

THE HEART OF THE MATTER:
POEMS INSPIRED BY CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT PHOTOGRAPHS

by

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“A Good Day to Die” and “Manna” *published in Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression*.

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores and expands the consensus narrative of the American Civil Rights Movement through a collection of original poems inspired by civil rights photographs. My purpose was to gain a better understanding of the civil rights movement, the literature written about and because of the movement, and in particular, how images and text interact, allowing for a deeper engagement on the part of the individual reader. The poems are introduced by a creative process narrative that frames the poetry as a response to the call, initiated by Julie Armstrong in her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to American Civil Rights Literature* (2015), to transform silence into action. The creative process narrative also documents my own growth in understanding that process of transformation in terms of the perpetual choice between freedom and fear. Taken together, the narrative essay, photographs, poems, and bibliography participate in what Armstrong calls the “new civil rights studies.”

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CHAPTER ONE: COMMITMENT TO CHANGE: A CREATIVE PROCESS NARRATIVE

1. Inspiration

In the fall of 2013 I sit with coffee and newspaper in hand, half-watching an episode of *CBS Sunday Morning*. The words “civil rights photography” bring my full attention to the television and a series of captivating and disturbing photographs. A new exhibition of Bruce Davidson’s civil rights photography is opening in New York, and Davidson is speaking about the impact taking the photos had on his perspective of the movement. The photos are stunning, depicting in black and white a struggle I know about, but do not really know. I think about what I do know about the movement and realize that knowledge revolves around a collective common knowledge of the movement that is limited to a particular timeframe – from 1954, with the *Brown vs the Board of Education* decision, to 1968, with Martin Luther King’s assassination. What is missing from that narrative is the depth, length, gradation, and complexity of that history. As I watch the photos flash on the screen and listen to Davison speak about what the photos mean to him, I hear myself whisper, “I could write poems to accompany those photographs.”

Almost immediately, my fear steps in and I begin questioning any authority I might have to realize such an ambitious project. After all, I’m a white girl who grew up in the Pacific Northwest, and my internal naysayer voice berates me, “how could *you* have anything to contribute?” Yet, I stand up, go to my computer and type “Bruce Davidson” into Google and find some of the images that I just saw on TV. Scanning through the images, and tracing Davidson to his publisher, Magnum Photos, I recognize

that the core of who we are resonates around how we treat each other. After watching that segment about Davidson's exhibition, deep down I know I will never walk away from the story this project wants me to tell.

Early June, 2014. I am driving to St. Louis to attend the inaugural Big River Writers Conference. Four months earlier I saw an ad for the conference in *Poets & Writers Magazine* advertising Dorianne Laux as a featured faculty member. Over the last several months I have become enraptured with Laux's work and, at the encouragement of my Fiction Writing instructor, Dr. Jennifer Kates, I submit the application materials and am offered not only a space in the conference, but also a scholarship for a portion of the registration fee. Though it's my first writers conference, I am elated at the opportunity to work with Laux. To my surprise, it is meeting Adrian Matejka, the other poetry faculty member at the conference, that brings me back to this particular project in a way I did not expect.

Friday morning of the conference Matejka gives a speech focusing on the ethics of persona poetry he titles "Vanilla Ice had Poetic License Too: Consent and Appropriation." Matejka emphasizes the necessity of doing the required research and how poetic license does not absolve an author from respect of the subject matter, especially when that subject matter involves "human beings with names and gravestones" ("Vanilla"). The line between creative consent and cultural appropriation is a thin one and something any author must consider when approaching a project that has the potential to adopt or inhabit someone else's experience. As I am listening to Matejka speak about his project, his approach, and how to navigate those pitfalls, his words speak

to me about the possibilities for my own project. The next day I meet with Matejka and tell him about my idea and how his project is stirring in me the impetus to pursue my own. Matejka impresses upon me the importance of doing the research. His inscription in my copy of his book encourages me to “follow the photographs to the poems [I] needed to write” (Inscription).

Driving home Sunday afternoon, I am invigorated. I am preparing to start graduate school and over the course of the summer I search out and buy the book of Davidson’s photography, *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs 1961-1965*. Sitting with the photos and doing Google and library searches about Davidson and his work, I begin to wonder if this project might turn into my thesis.

August 2014. I begin my first semester as a graduate student, putting aside this project in order to focus on my coursework, tutoring, and teaching assignment. I become aware that the literature I gravitate to discusses poetry and topics such as slavery, the Civil War, Transcendentalism, Abolitionism, Reconstruction, the Harlem Renaissance, and the civil rights movement of the 60s. I begin to take any opportunity I can to write on topics that explore the human relationship with self and the ways we justify our behavior toward each other. My focus lands on Walt Whitman and Langston Hughes, two authors I see working together to define equality in an amorphous democracy.

Spring of 2015. I research and write a paper on Whitman’s influence on Langston Hughes for my American Literature 1800-1860 class. Through the research, I discover that Whitman’s work toward an inclusive American democracy runs deeper than simply

defining a country. For Whitman, that inclusivity is the key to the success of a society. Hughes applied Whitman's ideas of an inclusive democracy to his people and found a road to the freedom America had long promised to all its citizens. A column in the *Chicago Defender* expressed Hughes's defense of Whitman as the "Negroes' First Great Poetic Friend": "But more than a mere pioneer in style, Whitman was a pioneer in the expression in poetry of the basic precepts of American democracy as applying to everyone, white or black...[Whitman's] 'Leaves of Grass' contains the greatest poetic statements of the real meaning of democracy ever made on our shores" ("Calls" 11). Hughes sees in Whitman the dream of a greater tomorrow. For his own community, Hughes sees a personal freedom born out of the democratic identity Whitman imagined for America.

Summer 2015. I turn my focus to Hughes, researching and writing a paper on the impact of Hughes' first book *The Weary Blues* (an essay for which I would tie for third place in the 2015-2016 William R. Wolfe Graduate Writing Awards) revealing a gap between old and new ideas of being black in America. Hughes' work pointed toward embracing the full value of Negro life and heritage, bringing it all into the American mainstream, rather than resting on a "talented tenth" to be the example for the entire community. Hughes's exploration of the black human condition probed the extent of the African tradition in America. Hughes sought inclusiveness within his people the way Whitman sought that same inclusiveness within America. Arnold Rampersad, Hughes's main biographer, notes in an introduction to a selection of Hughes's poetry: "Hughes never sought to be all things to all people but rather aimed to create a body of work that

epitomized the beauty and variety of the African American and the American experiences, as well as the diversity of emotions, thoughts, and dreams that he saw common to all human beings” (Rampersad 3). Freedom, for Hughes, is not only available to the educated and talented, but something that belongs to every individual, including African Americans.

Working intimately with both Whitman and Hughes, I begin to see a clearer path leading to the project you now hold in your hands.

Fall of 2016. I meet with Dr. Dubek in the Starbucks at the Walker Library and show her the book of photographs, discuss my inspiration, and share my own winding life story. Five months earlier I had approached Dr. David Lavery with my idea, Davidson’s book in hand so I could show him the photos that were so captivating, and he agreed that a creative thesis was not only an option, but also held immense potential for my personal scholarship. He recommended Dr. Laura Dubek as a guide and a mentor. Dr. Dubek and I talk about the possibilities of my project and she suggests that I begin with a DVD collection *Eyes on the Prize*, a fourteen-episode documentary produced by PBS’s *American Experience* about the American civil rights movement, 1954 to 1985. I watch the episodes, take notes, and share them with Dr. Dubek at our next meeting:

- The activists’ depth of courage to remain non-violent and fully committed to the goal of freedom while being screamed at, spit on, beaten, and murdered is humbling.

- Why is America so violent when it comes to racism and why does it have such a difficult time getting past inherent physical differences?
- I'm not sure which is more dangerous, the more personal attacks (lynching) of blacks in the South or the wide spread generalized yet massive hostility of the riots in places like LA or Chicago.
- The integrated power structure (e.g. New York State and Rockefeller during the Attica Prison Riot, Hoover and the FBI in Chicago regarding the murder of Fred Hampton) not only violently and often without provocation, stomp out those opposing the established norms, but also turned and blamed the oppressed for the violence.

Having a better sense of where I am with the work, Dr. Dubek and I agree to do a directed reading in the Spring of 2016.

1. Critical Conversations

Dr. Dubek and I began the directed reading with two books - Julie Armstrong's *The Cambridge Companion to Civil Rights Literature* (2015) and Jeffrey Coleman's *Words of Protest, Words of Freedom: Poetry of the American Civil Rights Movement and Era* (2012). Armstrong's anthology defined a new field of study by supplying a theoretical framework for the field with essays that address major genres (Drama and Performance, the White Southern Novel, civil rights movement Fiction, Film, and Poetry), time periods, (Jim Crow, Black Arts Movement), and critical perspectives (Social Protest, Gender, Sexuality, Post-Racial/Post Civil Rights). Coleman's anthology was the first text to present civil rights movement poetry as a genre of civil rights

literature. Both texts provided a framework for me to understand where and how my specific research interests entered the scholarly conversation. Dr. Dubek and I worked together as I began to establish my own voice as a scholar in that conversation. Entering the conversation with both Armstrong and Coleman, I responded with an essay of my own, “Civil Rights Movement Poetry: Looking Back, Moving Forward,” which will be included in Dr. Dubek’s upcoming collection of essays *Living Legacies: Literary Responses to the Civil Rights Movement*. What I discovered is as a poet, I am entering the civil rights conversation as an observer, a historian, and an expressive analyst taking what I learn through observation of current culture and historical research and creating new primary texts. I am responding to both Armstrong’s and Coleman’s call to fill the gap in the critical study of civil rights literature by both exploring the gradations of a collective traumatic history through study of the intersection between art and literature, and also adding original texts.

Both Armstrong and Coleman point out the gaps in the critical study of civil rights literature. Armstrong suggests that this gap exists because “civil rights historiography privileged analysis of political and social issues over the cultural and intellectual” (*Cambridge* 4). What is absent from civil rights discourse is scholarship that explores the nuances and complexity of a history that is at once multidimensional and inherently transformational. Our relationship to that history changes as we encounter it through the literature and art, both of which have the power to deepen and expand personal understanding. Armstrong suggests it is the space where reader and text meet and interact that results in the greatest transformation of all: “The act of reading has the potential to change how readers see themselves, their communities and their histories.

