

GARRY WILLS
MARTIN LUTHER KING IS
STILL ON THE CASE

Here is an example of the casualness the New Journalism still enjoys in terms of form. Wills starts off by sketching the scene at Martin Luther King's funeral-in the novelistic fashion but breaks off into a dissertation on Southern Negro preacher rhetoric as soon as he feels like it. Novelists didn't hesitate to do this sort of thing in the early and mid-nineteenth centuries before the Jamesian notion of point of view began to seem like an imperative. Wills is a student of classical rhetoric, incidentally. He was a Greek scholar, on the faculty of Western Maryland University, author of many scholarly monographs, when he wrote the first of several pieces for Esquire in tandem with Ovid Demaris, one of them being the highly regarded "You All Know Mem Jack Ruby!" T. W.

Of course, Mailer had an instinct for missing good speeches- at the Civil Rights March in Washington in 1963 he had gone for a stroll just a little while before Martin Luther King began, "I have a dream," so Mailer trusting no one else in these matters, certainly not the columnists and the commentators would never know whether the Reverend King had given a great speech that day, or revealed an inch of his hambone.

NORMAN MAILER The Armies of the Night

"Nigger territory, eh?" He was a cabdriver, speculative; eyed the pistol incongruous beside him on the seat, this quiet spring night; studied me, my two small bags, my raincoat. The downtown streets were empty, but spectrally alive. Every light in every store was on (the better to silhouette looters). Even the Muzak in an arcade between stores reassured itself, at the top of its voice, with jaunty rhythms played to no audience. Jittery neon arrows, meant to

beckon people in, now tried to spare them off. The curfew had swept pedestrians off the street, though some cars with white men in them still cruised unchallenged.

"Well, get in." He snapped down every lock with four quick slaps of his palm; then rolled up his window; we had begun our safari into darkest Memphis. It was intimidating. Nothing stirred in the crumbling blocks, until almost noiseless armored personnel carrier went nibbling by on its rubber treads, ten long guns bristling from it (longer because not measured against human forms, the men who bore them were crouched behind the armored walls); only mushroom helmets showed, leaning out from each other as from a single stalk, and, under each, bits of elfin face disembodied.

At last we came to lights again: not the hot insistence of downtown; a lukewarm dinginess of light between two buildings. One was modern and well-lit; a custodian sat behind the locked glass door. This is the headquarters of a new activism in Memphis, the Minimum Salary Building (designed as national headquarters for raising the pay of ministers in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and now encompassing other groups). Its director, Reverend H. Ralph Jackson, was a moderate until, in a march for the striking sanitation workers, he was maced by police. Since then his building has been a hive of union officials, Southern Christian Leadership Conference staff, and members of various human-rights organizations.

Next to it is the Clayborn Temple, a church from which marchers have issued almost daily for the past two months. Marchers fell back to this point in their retreat from the soufflé that marred Dr. King's first attempt to help the strikers. Some say tear gas was deliberately fired into the church; others that it drifted in. But the place was wreathed with gas, and a feeling of violated sanctuary remains. Churches have been the Negro's one bit of undisputed terrain in the South, so long as they were socially irrelevant; but this church rang, in recent weeks, with thunderous sermons on the godliness of union dues.

I pay the cabdriver, who resolutely ignores a well-dressed young couple signaling him from the corner, and make my way, with bags and coat, into the shadow of the church porch. In the vestibule, soft bass voices war me. I stop to let my eyes, initiated into darkness, find the speakers and steer me through their scattered chairs. They are not really conversing; their meditative scraps of speech do not meet each other, but drift off, centripetally, over each one's separate horizon of darkness. This uncommunicative, almost musical, slow rain of words goes on while I navigate my way into the lighted dim interior of the church.

