each grade were divided into three tracks based on aptitude tests. There were no AP classes. Those in the same track took required courses together. In the second semester of seventh grade the high track was assigned to Mrs. Freeman for History and Homeroom. Having my mother as my teacher was uncomfortable for us both, but better than the alternative of switching to a lower track. (I tried that for a week and hated it). What I noticed most was the changed attitudes of my classmates. Kids wanted to be friends with me that I barely knew; I was invited to parties; I was elected to a class office for the first and only time. I had no idea why they thought being nice to me would help them with their History teacher (it didn't) but it taught me the importance of derivative status. The following semester life returned to normal, and the semester after that I skipped another grade and went to

a new school, where I knew nobody and was nobody.

Shortly after my sixteenth birthday I escaped the Valley. I counted the seconds. I was glad to leave and never wanted to return. Going to the University of California at Berkeley liberated me from my status as an untouchable. Cal was so much more diverse and less conformist than the Valley. I met many people with whom I had something in common more positive than low social status. At Cal, academic achievement was a virtue, and politics was pursued in many ways by many students. My work in various political groups taught me that while I could not fight *for myself by myself*, I could fight *with others for others*. My passion for politics taught me to wear a mask – a political persona – when necessity dictated. But deep down inside, my eight and a half years in the Valley had made their mark. The belief that I would always be the kid who had cooties left a residue of anger that never went away.

I don't *know* how common experiences like this were among those whites who made long-term personal commitments to changing race relations but, from conversations I remember and biographies I have read, I *suspect* that they were very common, and may even distinguish those white youth who invested major time and effort from those who supported civil rights without leaving home. A lot of us were fighting proxy battles.

Religion

If anyone had asked me at the time if religion played any role in my decision to work for civil rights I would have responded with a resounding NO. I was not a believer. I respected the hyper-Christianity of the civil rights movement but I didn't embrace it. My religious upbringing was pretty sparse. I think my mother was also a non-believer, or at least agnostic, though we never discussed religion. She thought I should have some exposure to religion so she took me to nondenominational, community churches when I was young. None of what I heard was heavy handed, but neither did it stick. At age 12 I told her I had better things to do on Sundays. We both stopped going to church.

From reading others' stories I know that religion played a very important role for many who became full time activists, especially white Southerners. This has been true historically for many movements, not just the civil rights movement. Some religions have been particularly fertile grounds for social activists. In the Nineteenth Century, a few Quaker sects contributed a disproportionate number of social reformers to good causes. Methodists were frequent activists, especially, but not solely, for temperance. In the early 20th Century, evangelical Christians were common in the Progressive Movement. In the Sixties movements, Jews were heavily involved. I heard Dr. King preach that the willingness to sacrifice oneself for a larger cause was a key to social activism. He saw self-sacrifice as essentially a religious ideal. Although I did not feel religious, I think he was right.

I've often wondered what it was that made me feel it was my personal responsibility to make the world a better place. It's an internal voice that eggs me on far beyond a commitment to personally do the right thing. After reading a lot of history, I think religion had something to do with it, even though I was not religious. My mother was raised a Methodist. She told me that her parents joined that church when they married because their respective parents objected to their

child joining the church of the other (Southern Baptist for my grandmother, Church of Christ for my grandfather). Perhaps, like all converts, they made a special effort to learn the tenants of their adopted faith, at least some of which were passed to their children. Others have written that “the women of the Methodist Church [were] the vanguard of southern white church people’s efforts to sow seeds of racial change in the pre-civil rights era.” (Manis, 2004) In the 1950s, the Methodist Women’s Division encouraged school desegregation; it had some success in the upper South, but not in the Deep South. (Knotts, 1990) Overall, a lot of white civil rights workers came out of the Methodist Church. Even though I wasn’t raised a Methodist, I suspect that the same teachings that led white Methodists to pursue racial justice long before other denominations in the South gave birth to my inner voice. As they passed through my mother they lost their religious trappings.

Religion per se is not the only source of commitment. Any strong belief system, even an atheistic one, can serve the same purpose if it teaches adherents that they must act on their beliefs. Another major source of civil rights workers were the children of socialists and Communists, though they didn’t always reveal this about themselves at the time. Ideology and religion are twins. Whether one learns social responsibility from going to church, or temple, or a Marxist study group, the result is the same: an inner voice that won’t leave you alone when faced with injustice until you DO something.

SCOPE

My correspondence with those who came to the SCOPE/SCLC reunion in 2015 gave me more insight into what kind of people were willing to give up a summer, and sometimes several years of their lives, to do civil rights work in the South. I didn’t do a survey, so I have no numbers, but among my impressions two factors stood out. I was struck by how many of them had gone into the helping professions. Most became teachers, social workers, medical workers, or different types of counselors. More became clergy than lawyers. Quite a few were artists or writers. Politicians and business owners were scarce. Few spent their working lives in large corporations. They were creative, and they liked to feel needed. Making a difference in other people’s lives, not pursuing money or power, motivated their life choices. Working in the civil rights movement was one those choices.

The other characteristic was how many SCOPERS had major experiences of marginality – being shut out, put out, or just plain left out. This prompted them to identify with others who were excluded. There are many ways to be marginal, some due to shared characteristics and some not. Groups tend to marginalize people who are different, but what kind of difference evokes that reaction can vary. A member of an identifiable, stigmatized minority is a ready target. But groups will often look for differences when none are obvious. One can be left out, pushed out, ignored, or gratuitously punished without being a member of an identifiable group. Children are particularly prone to do this; they like to identify ins and outs, to see others as us or them. Children have to be taught tolerance; it doesn’t come naturally. “Brotherly (sic) love” is a religious teaching precisely because it’s not innate.

I was marginalized as a child in the Valley, but not at Berkeley, though not for any identifiable group characteristic. Sometimes my SCOPE correspondents volunteered personal

experiences or feelings which motivated them to identify with Negroes. For example, I discovered that quite a few were gays or lesbians. In 1965 no one would have admitted this because it would have labeled them as perverts and led to their removal from SCOPE, but fifty years later people were quite open about their sexual orientation. Some were active in gay or lesbian organizations that I found online when searching for them. Without asking, I could identify lots of homosexuals among the civil rights vets I found. It's easy to see why someone who has lived in the shadow of stigma would empathize with a stigmatized people.

Jews are a special case. Surveys of civil rights workers asked religion, so we know that Jews participated in the movement in much larger proportions than their presence in the general population. Whether those who identify as Jewish felt marginal really depends on where they lived and their social situation so feelings of marginality were not always pushing them to be civil rights workers. However, Jews of my generation were raised on the Holocaust. They learned how simple discrimination and segregation in Europe eventually led to mass execution. They were taught to never let that happen here – to anyone. The civil rights movement gave them a way to act on that admonition.