Literature asks readers to step outside of themselves to imagine new ways of seeing and being in the world” (*Cambridge* 6). As reflections of the moment, literature and art become both artifact and process for the reader. Because of the way civil rights literature extends beyond the history of the moment into cultural and intellectual spaces, the scholarship must also reach deeper into the lives, minds, and hearts of its participants. Foregrounding her collection with Audre Lorde’s essay “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” Armstrong calls attention to the *Cambridge Companion’s* main theme – words as action. While bringing attention to the “understudied connections between the civil rights movement and the arts” (*Cambridge* 1-2), Armstrong reminds readers that words are indeed action in the face of silence and indifference.

Jeffery Coleman answers Armstrong’s call in both his *Cambridge Companion* essay “Civil Rights Movement Poetry,” and the introduction to *Words of Protest*, with a call of his own for the “critical framing and rightful place [of civil rights poetry] in the ever-expanding canon of American letters” (“Civil” 144). Noting that the genre “though often overlooked or neglected, is the most aesthetically exuberant, historically resonant, and poignant of post-war twentieth century America” (“Civil” 143), Coleman argues that the poetry has not been collectively studied within the context of the movement. Civil rights movement poetry is one of the most prolific forms of literature to represent words as action, and while individual poets such as Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks have received wide critical attention, civil rights poetry has yet to be contextualized as a genre of civil rights literature. Coleman contends that this kind of critical neglect leaves scholars naïve to the full “...aesthetic and historical poignancy of the genre” (“Civil” 153). However, that neglect does offer scholars in various fields a unique opportunity to

explore the poets and poems of the civil rights era as “many of the poems invite interdisciplinary and trans-genre critiques” (“Civil” 154). Thus, Coleman’s anthology, *Words of Protest*, becomes both a valuable primary resource and an opportunity to engage in the transformation Armstrong suggests results from the imaginative space where reader and text interact (*Cambridge* 6).

Though suggesting new and potentially rich lines of inquiry, Armstrong and Coleman are both contributors to an established body of scholarship. I begin to build my bibliography with works such as Christopher Metress’ essay “Making Civil Rights Harder: Literature, Memory, and the Black Freedom Struggle,” Jacquelyn Dowd Hall’s essay “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” and Edward Baptist’s book *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*; anthologies such as *The Civil Rights Reader*, *The Vintage Book of African American Poetry*, *Every Eye Shut Ain’t Asleep*, and *The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks about Race*; books of poetry such as Alice Walker’s *Revolutionary Petunias & Other Poems*, Michael Harper’s *Dear John, Dear Coltrane*, and Frank X. Walker’s *Turn Me Loose: The Unghosting of Medgar Evers*; and fiction such as *Bombingham*, *The Color of Water*, and *Underground Airlines*, as well as collecting photos from many different sources such as *Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore*, *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68*, *Freedom: A Photographic History of the African American Struggle* and *This Light of Ours: Activist Photographers of the Civil Rights Movement*. I quickly found that the research had no real end point. Although I had to pull back on the voracious reading and intensity of my research in order to complete this project, I found I was, and am,

constantly discovering new texts, encountering articles, and coming across reports on every aspect of race relations in literature and culture in places as diverse as the daily news, Facebook, the thesis and dissertation database, and a conversation in line behind me in the grocery store. My uncertainty assuaged, I saw more clearly the relevance of my topic and the point where the scholarship and the creative work intersect.

3. The Relationship of Text and Image

The spring of 1963 saw the world compelled to acknowledge the ongoing acts of violence against black bodies that resulted from the continuation of enforced segregation laws in the southern United States. Motion and still cameras caught the action in-depth as public safety commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor encouraged beatings and turned fire hoses and dogs on marchers in Birmingham, Alabama. “I want them to see the dogs work,” Connor quipped as he encouraged whites to get close to the action (qtd. in Durham 102). Both journalistic and activist photographers such as Bruce Davidson, Charles Moore, Gordon Parks, Maria Varela, Bob Fitch, and Bob Adelman, and their photographs, quickly became part of the lexicon of the movement. While the country was aware of the ongoing struggle for civil rights in the south, the visual images, namely the still photography that came out of the tense and often violent interactions, turned attention to the problem in a way no other media had. Photographers not only captured the full force of hundreds of public and private acts of racial discrimination, the medium allowed viewers to remain in the moment for a longer time. Photographers became important storytellers in the struggle for civil rights and their photographs became vivid visual testaments to those stories. Faced with the truth of the brutality in a way that could no longer be ignored, people from outside the south, including the Kennedy

Administration, answered the call to fight for civil and human rights. The result was a stampede of support for the necessity of change.

The inclusion of images with text is not uncommon in African American literature. Indeed, Armstrong opens the *Cambridge Companion* with a reflection on the intersection between visual art and literature. Citing a collective of artists calling themselves “Spiral” that joined forces in 1963 to use their talents in service of the civil rights movement, Armstrong details the choice of the anthology’s cover art, a painting titled *Freedom Now* by Reginald Gammon, one of Spiral’s original members. Armstrong illuminates the alliances between artists during the 1960’s because “...the arts could, and should, inspire change. From the artist, through the work, to the audience, and into the community (outward and upward), *movement* would flow” (1). Combining their strengths, artists inspired each other, and a collaboration between art forms, between image and text, moved people into action in new ways. Armstrong’s analysis of the anthology’s cover image details her point by creating space for deepened conversations about the civil rights movement to happen, both in scholarship and in the community. Reflecting on how Gammon utilizes words and cut off images to make audiences part of the action, Armstrong notes, “By cutting off the words, Gammon invites audience members to finish the statements, articulating for themselves why these protesters have taken to the streets. Viewers therefore become part of the demonstration, other wide-open mouths participate in the call and response that the painting’s title signifies...” (1). Thus, the image creates a call and response, a convention central to African American culture.

While Armstrong’s collection maintains a focus on the literature of the movement, it is often difficult to talk about civil rights literature without reference to the

relationship between the literature and the visual arts. Images of both public and private acts of violence, protest, and black life significantly challenged economic, social, and political regimes of power. The interplay of text and image in regard to African American literature is not new, that interaction can be seen prior to the Harlem Renaissance; however, study of that relationship is only beginning to emerge. Often seen in relationship to creating or reimagining African American identity, many images that are found connected to African American texts also sought to represent African Americans in ways that would dismantle the racism that was rooted in American culture. For example, Anne Elizabeth Carroll asserts in her book *Word, Image, and the New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance* (2007), “Many participants of the Harlem Renaissance...hoped that texts like *The New Negro*...would alter how readers understood African Americans, and that this new understanding, in turn, would help undermine the racism that was still so painfully evident in America” (2). Carroll’s monograph explores the relationship of image and text by sampling such African American publications as *The Crisis*, and *Opportunity* magazines and the cover art of books such as Langston Hughes’s *The Weary Blues* (see figure 1).



Figure 1: Cover image of Langston Hughes’ *The Weary Blues*, Knopf, 1926, photo courtesy of Poets.org

Other examples of the interaction of images and text include Leigh Raiford's examination of the role of civil rights photography and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's creation of posters from those photos in the movement of the 1960s, "'Come Let Us Build a New World Together': SNCC and Photography of the Civil Rights Movement," (see fig. 2) and Stanley Nelson's nod to the importance of Emory Douglas' artwork (see fig. 3) for the newsletter *The Black Panther* in Nelson's documentary *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of The Revolution*.



Figure 2: "Come Let Us Build a New World Together," SNCC poster, 1962, Photograph by Danny Lyon, courtesy of *Civil Rights Movement Veterans* <http://www.crmvet.org/images/posters.htm>.



Figure 3: "All Power to the People," Emory Douglas, 1969, courtesy of *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2008/oct/28/emory-douglas-black-panther>.

The intimate collaboration of images and text not only defined an identity but also stood as social commentary, helped to narrate change, provided messages of community cooperation, and mobilized readers to act.

The poetry that came out of the movement expresses a similar intimacy that the photographs reflect. Though civil rights movement poetry has been understudied as a genre of literature, the poetry, like the photographs, stands as testament to a struggle that requires an acknowledgement of the humanity of the individuals involved for change and transformation to take root. Both the poetry and the photos answered and expressed a call

to action to change the systemic oppression that continued to weave itself into the landscape of American culture.

Poets speak to, for, and with photographs by creating a narrative, reconstructing history, and imagining new ways of being. The combination of photography and poetry allows the reader to experience an image on a deeper level. Still photography captures and holds a moment in time, allowing the viewer to experience the moment over and again. Text, particularly poetry, relates the experience through words, allowing for a broader individual interpretation. The poet begins in the moment, then steps outside the boundaries of that individual moment to explore the layers of experience contained within it. Because a poet's relationship to an image changes from strictly ekphrastic – telling the story the photo tells with vivid description – to allowing the interplay of image, light, and color to define an experience, the combination of image and text expands and deepens the viewer's experience. Photographs and the text collaborate to create new understanding and open new avenues for discussion. In terms of the American civil rights movement itself, an exploration of the poetry and the photography together not only expands the consensus narrative of the movement; that collaboration prompts deeper levels of discourse and ideally, brings awareness and healing.

4. The Poems

Summer 2016. I focus on writing the poems for this collection. Although I continued to write and read poetry during the previous two and a half years outside of my academic pursuits, I am beginning to understand that I repeatedly walk the bridge between scholarship and creativity. I begin to wonder, could I, with the knowledge that I have assimilated throughout my graduate career and with my passion for the creative

process, find the balance point between the two? I know if the two could not exist simultaneously I would not be doing the work that I am doing. What I discover is that both pursuits exist in equal measure. Each supports, feeds, expands, and continually balances the other, and that balance point is constantly in motion because my attention is continuously moving between the two. The times I am neglecting one to the pretention of the other, my insecurity increases, my passion for both wanes, and neither seems a worthwhile pursuit. I find the key in keeping the research close, both the critical scholarly research and the poetic models and conversations, where the meeting of the two allows both to thrive.