357 MARTIN LUTHER KING IS STILL ON THE CASE

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About a hundred people are there, disposed in every combination: family groups; clots of men, or of women; the lean of old people toward each other the jostle outward of teen-agers from some center (the church piano, a pretty dress on a hanger); or individuals rigid in their pews as if asleep or dead. The whole gathering is muted some young people try to pick out a hymn on the piano, but halfheartedly. There are boxes of food, and Sunday clothes draped over the backs of pews. The place has the air of a rather lugubrious picnic broken up by rain, perhaps, with these few survivors waiting their chance to dash out through the showers to their homes. Yet there is a quiet sense of purpose, dimly focused but, finally, undiscourageable. These are garbage collectors, and they are going to King's funeral in Atlanta. It is ten p. m.; in twelve hours the funeral will begin, 398 miles away.

They have been told different things, yesterday and today, by different leaders (some from the union, some from S.C.L.C.). They have served as marshals in the memorial march that very afternoon, and preparations for that overshadowed any planning for this trip. Some have been told to gather at ten o'clock; some at eleven. They believe there will be two buses, or three; that they will leave at eleven, or at twelve; that only the workers can go, or only they and their wives, or they and their immediate families. Yesterday, when they gathered for marshals school, a brusque young Negro shouted at them to arrive sharply at ten: "We're not going by C.P. Time-Colored People's Time. And if you don't listen now, you won't find out how to get to Atlanta at all, cause we'll be on the plane tomorrow night." The speaker seemed to agree with much of white Memphis that you have to know how to talk to these people.

And so they wait. Some came before dark, afraid to risk even a short walk or drive after curfew. Some do not realize the wait will be so long; they simply know the time they were asked to arrive. Most will have waited three hours before we start; some, four or five. I try to imagine the mutters and restlessness of a white group stranded so long. These people are the world's least likely revolutionaries. They are, in fact, the precisely wrong people as the Russian field worker was the wrong man to accomplish Marx's revolt of the industrial proletariat.

People such as these were the first Memphians" I had met in any number That was four days ago. And my first impression was the same as that which nagged at me all night in the church: these Tennessee Negroes are not unlikely, they are impossible. They are anachronisms. Their leaders had objected for some time to J.P. Alley's "Hambone" cartoon in the local paper, they say, rightly, that it offers an outdated depiction of the Negro. Nonethe

358 GARRY WILLS

less, these men are Hambones. History has passed them by. I saw them by the hundred, that first morning, streaming past the open casket in a hugger-mugger wake conducted between the completion of the embalmer's task and the body's journey out to the Memphis airport. I had arrived in Memphis several hours after King's death; touched base at the hotel, at the police station, at the site of the murder and was just disturbing the sky; flashbulbs around and under the balcony still blinked repeatedly against the room number 306—like summer lightning. As the light strengthened, I sought out the funeral home police had mentioned—R.S. Lewis and Sons. Clarence Lewis is one of the sons, he has been up all night answering the phone, but he is still polite, professionally sepulchral, calm under stress. "They brought Dr. King here because we have been connected with the Movement for a long time. We drove him in our limousines when he was here last week for the ill-fated march. They brought the body to us from the morgue at ten-thirty last night, and my brother has been working on it ever since. There's so much to do this side the pulls spread fingers down over his right check and neck) was all shot away, and the jawbone was just dangling. They have to reset it and then build all that up with plaster." I went through the fine old home (abandoned to trade when the white people moved from this area) into a new addition the chapel, all cheap religious sentiment, an orange cross in fake stained glass. There are two people already there, both journalists, listening to the sounds from the next room (Clarence calls it, with a mortician's customary euphemism, the Operating Room, where a radio crackles excerpts from Dr. King's oratory, and men mutter their appreciation of the live voice while they work on the dead body. We comment on the ghoulishness of their task knowing ours is no less ghoulish. We would be in there, if we could, with lights and cameras; but we must wait through an extra hour of desperate cosmetic work. We do it far less patiently than Memphis garbage men wait in their church. Hell of a place for Dr. King to end up, isn't it?" the photographer says. And one hell of a cause a little garbage strike. When, at eight o'clock, the body is brought out, bright TV lights appear and pick out a glint of plaster under the check's powder. Several hundred people file past; they have sought the body out, in their sorrow, and will not let it leave town without some tribute. But not one white person from the town goes through that line.