I am writing these poems at the time of the shootings at the Orlando night club, Alton Sterling, Philando Castille, the police in Dallas and Baton Rouge, the deaths in Nice, France, and the escalating insanity of a presidential election that draws a clear line in the sand – either you’re with me or you’re against me – and my focus turns into a deep uncertainty that I am the one to address these issues. If anything, I am increasingly unsure whether writing poetry in the midst of what I perceive to be an implosion of American society is a frivolous pursuit. Through my research, by Dr. Dubek, several friends, and my ever present research partner Langston Hughes, I am reminded that the power of poetry is its unique ability to change thinking, shift perception, and reconnect us to our heart, where our truth and our choices live:

Poetry can convey both pleasure and pain. And poetry can make people think. If poetry makes people think, it might make them think constructive thoughts, even thoughts about how to change themselves, their town and their state for the better. Some poems, like many of the great verses in the

Bible, can make people think about changing all mankind, even the whole world. Poems, like prayers, possess power. (“Forward”)

We may not think of poetry as a traditional weapon, something that can slay dragons and defend our physical presence, but poetry has the ability to bring us back to our heart, where our choices live, where we can find and feel our connection to everything.

Remembering the role of poetry in a time of war, and knowing that my response to trauma and uncertainty comes in the form of poetry, I step around my uncertainty and get back to work.

What started out as a simple idea of writing poems inspired by images has become a messy and multilayered work. It challenges my ideas of what I have to offer as a white person and a poet, particularly on the subject of the American civil rights movement, as well as the concept that being a scholar cannot occupy the same space as being an artist. This work is messy because, as Jesmyn Ward puts it in her new edited collection *The Fire This Time*, “...race in the United States is not a tidy matter” (9).

While the messiness of such a conflict on both fronts results in the continual denying of one facet of identity for another, the resolution lies in the recognition of the relationship each one has to the other – the rational mind being the mechanism for the translation of the vibrant language of the heart. In his iconic book *The Triggering Town* (1979), Richard Hugo clarifies the goals for each identity while hinting that the roles inherently overlap: “Scholars look for final truths they will never find. Creative writers concern themselves with possibilities that are always there to the receptive” (56). Removing the necessity for both scholarship and creativity, black and white, to occupy the same space and instead acknowledge that they occupy concentric space allows both to exist and

function in service *of*, rather than in opposition *to*, the other. The internalization of this clash inevitably shows up on the page; however, the underlying truth that two diametrically opposed concepts feed, support, and balance each other runs through the heart of this work.

The poems in this collection are divided into four parts reflecting the stages of transformation: The Desire for Change, Awareness of the Conflict, Integration of Understanding, and Living the New Awareness. As I began working with the poems and photos to organize them into a cohesive story, I repeatedly saw within the collection the process of transformation; taking something and changing it into something else. That process is clear as I read through the poems and match up the photos. It then becomes a dimensional experience as I stand back and consider where this country currently stands regarding issues of race. I realize that a larger percentage of the poems fall into section two, Awareness of the Conflict. In an attempt to create balance, I go back through the poems looking for ones that might fit into another category. When none move and I stand back to look at the arc of the work as a whole, what appears is a reflection of the process itself. We place a lot of our attention on the conflict, pointing it out to ourselves and to others. With our attention engaged in the conflict, we forget that we are in the process of moving forward and remain steeped in the conflict. What becomes clear to me is change happens, and the ease of change is reflected in how attached we are to the way things currently are. Individually, we are rarely in the same stage at the same time. Collectively, we are rarely as far along as we think we are. The key to progressing through the stages is staying out of the judgment about where we are in the process and instead, embracing where we are so we can keep moving forward.

This collection is both a representation of my perception of the movement, moments both difficult to look at and celebratory in nature, and a reflection of my personal internal struggle for freedom from my own demons. In many ways, the poems tell both stories simultaneously. Although the poems have a voice and a perspective, I can in no way claim they tell anyone else's story. My goal has always been to honor the memory, the movement, the people, and perhaps by telling my own story, illuminate the truth that as Americans and as humans, this story belongs to all of us. These poems are dedicated to those who maintain their attention on the freedom regardless of the fear. They are, as Alice Walker wrote in the opening pages to *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems*, "... about (and for) those few embattled souls who remain painfully committed to beauty and to love even while facing the firing squad" ("Revolution"). These poems are for you, the one who wants to connect, and remain connected, to the Freedom, the Beauty, and the Love that is available to all of us.

CHAPTER TWO: VOICES OF FREEDOM

1. The Desire for Change

*I am the American heartbreak
The rock on which Freedom
Stumped its toe—
The great mistake
That Jamestown made
Long Ago.*

-Langston Hughes, "American Heartbreak"¹

¹ Hughes, Langston. "American Heartbreak," *The Panther and the Lash: Poems of Our Times*. New York, 1967, pp. 25.



Figure 4: Davidson, Bruce. *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs 1961-1965*. St. Ann's Press, 2002. pp. 64.

My Soul Story

Listen closely. This is my soul story. It starts in the middle because like any good story it must be viewed with a heart that knows more than it has words for, a mind that has gathered all the information, and a consciousness that took the time to merge the two into knowledge. Does my story look like yours yet? Does it have a similar feel? What if I told you there are snakes and demons and dark places in it? or laughter and hard work and endless searching? and ineffable moments of kindness and joy? What if I told you all of those moments are essentially the same thing, are all made of the same small pieces? Do you feel any connection yet? Do you feel the bottomless pain and the endless ecstasy? Because this is your story too. This the story of how we become whole one step at a time. Listen closer, you will begin to hear my breath become yours. We will breathe together. We will wake up together.



Figure 5: *A History of Racial Injustice: 2016 Calendar*. The Equal Justice Initiative, 2016, pp. October 2016.

Hamartia

It's found in the things we avoid
like our life depends on it,
that fatal flaw we're sure
separates us from everything.
The truth is it only survives
on what we give it,
how much we let it rule
over every last thing.
We kill and rape and pillage
to avoid its steely gaze,
its cold grasp
around our delicate neck.
We suspect
if we don't look directly at it
if we don't say its name
if we pander to our belief
in its invulnerability
we won't have to admit
how afraid we are
that flaw is the very
truth of us,
and we will succumb
to our inevitable end
at the hands of our own
selfish judgment.



Figure 6: Morrison, Toni. *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*. Houghton Mifflin, 2004. pp. 24.

Blame

Gunshots rang out
bodies fell
blood pooled at our feet
and we ran
into the streets
refusing to overlook
the idea that accidents happen,
but these were no accidents.
The gunshots
plotted a story
told all too often
around dinner tables
and water coolers
and the evening news.
We began shouting
to be heard above the
pop, pop, pop
that traced its way
around this place
that calls itself
the land of the free.
And instead of
waiting to hear our hearts
beat another day
we went searching for
anything to
absorb the pain.



Figure 7: Hunter-Gault, Charlayne. *To The Mountain Top: My Journey through the Civil Rights Movement*. Roaring Brook Press, 2012. pp. 91.



Figure 8: Ebony Magazine. *Ebony Pictorial History of Black America: Volume III: Civil Rights Movement to Black Revolution*. Johnson Publishing Company, 1971. pp. 99.



Figure 9: Bullard, Sara. *Free at Last: A History of the Civil Rights Movement and Those Who Died in the Struggle*. Southern Poverty Law Center, 1993, pp. 73.

Bombs

Can you hear the bombs going off
every time a black man is stopped
by the police, the intake of breath
as we all await another body to lie
bleeding on the pavement, wondering
if those bombs are the same bombs
that bursted in the air and gave proof
in the night that we all stand united
in an unrelenting quest for freedom.

Either way the bombs remind us
of churches where little girls
never made it to Sunday school
and planes that blew up
the New York skyline
and the all the dead bodies,
nothing but a residue of pink mist
splattered across the lives of survivors.

The questions never stop coming,
never stop pulling at our pant leg
like an insistent child wanting attention,
demanding some kind of answer
that puts our pieces back together,
gives us a way to meet the world
so when the next bomb goes off,
we have something, anything, to stand on.



Figure 10: Bullard, Sara. *Free at Last: A History of the Civil Rights Movement and Those Who Died in the Struggle*. Southern Poverty Law Center, 1993, pp. 45.

Helpless

I sit and watch the news
hear all the torment
and torture and restless uncertainty
my heart breaking a little
at the lack of connection,
the lack of desire to connect
to anything but the fear.
I sit quietly with the dog
snoring soundly at my feet
and wonder what there is for me to do.

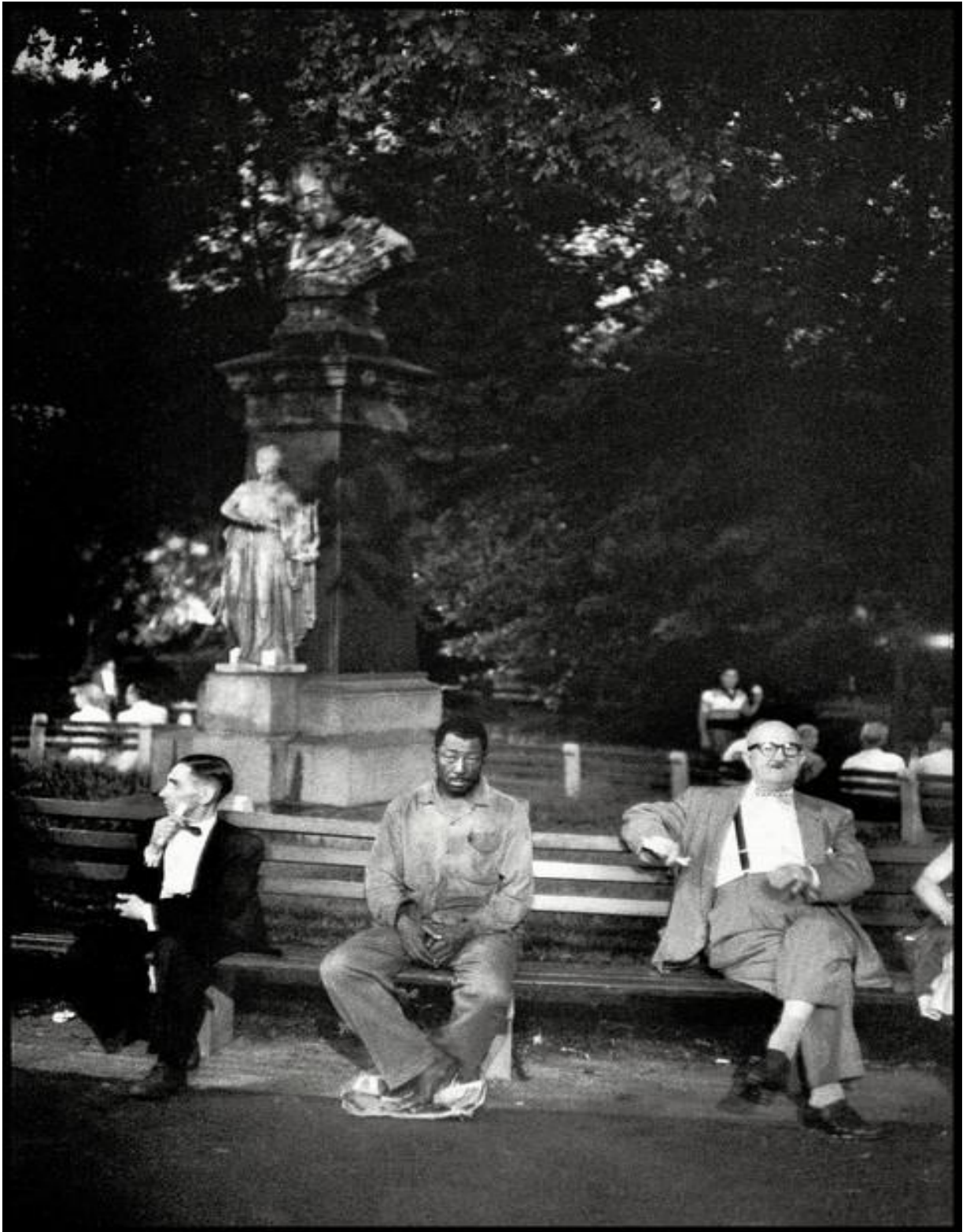


Figure 11: Davidson, Bruce. *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs 1961-1965*. St. Ann's Press, 2002, pp. 13.

black & white

We say it in passing
- *it's black and white* -
marking clearly
the lines
that divide us
from each other.
We plot our history
in those same terms
black or white,
up or down
right or wrong,
good or bad
searching for
absolute boundaries.
Consumed with
external recognition
of our individual
stake in the world.
We forget absolution
requires
an act of contrition,
an awareness
of where
we've been,
where we want
to go. It requires
we acknowledge
our history,
our humanity,
and the subtle
differences
that connect us
one to the other.



Figure 12: Davidson, Bruce. *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs 1961-1965*. St. Ann's Press, 2002, pp. 94.

Uncertainty

I take a shower
drive to work
clean my desk
unable to shake
the uncertainty
that presses everything
tighter, blinds me
like a mask
I'm too afraid to take off,
certain my container will
disintegrate
leaving nothing
holding me together
except thoughts that swirl
in a constant whirlpool
*I should have done something sooner,
what's there for me to do now?*
The dog nudges my hand
brings me back,
reminds me
the only thing to do
is to love.



Figure 13: Hunter-Gault, Charlayne. *To The Mountain Top: My Journey through the Civil Rights Movement*. Roaring Brook Press, 2012, pp. 94.

Process

We always think
this, whatever it is,
will come to an end
will stop, will disappear
 sometime
 someplace
never to be seen again
The truth is
we keep going
even when
the “this” gives up
its literal form
and the life we saw
moving through the world
 sometime
 someplace
transforms itself
into something else
and we keep moving
forward.

2. Awareness of the Conflict

In these trying circumstances, the black revolution is much more than a struggle for the rights of Negroes. It is forcing America to face all its interrelated flaws – racism, poverty, militarism and materialism. It is exposing evils that are rooted deeply in the whole structure of our society.

It reveals systemic rather than superficial flaws and suggests that radical reconstruction of society itself is the real issue to be faced.

-Martin Luther King, Jr. "A Testament of Hope"²

² King Jr., Martin Luther. "A Testament of Hope." *Playboy Magazine*. Jan 1969, pp. 175, 194, 231-236.



Figure 14: Davidson, Bruce. *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs 1961-1965*. St. Ann's Press, 2002, pp. 62.

Bless Our Hearts

the cotton fields

the poke weed

the run down row houses far away from the tree lined streets
and old empty slave quarters on plantation tours.

the southern pride

the legacy of southern hospitality

the Confederate flag

and the heritage that runs through the land like blood in the veins.

the long history

the deeply scarring epithets

the creaking magnolia trees

and the men in masks burning wooden crosses in front yards.

the million stereotypes

are all at once living legacies

and ancient stories passed along sitting on a porch

as the summer locust songs swell and fade, swell and fade.

we leave things unsaid

because we are deathly afraid

it will all start again, or that it never really ended,

and we forget the courage that grows in the face of so much hate.

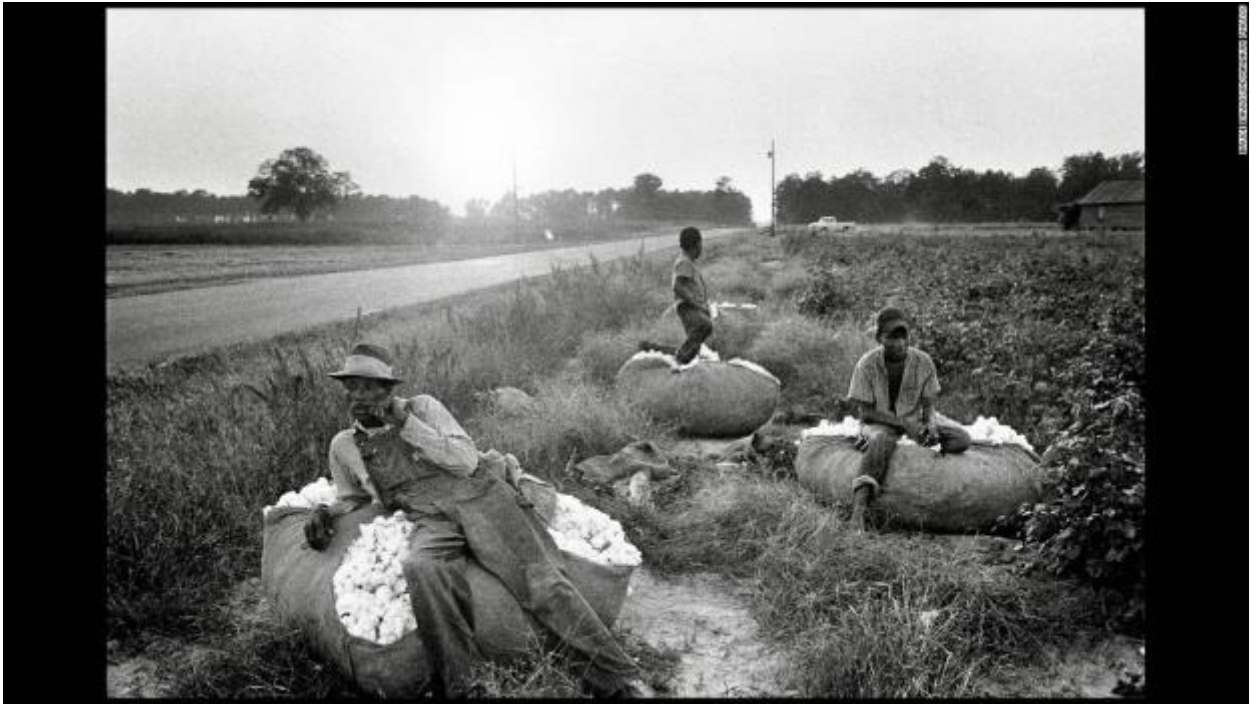


Figure 15: Davidson, Bruce. *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs 1961-1965*. St. Ann's Press, 2002, pp. 80.

Slavery

Sometime in the past
it happened,
lives chained in the belly of ships
then to anything that would take them.
not seen as lives at all
Violence became survival
and never ended
as “owners” route around
to get their property back
refusing to acknowledge
yesterday has long since
had its moment in the sun.



Figure 16: Morrison, Toni. *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*. Houghton Mifflin, 2004. pp. 24.

Wholeness

I'm afraid of being whole
that the genesis of me
made a lasting mistake
some fatal flaw
that can't be undone
that irreparably separates
me from Me.

That's how come I'm
always looking for answers,
for understanding, for help.
I yell because I'm helpless,
because otherwise I'm sure
I'm disappearing. Throwing
things makes me feel alive,
and all I really want is to know
that I'm still here.



Figure 17: *A History of Racial Injustice: 2016 Calendar*. The Equal Justice Initiative, 2016, pp. August 2016.

The Bad Stuff is Easier to Believe

Mama told me all the time
how beautiful and talented
and special I was but when I
walked out the door
none of it mattered
the words got stuck in the doorway
and dropped to the floor
bursting like fireflies
in the streaming sunlight.

The world didn't see
what mama saw calling me
fool and weakling and nobody
as I walked to school alone.
Those words didn't drop
away like mama's but stuck
like debris caught in Velcro
filling every crevice
until the pieces of me
no longer stayed connected.

I stopped believing mama,
let her words slide off
like ice cream dripping down
my hand on a sweltering
summer day, proof the world
knew more than mama ever would
and I would forever be caught
between voices that never stopped
to ask what I wanted.

The day mama died I stared blankly
at her walls filled with pictures
of her family - smiling, laughing,
hugging - I was no more than seven
in any of them. Her words finally pierced
the reveille of voices telling me no
and I stepped out into the sun
with her voice ringing in my heart.



Figure 18: Marable, Manning and Leith Mullings. *Freedom: A Photographic History of the African American Struggle*. Photo Editor: Sophie Spencer-Wood. Phaidon Press, 2005, pp. 101.

Ancestry

These are our ancestors,
the ones hanging from trees
or the ones doing the hanging.
One day
those that descend from us
will look back in wonder
at the legacy we left behind.



Figure 19: Davidson, Bruce. *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs 1961-1965*. St. Ann's Press, 2002, pp. 58.

Questions

My father left when I was five.
The only thing I remember
is saying goodbye,
the car packed to the gills
and mom driving us away
in a bitter silence.
He remains to this day
nothing but a smoky
shadow at the distant edge
of my lonely world,
someone I'm supposed
to want to know
but all I have left
is a naked desire to be seen.



Figure 20: Marable, Manning and Leith Mullings. *Freedom: A Photographic History of the African American Struggle*. Photo Editor: Sophie Spencer-Wood. Phaidon Press, 2005, pp. 132.

Lynching Selfie

We had our pictures taken with bodies,
bodies that might have been beaten,
drowned in rivers, burned alive
dragged down old roads by their hands,
dismembered,
or some combination of them all
before they hung
creaking from trees, or poles,
or gallows specially built
for the occasion.
In the pictures you can see us
smiling like we just won some lottery,
certain our invincibility
could never be taken away.
We turned those pictures
into fifty-cent postcards,
sent them to our friends up North
or out West
so they could celebrate our victory with us,
souvenirs or our self-imposed superiority.
The postcards,
now collector's items,
sell on EBay for around \$100 a piece,
apparently the going price for a life that's not ours.