Those who do come are a microcosm of the old Southern Negro community. Young boys doff their hats and their nylon hair caps their do rags as they go by. A Negro principal threatened to expel any child from a local high school who came to class with an "Afro" hairdo. Possessive matrons take up seats in the back, adjust their furs, cluck sympathetically to other women

359 MARTIN LUTHER KING IS STILL ON THE CASE

of their station, and keep the neighborhood record straight with bouts of teary gossip. They each make several passes at the coffin, sob uncontrollably, whip out their Polaroid cameras, and try an angle different from that shot on their last pass. One woman kisses the right cheek. Clarence Lewis was afraid of that: "It will spoil the makeup job. We normally put a veil over the coffin opening in cases of this sort; but we knew people would just tear that off with Dr. King. They want to see him. Why, we had one case where the people lifted a body up in the coffin to see where the bullet had gone into a man's back.

Outside, people mill around, making conversation, mixing with stunned friendliness, readjusting constantly their air of sad respect. Again, the scene looked like a disconsolate picnic. Some activists had called him "De Lawd. He always had to be given either his title (Doctor King," even the Reverend Doctor King") or his full historic name ("Luther Martin King one prim lady mourner called him in the funeral home, understandably stumbling over the big mouthful). Even that title "Doctor never omitted, punctiliously stressed when whites referred to him, included even in King's third person references to himself had become almost comical. He was not only "De Law," but "De Lawd High God Almighty," and his Movement was stiff with the preacher dignities of the South; full of Reverends This and Bishops That and Doctors The-Other. No wonder the militants laughed at it all. And now, damned if he hadn't ended up at a Marc Connelly fish fry of a wake right out of The Green Pastures.

Connelly learned to read by poring over the pages of the Memphis Commercial Appeal and he learned his lesson well; he was able to create a hambone God: "Dey's gonter to be a deluge, Noah, an dey's goin to be a flood. De Levees is gonter bust an everything dat's fastened down is comin loose.

These are unlikely people, I thought at that sad fish fry, to ride out the deluge whose signs had already thundered from several directions on the night King died. But then, so was Noah an unlikely candidate. Or Isaac, who asked. Does you want de brainiest or the holiest, Lawd?" I want the holiest, I'll make him brain." And there was one note, at King's makeshift wake, not heard anywhere in Connelly's play. As one of the mammy types waddled out the front door, she said with matter-of-fact bitterness to everyone standing nearby: wish it was Henry Loeb lying there" handsome lovable Henry Loeb, the city's Mayor, who would later tell me, in his office, how well he liked his Negroes; unaware, even now, that they are not his. Connelly's "darkies" do not hate white people: the white folk" simply do not exist in his play, which was meant to fortify the Southern conviction that they have their lives and we have ours, an arrangement convenient to the white and (so whites tell themselves) pleasant for all. The whites get servants, and the blacks get fish

360 GARRY WILLS

fries. That whole elaborate fiction was shattered by the simple words, "I wish it was Henry Loeb." Massah's not in the cold, cold ground. She wishes he were. These people may be Hambones, but not J.P. Alley's kind. They are a paradox, a portent white Memphis still must come to grips with hambone militants, good darkies" on the march. When even the stones rise up and cry out, the end has come for Henry Loeb's South.

The signs of it are everywhere at the Lorraine Motel, where King died; it is an extension of the old Lorraine Hotel, once a white whore-house. Then, when the neighborhood began to go black, it was thrown to a Negro buyer as, in the South, old clothes are given to the help. A man named William Bailey bought it, and laboriously restored it to respectability. King stayed there often on his visits to Memphis. It is now a headquarters for the S.C.L.C.'s Project Memphis, a program designed as its assistant director says to make Memphis pay for the death of Dr. King." Yet the Lorraine is run by a man who could pose for "Uncle Ben rice ads an ex-Pullman porter who is still the captain of porters at a Holiday Inn. He works for the white man, and does it happily, while he owns and runs a black motel where activists plot their campaigns. Iâ€™m very proud to be part of the Holiday Inn family," he told me. Why, the owners of the whole chain call me Bill Bailey." That's the Negro Henry Loeb has always known. It is the other side of him the owner of the Lorraine, the friend of Dr. King that is the mystery.