Figure 21: Morrison, Toni. *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*. Houghton Mifflin, 2004. Print. pp. 45.

Saturday Morning

I catch a glimpse of those girls
 walking toward the flea market
 and wonder what would happen
 if we all had happened
 upon each other winding idly
 through the vegetables
 & fruits & homemade soaps,
 me in my Saturday grubbies,
 hair in a haphazard knot
 high on my head
 trailing the happiest dog
 in the world at my side,
 them in their trendy Saturday best,
 hair perfectly quaffed and colored
 glimmering in the bright sun.

I light a cigarette and
 wait for the light
 to grant me permission
 to continue on my way,
 the light, red as the blood
 that runs in all our veins
 taunts me to take the high road,
 shout a hello out my open window
 make an effort to be the bigger person
 rather than giving them the satisfaction
 of ignoring me yet again.

The judgments pile up,
 get projected on each other
 because to see ourselves as them,
 to recognize we are the same,
 is too hard to bear,
 a depth-defying trick
 we're not sure we'll survive.
 So we pass each other
 without a word, or a glance
 certain the other only sees
 the worst we have to offer.

Before I can make up my mind,
 acknowledge their presence
 with a quick wave,
 the light turns green,
 demands I make a choice.
 I drop the cigarette to the pavement,
 put my foot on the gas
 and pretend I don't see them.



Figure 22: Lyon, Danny. *Memories of the Southern Civil Rights Movement*. University of North Carolina Press, 1992, pp. 90-91.

Witness

I heard the bomb go off
felt it rattle my teeth and my soul
knew someone had to be dead.
I never imagined

they'd stoop to killing children
'course I didn't think
they'd shoot 'em with firehoses
or sic dogs on 'em either.

I watched a white man
standing still in the chaos
that followed,
a slight smirk on his face
cigarette smoke billowing
around his head like a
sadistic halo.

He watched as they pulled
people from the wreckage,
sent injuries to the hospital,
cried over those little bodies.

He just stood there
melting into the onlookers
a look of satisfaction shining
in his cold, dark eyes.



Figure 23: Kelen, Leslie G., editor. *This Light of Ours: Activist Photographers of the Civil Rights Movement*. UP of Mississippi 2011, pp. 57.

A Good Day to Die

I decided to die today
to lie down in the middle
of everything that I wanted
everything that I'd been chasing
and transform myself
into who I really am.

But instead I fell
face first
into the chase
and went back to sleep
dying instead
to everything that loved me
and to the chase itself.

And I slept like Dorothy
in that field of Poppies;
drunk on the Beauty I refused to see,
blind to the Light illuminating my way,
deaf to the voice of my Heart guiding me home.

I slept and dreamt
of running in full body armor
ready to fight,
fight to the death
for anything I might want.

And I dreamt
everything I was chasing
stood quietly by
embracing me like my own smooth skin,
caressing me as I slept.

The trees bowed
and sighed
singing lullabies
to heal my broken heart,
and the sun reached
its glowing arms through the trees
warming the spot where my body laid
reminding me it is always
a good day to die.



Figure 24: Kasher, Steven. *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68*. Abbeville Press Publishers, 1996, pp. 145.

In Medias Res

We started out assuming
we already knew
how to run
when we hadn't yet
learned to stand,
we skipped right over
the wonder of
bugs and clouds
and the way snowflakes
melt on our waiting tongues.
Instead, we nurtured
the insidious belief
in our own invincibility
and make-believe
became a way of life,
the reality of choice
and responsibility
and the consequences of our actions
never impressed
their way into our
awareness. So we wait
and wonder, if we knew
then what we know
now, would we appreciate
the bugs and the clouds
and the way snowflakes
melt on our tongues.

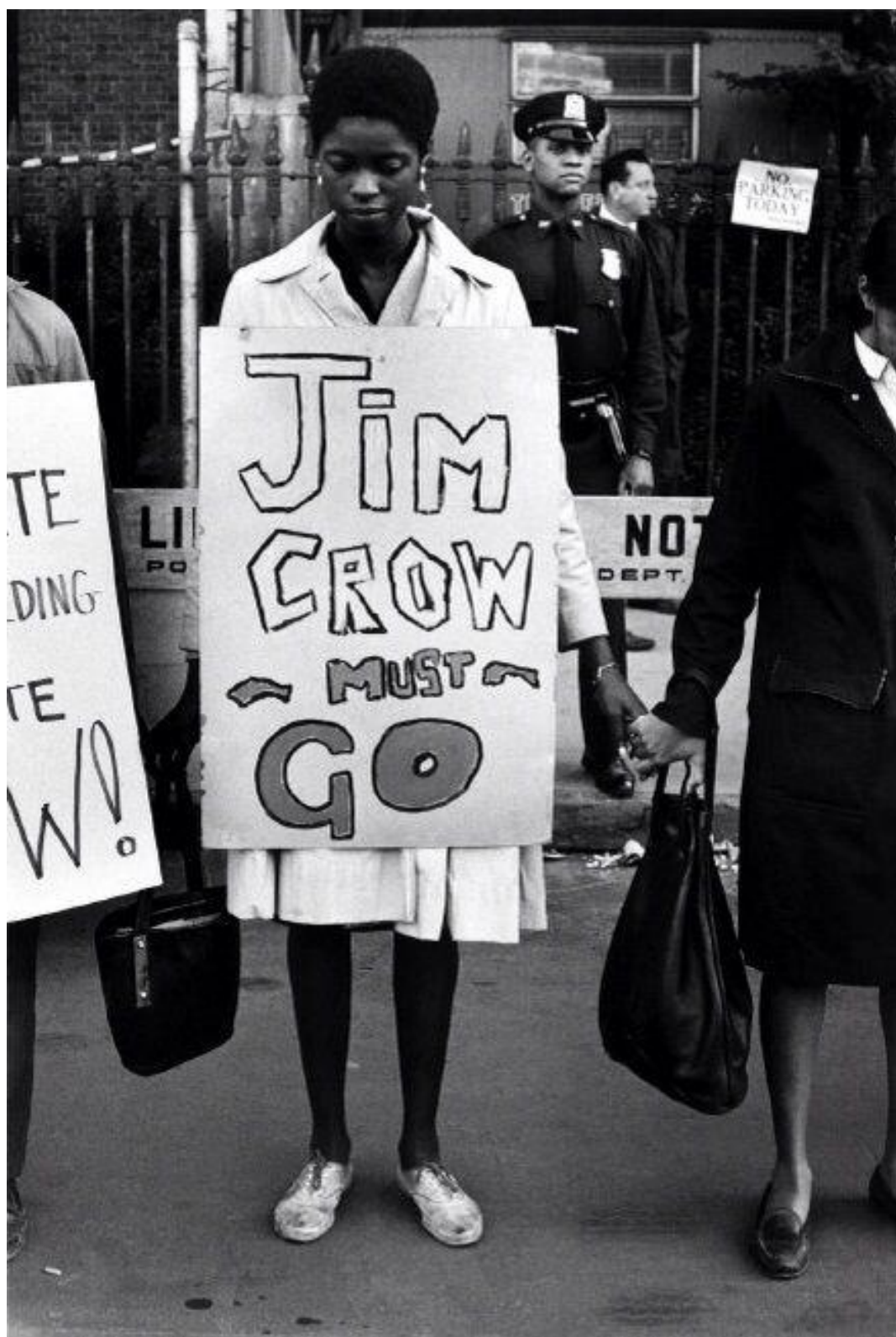


Figure 25: Davidson, Bruce. *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs 1961-1965*. St. Ann's Press, 2002, pp. 25.

The Other J. C.

When someone talks about J. C.
I always wonder which J. C. they mean -
the one that stood for unconditional tolerance and love
or the one that preached separation and anger and fear?
It always seems an important distinction to make
like clarifying the difference between
violence & action,
or fear & freedom.



Figure 26: Durham, Michael. *Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore*. Steward, Tabori & Chang, 1991, pp. 149.

Prayer Stick

I hand over the stick
full of secret prayers
for forgiveness,
my transgressions tied
tightly to it,
hoping that no one sees
or can guess or will know
how awful I have been,
how messed up I really am.
The fire hisses and pops,
spits sparks at my feet,
quiets into a rush
of fevered breath.
The stick and everything on it
begin to melt, become
glowing ash.
I wonder if I'm ready for this,
or if I can snatch the stick back,
my flesh unscathed
along with my life,
and reserve the real healing
for those who deserve it
The stick breaks in half
with a soft crack,
slides deeper into the mouth
of the dragon
as if in response
to my thoughts.
There's no turning back.
Shaking I return to my spot,
pull my hood farther down,
remember I'm supposed
to hate those we lit the fire for,
and let the tears pool where
no one can see them.

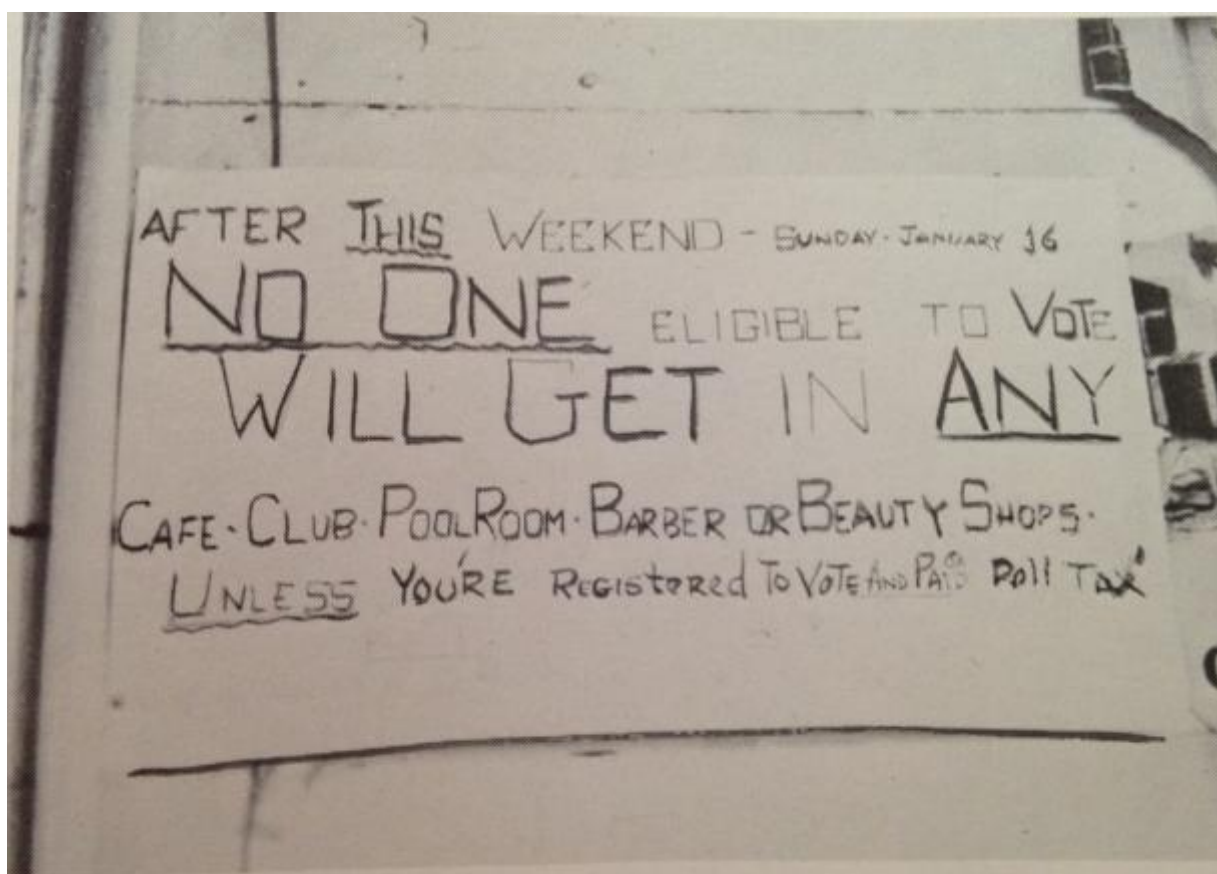


Figure 27: Ebony Magazine. *Ebony Pictorial History of Black America: Volume III: Civil Rights Movement to Black Revolution*. Johnson Publishing Company, 1971, pp. 179.

Hate

Hard as it is
we never stop
to think about
all the little things,
the things we assume

don't matter,
the things that rub
our bodies like sand
every time we move,
move to a dissonant beat

until we realize
the choices we make
demonstrate
the separation
that appears,

appears to rule the world
and we resign ourselves
to what must be true -
it is always and forever
us against the cold cruel world.



Figure 28: *A History of Racial Injustice: 2016 Calendar*. The Equal Justice Initiative, 2016, pp. March 2016.

Common Ground

The question floated up as I walked,
each step drumming the same beat as my heart,
rode my breath with every hot exhale.

*How do I find common ground
when my ground
is built out of wet sand
that keeps slipping
through my toes?*

The answer came unobtrusively, showing itself
as they approached us, shouted for us to turn back,
threatened us with fists, and clubs, and gas
and their unrelenting fear of change.

Swim.



Figure 29: *A History of Racial Injustice: 2016 Calendar*. The Equal Justice Initiative, 2016, pp. June 2016.

Symbolism

We are all just symbols,
metaphors for what we're
desperate to say.
Everything we see,
anything we do
who we identify ourselves to be
represents the ever present battle,
the defining choice we are always making,
Freedom or Fear.

3. The Integration of Understanding

*You're never really a whole person if you remain silent,
because there's always that one little piece inside you that wants
to be to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder
and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don't speak it out
one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside.*

-Elizabeth Lorde-Rollins³

³ qtd in Lorde, Audre. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. Crossings Press, 1984. pp. 40-44.

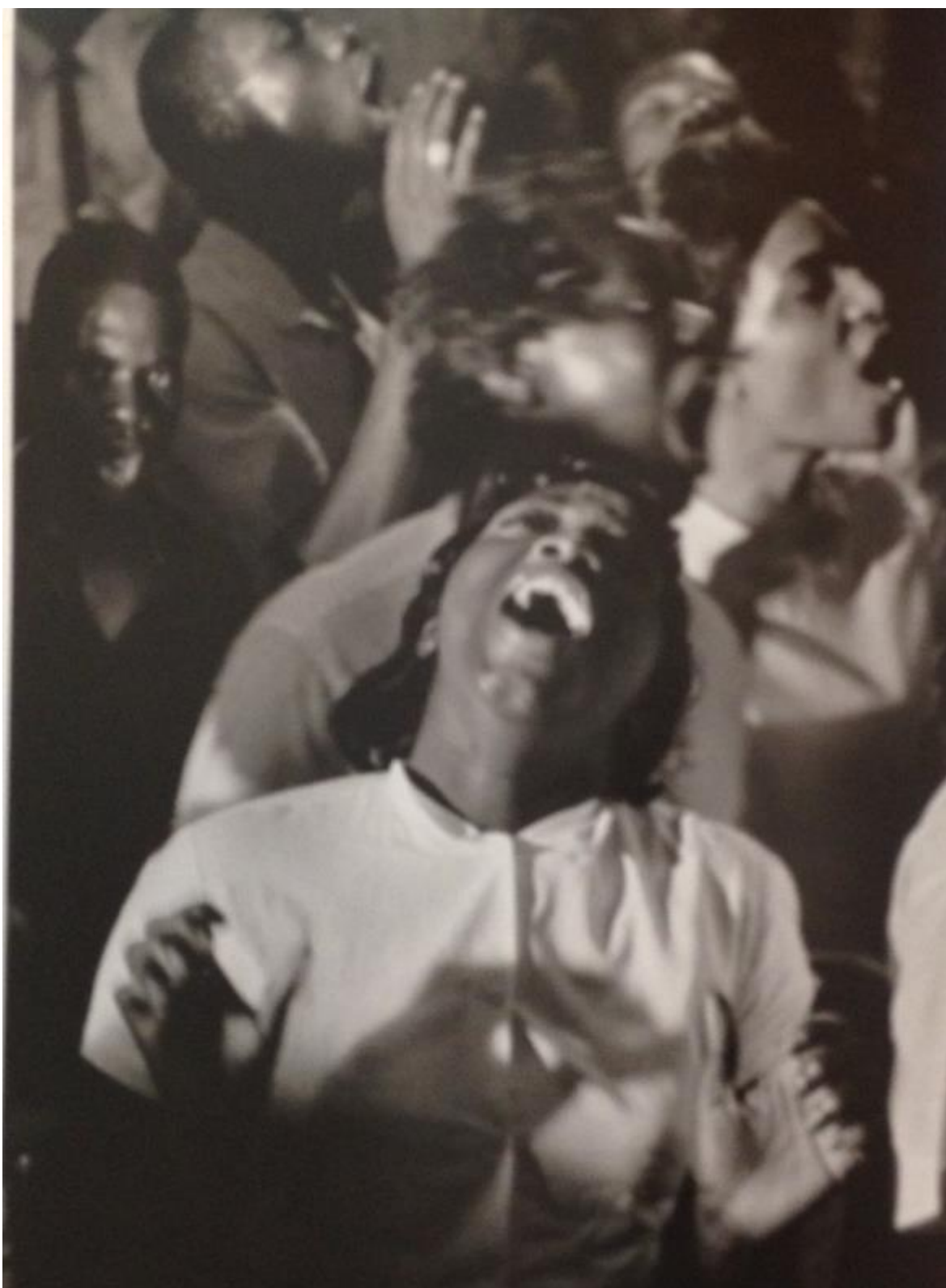


Figure 30: Kasher, Steven. *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68*. Abbeville Press Publishers, 1996, pp. 100.

The Heart of the Matter

Took me thirty years to admit
I wanted that relationship back
the one I severed
with a flick of my wrist
and a few 4-letter words,
and buried under a pile of dirt
with prayers I'd never find it again,
the one that pumped purpose
through my veins
and fed my dreams.
When I ran from that spot
no one saw me run.
And now I'm so damn good at running,
running so fast I forgot how to stop,
my past a distant smudge of memory
that's all too easy to gloss over.
Being heartless gave me wings
made me feel invincible
transformed my fear
into an imaginary friend,
held my hand,
kissed my cheek,
allowed indifference to grow
like a wild fire,
and dropped me down
without a way
to feel the Earth under my feet.
But the Earth held my heart there
beating like a beacon
under six feet of dirt
and cactus flowers
and voices raised in celebration
of the road that never disappears.