King made the mistake of saying, on his penultimate visit to Memphis, at one of the posher new Holiday Inns-in the kind of place where Bill Bailey works, not in the motel he own. The Memphis paper gleefully pointed out that King could stay in the Inn because it had been integrated without demonstrations." But the Lorraine is not integrated (except in theory). Neither was the white flophouse in which the sniper lurked. It is good that King came back to the real world, the defacto segregated world, to die. He was in the right place, after all. Memphis indeed, had taught him to stay in his place a thing it will come to regret. For his place is now a command post, a point where marches are planned, and boycotts, and Negro-history classes. These garbage men are that new thing, Hambones in rebellion and they have strange new fish to fry. The people who filed past King's body had said no to the whole city of Memphis, said it courteously, almost deferentially (which only made it more resounding); they had marched every day under their employers eyes; boycotted the downtown, took on, just for good meaâ€™sure, firms like Coca-Cola and Wonder Bread and Sealtest Milk; and were ready, when the time came, to join with King in taking on Washington. Patience radiates from them like a reproach. Perhaps that is why the white community does not like to see them in a mass only in the single dimension,

361 MARTIN LUTHER KING IS STILL ON THE CASE

the structured encounter that brings them singly into the home or the store for eight hours of work. These Negroes seem almost too patient wrong people for rebels. Yet their like has already made a rebellion. A tired woman in Birmingham was the wrong sort to begin all the modern civil-rights activism; but Rosa Parks did it. King was drawn into that first set of marches almost by accident as he was involved, finally, in the garbage men's strike: "Dat's always de trouble wid miracles. When you pass one you always gotta rar back an pass another.

The buses were late. They were supposed to arrive at eleven-thirty for loading baggage (each man had been told to bring toothbrush, change of underwear, change of outer clothes if he wanted it, and most wanted it). Besides, there had been talk of a bus for teen-agers, who were now giggling and flirting in the dark vestibule (surrendered to them by their elders). Jerry Fanion, an officer of the Southern Regional Conference, scurried around town looking for an extra bus; like all Negroes, he was stopped everywhere he went. Police recognized him, and they had been alerted about the men who would be leaving their homes for the funeral; but they made him get out of the car any way, and laboriously explain himself. He never did get the bus. Later in the week, the teen-agers made a pilgrimage to King's grave.

Meanwhile, the wives in the Clayborn Temple still did not know whether they could go with their husbands. About eleven-thirty, T.O. Jones showed up, with P.J. Ciampa. Jones is the spheroid president of the sanitation local a man too large in some ways and too small in others for any standard size of shirt, coat, pants. He is content with floppy big pants and a windbreaker that manages to get around him, but only by being too long in the sleeves and too wide in the shoulders. He is a quiet man in his early forties, determined but vague, who began the strike by going to the office of the Director of Public Works and when the Director told him there was an injunction against any strike by city employees changing into his prison clothes on the spot, Ciampa is the fiery Italian organizer who came into town for the union and amused people with televised arguments against Mayor Loeb (who insisted that all negotiations be carried on in public). Jones and Ciampa have lost the list of men signed up for the buses; they don't know how many buses are coming, how many can ride on each. They try to take two counts of workers alone, and workers with their wives; but it's difficult to keep track of those who wander in and out of shadows, doors, anterooms.

After an hour of disorder, it becomes clear that everyone can fit into the three buses if folding chairs are put down the aisles. T.O. had told me to save a seat for him, but the chairs in the aisle barricade us from each other. I sit, instead, with a sleepy young man who describes the route we have to take,

362 GARRY WILLS

and then finds confirmation of his theory, with a kind of surprised triumph, all along the way. The route one travels through Mississippi and Alabama is a thing carefully studied by Southern Negroes. After giving T.O. a check for the bus drivers, Campa went back to the hotel, T.O. swung onto the lead bus, and we pulled out.