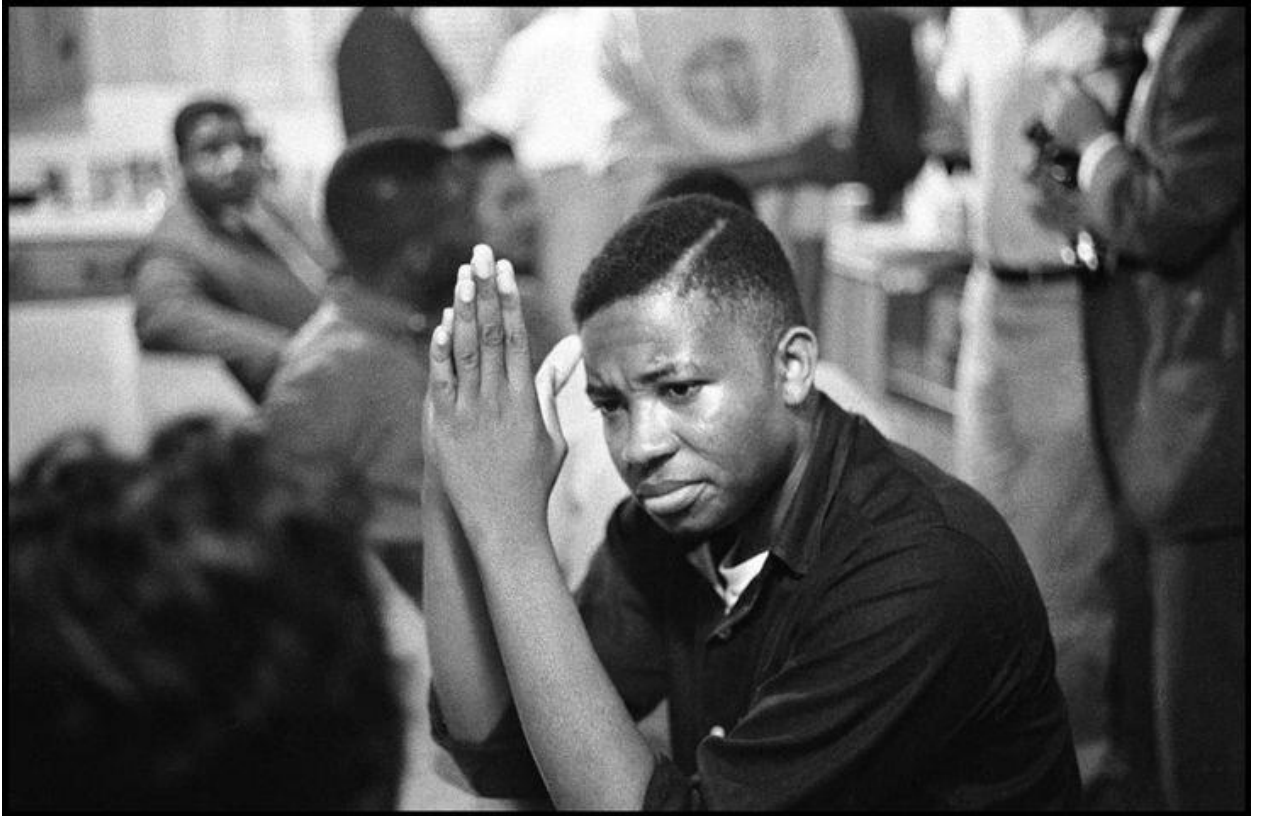


Figure 31: Marable, Manning and Leith Mullings. *Freedom: A Photographic History of the African American Struggle*. Photo Editor: Sophie Spencer-Wood. Phaidon Press, 2005, pp. 288.

I Know

I don't know
what I'm doing

but at least
I can admit it,

admit that I
don't know

and ask for help
ask for mercy

in a world
that claims

it has none
to give.

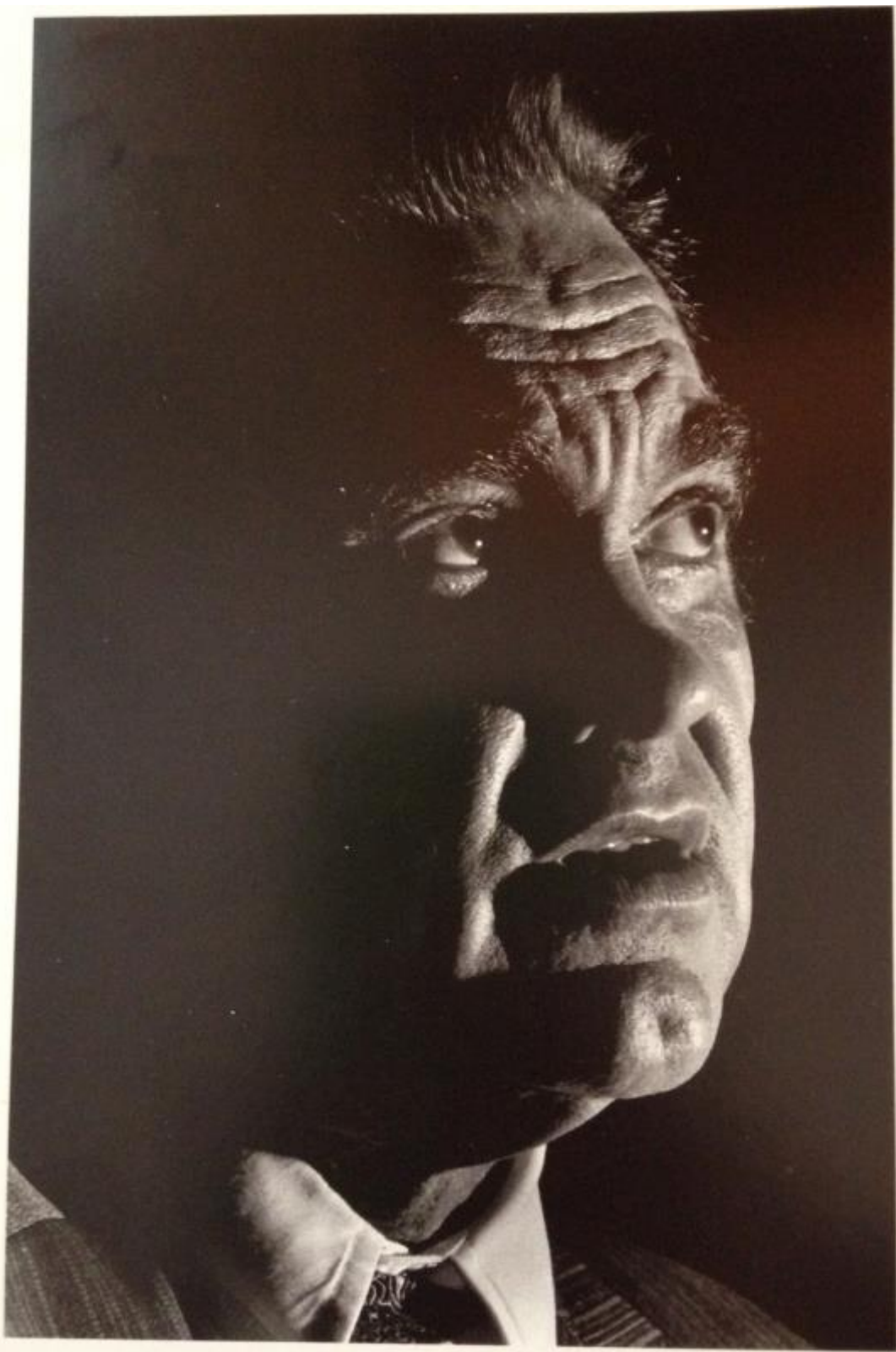


Figure 32: Durham, Michael. *Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore*. Steward, Tabori & Chang, 1991, pp. 178.

Choices

The distance between being whole
and scattered into a million pieces
is no more than the length
of a breath, or a heartbeat
that stretches out beyond
the boundaries of time.

I might not have fought
so hard for the separation
of all those million pieces,
for the glory of singularity,
the blessings of superiority,
if I had ever taken
a moment to breathe
the sweet magnolia scent
of the trees on my lawn,
listened to the soft throb-dub
of my own beating heart
or felt the soft grace
of your delicate touch.

Had I known, I would never have
left that empty shell of me
creaking in the wind.



Figure 33: Davidson, Bruce. *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs 1961-1965*. St. Ann's Press, 2002, pp. 17.

Lunch

I was never one of the cool kids.
On the rare occasion
I ended up at the same lunch table
they pretended I understood
their inside jokes,
appeared shocked
when I didn't know
what they were talking about.
I understood more
than they realized,
followed their laughter
like a tennis match,
wished their discussions
revolved around more
than what everyone else
was doing. Now, I spend
my time appreciating the fact
that I'm just one of the people
sitting, eating my lunch
wherever I want.



Figure 34: Davidson, Bruce. *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs 1961-1965*. St. Ann's Press, 2002, pp. 7.

Sometimes I Forget

I have a job to do
while I'm here

that purpose lost
in a fog

of inattention
and distraction

apathy & fatigue
I forget to wander

under the stars
on a clear night

or in the shadows
with the dog

whose sentience
can find that purpose

peeking on a blade
of grass

or wading in a
creek or accepting

kind words
from a stranger

a purpose that is never
about fixing the world

but about confirming
and affirming

our ability to remember.



Figure 35: Morrison, Toni. *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*. Houghton Mifflin, 2004. Print. pp. 68.

Connection

When I was little
mama said difference
was defined by color,
that it was color
that separated us into
right and wrong,
good and bad,
dirty and clean.
I assumed she was right
until I went to school
and met a colored girl
wearing the same dress as me
scrubbing her face and hands
with soap after recess.
I realized it wasn't color
that divided us at all,
but our refusal to see each other.



Figure 36: Davidson, Bruce. *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs 1961-1965*. St. Ann's Press, 2002, pp. 7.

Wisdom

*You must learn one thing
the world was made to be free in.*

-David Whyte, "Sweet Darkness"⁴

When the world has beaten you
bloodied your vision and
cast stones in your eyes

when you can no longer speak
and no longer hear a sound

when at last your feet
are broken and your heart
lies in pieces on the floor

you stop fighting and reach out
a shaking hand to your neighbor

restoring your faith
and your broken heart
and see clearly that you are not alone.

⁴ Whyte, David. "Sweet Darkness." *The House of Belonging*. Many Rivers Press, 1997. pp. 23.



Figure 37: Kelen, Leslie G., editor. *This Light of Ours: Activist Photographers of the Civil Rights Movement*. UP of Mississippi 2011, pp. 95.

Attention

What do you want to remember?
The guns, the violence, the epithets?
or the way the full moon
trickles through the crack
in the curtains
and wakes you up,
or the way those hands,
both black and white,
raise in celebration
and, for a single moment,
dissolve the gap
between good and bad.



Figure 38: Berger, Martin A. *Freedom Now! Forgotten Photographs of the Civil Rights Struggle*. University of California Press, 2013. pp. 68.

Manna

How do we weigh what we want
 against the instinct to survive?
 To dream of something more

than we think we deserve
 illuminates the tools of survival:
 breath, bread, embodiment.

When we dream of something more –
 more life, more love, more breath and bread –
 we remember we are more

than simple embodiment, are made of more
 than flesh and fornication and foul breath
 and one hundred fifteen thousand, two hundred

heartbeats a day. Survival then becomes
 the desire for more measured out in breaths
 and blinks and the wisdom of whatever observes us.

4. Living the New Awareness

*We are more alike, my friends
than we are unlike.*

- Maya Angelou, "Human Family"⁵

⁵ Angelou, Maya. "Human Family." *I Shall Not Be Moved*. Random House, 1990, pp. 4-5.

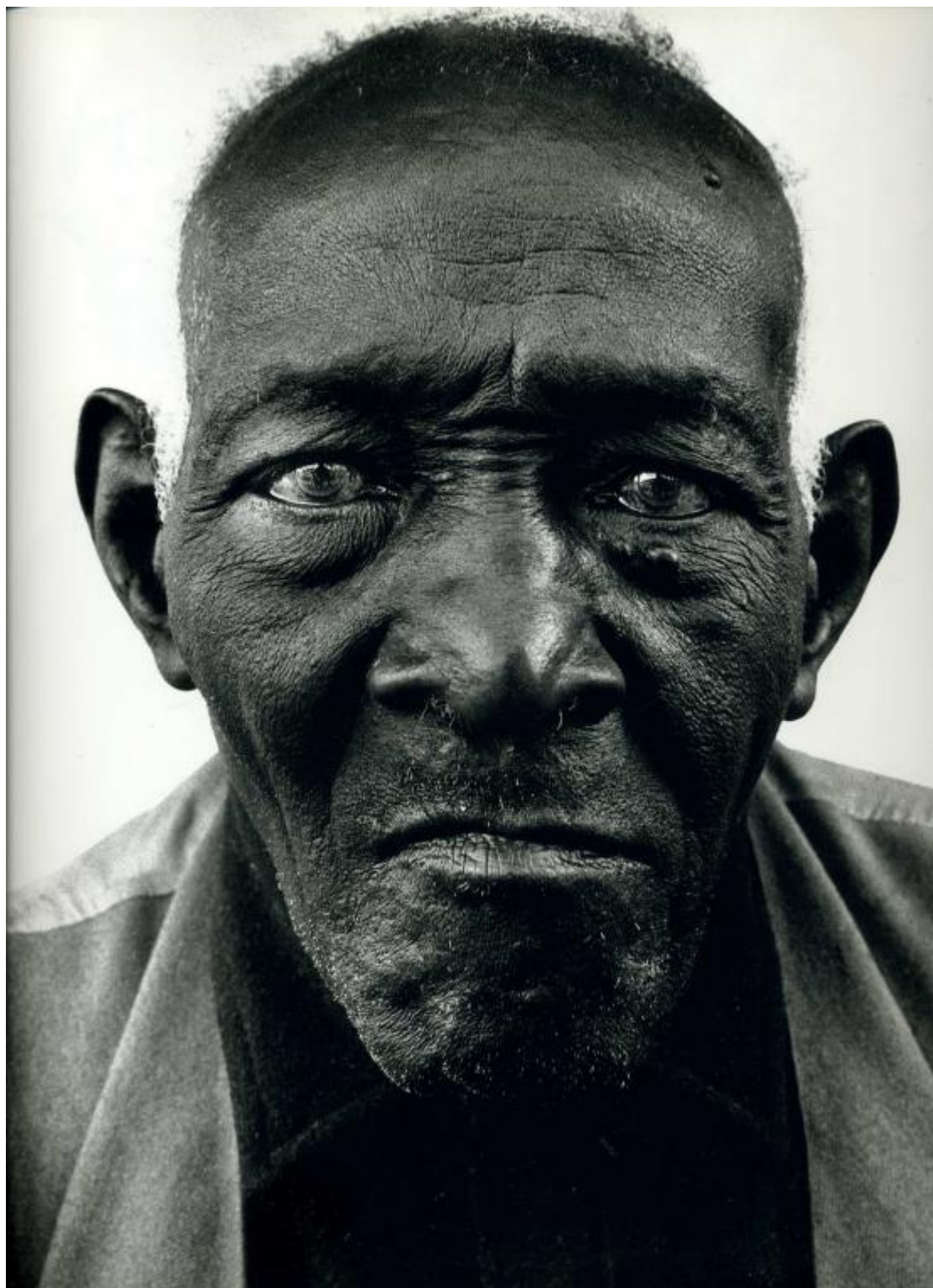


Figure 39: Kasher, Steven. *The Civil Rights Movement: A Photographic History, 1954-68*. Abbeville Press Publishers, 1996, pp. 100.

Whole

I read somewhere
the smallest part of us
- quarks or leptons -
cannot be divided.
We can peel off layer after layer
like an onion
or a set of Russian nesting dolls
opening ourselves to something new
with a simple twist.
The foundation,
that smallest doll,
remains whole
the core of the entire puzzle.
Lathed from a single piece of wood
that doll stands smiling,
whole, holding the mystery
of our very creation
close to her tiny chest
proving that as hard as we try,
even shattered into a million pieces,
we can never be separated
from ourselves.



Figure 40: Davidson, Bruce. *Time of Change: Civil Rights Photographs 1961-1965*. St. Ann's Press, 2002, pp. 83.

Newspaper Walls

She walks me over to that cabin,
her stout legs shuffle along the dirt trail
she's walked a thousand times. She points
arthritic fingers through glassless windows
at walls covered in newspaper so old its lost
any strength it once had. The tiny one-room
building seems to be waiting for permission
to relax its grip on the earth.

I know she raised my mother here alone
waiting in vain for her husband to come back.
Her voice becomes haunted, but it's courage
I hear the most as she weaves a story
that rivals any I'd heard her tell before.

"Those walls told me stories in my sleep. I'd watch
their shapes weave a life I knew I'd never
touch. I whispered those dream-stories to my
baby girl hoping one would reveal the delicate price
of our freedom." She said she could tell the walls
knew, but refused to tell, what happens to those
that give up. So she and her little girl rocked their days
away, their hearts full of both anticipation and dread.

"Truth was, I'd forgotten your mama was the future
those stories wouldn't let me see." She pauses, searches
my face, brushes away my tears as she swats the stories
away with the twilight mosquitos. "Child, your mama
don't talk about those days, but it's good to remember
where you come up from so you can appreciate where you are."

I smile, hold her hand as we walk slowly back to the house,
our new house, and new life. I hear the wind whip through
the open windows behind us and watch one of those old
stories fly over the tops of the trees.

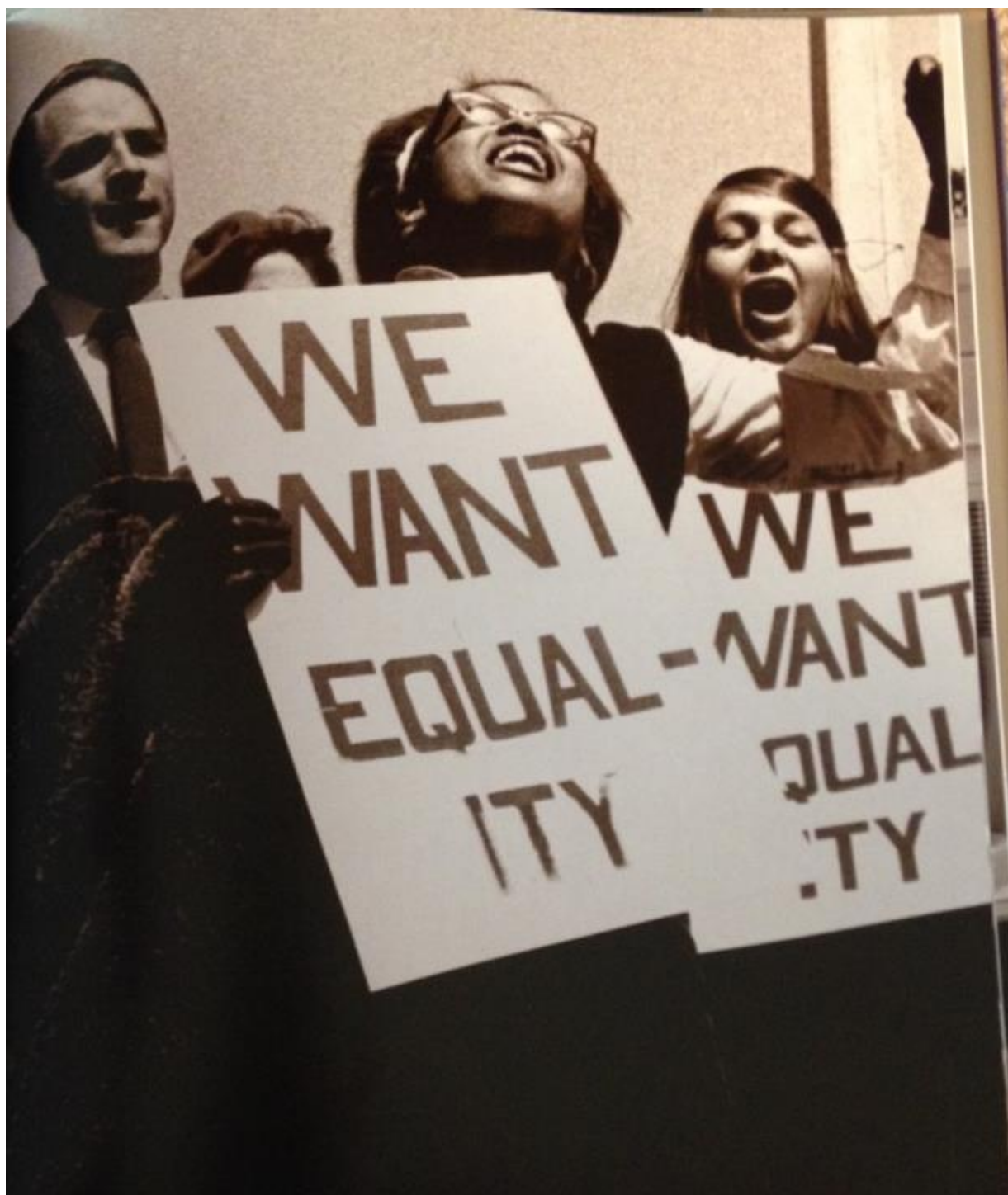


Figure 41: Morrison, Toni. *Remember: The Journey to School Integration*. Houghton Mifflin, 2004, pp. 59.

Responsibility

It is I who must choosing whether to engage
in all the fear and hate and rage
or pick a side and take a stance
whether with words or daggers and a lance
It's in the challenges I find my choices
and understand change requires my voice.



Figure 42: Kelen, Leslie G., editor. *This Light of Ours: Activist Photographers of the Civil Rights Movement*. University Press of Mississippi 2011, pp. 160.

After

After all the sobbing and celebrations
die down and everyone has gone home
and I am left with nothing but myself

to comfort the emptiness as the fear
of starting over balances precariously
on the edge of a stormy cliff, what rises

up is the knowing that this is not the end
but that illustrious and elusive
beginning, an answer to prayers for more,

a turning of the tide, a way through,
and although there is never any going back
there is always a coming Home.



Figure 43: Durham, Michael. *Powerful Days: The Civil Rights Photography of Charles Moore*. Steward, Tabori & Chang, 1991, pp. 119.

Freedom

From the time we are little we chase it
with a robustness and a gravity we can
barely express, and every time we think
we are close enough to touch it, we become
enchanted with some other pursuit, distracted
long enough to forget that we are more
than our circumstances. Out of all the ways
to live a life, freedom is rarely what we think
it is, rarely anything more than the choices
laid lovingly before our feet.

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