In the seat behind me, a woman is worried over the teen-agers still standing by the church, hoping they will get a bus. "How they gonna get home?" she asks, "Walk, woman," her husband grows. But what of the curfew?" What of it?" "I don't trust those police. If I hadn't got on the bus with you, I'd have stayed all night in the church." As the bus rolls through downtown Memphis, on its way South, the woman sees cars moving. What are they doing out during the curfew? Why aren't they stopped?" She knows, of course. Her husband does not bother to answer her.

In our bus, all the animation comes from one voice in the back. A tall laughing man I had watched, in the church, as he moved from one cluster to another, mixing easily, asked to sit beside me while I was still saving a seat for T.O. I was sorry later I had not said yes. As the riders shouldered sleepily into their chair backs, he joked more softly, but showed no signs of fatigue himself though he had been a marshal all the long afternoon of marching. And as fewer and fewer responded to him, he moved naturally from banter and affectionate insults to serious things: "That Dr. King was for us." The response is a sigh of yesses. "He didn't have to come here." A chorusing of noes. As he mused on, the crowd breathed with him in easy agreement, as if he were thinking for them. This audience participation" is what makes the Southern preacher's sermon such an art form. I had been given a dazzling sample of it three days before in the garbage men's meeting at the United Rubber Workers Union Hall. That was the day after King's death, and a formidable lineup of preachers was there to lament it. They all shared a common language, soaked in Biblical symbol: Pharoah was Mayor Loeb, and Moses was Dr. King, and Jesus was the Vindicator who would get them their dues checkoff. But styles were different, and response had to be earned. The whole hall was made up of accompanists for the improvising soloist up front. When he had a theme that moved them, they cheered him on: "Stay there!". "Fix it." Fix it up. Call the roll." Talk to me!" Talk and a half." The better the preacher, the surer his sense of the right time to tarry, the exact moment to move on; when to let the crowd determine his pace, when to push against them; the lingering, as at the very edge of orgas, prolonging, prolonging; then the final emotional breakthrough when the whole audience comes together.

Memphis is not really the birthplace of the blues, any more than Handy was the father of them; but these are the same people who created the form

363 MARTIN LUTHER KING IS STILL ON THE CASE

the triple repeated sighing lines, with a deep breathing space between each. space filled in with the accompanists break or jazz. That is the basic pattern for the climactic repetitions, subtle variations, and refrains of the preacher's art. That kind of sermon is essentially a musical form; and the garbage men are connoisseurs. When a white pastor from Boston got up, he gave them slogans and emotion; but without a response from the audience—he didn't know the melody.

Nor did all the black preachers succeed, or win equal acceptance. The surprise of the afternoon, at least for me, came when an S.C.L.C. delegation reached the hall, and the Reverend James Bevel got up to preach. He and his associates looked almost out of place there amid the "do rags and scarred ebony skulls; they were immaculately dressed, with educated diction, wearing just the proper kind of natural and a beard.

Bevel was the fourteenth, and last, speaker of the afternoon. It seemed that earlier emotional talks would have drained these men of all response left them after the shock of the preceding night. But Jim Bevel slowly built them up from quiet beginnings to an understanding of what it means to be on the case." (This is a phrase he invented a year ago to describe musicians who are perfectly interacting; it is now an S.C.L.C. phrase of wide applicability.

Dr.King died on the case. Anyone who does not help forward the sanitation workers' strike is not on the case. You getting me?" (They're getting him. There's a false rumor around that our leader is dead. Our leader is not dead. (No!" They know King's spirit lives on half the speeches have said that already.) That's a false rumor." (Yes!" False." Sho nuff. Tell it!"

Martin Luther King is not" (yes, they know, not dead; this is a form in which expectations are usually satisfied, the crowd arrives at each point with the speaker; he outruns them at peril of losing the intimate ties that slacken and go taut between each person in the room; but the real artist takes chances, creates suspense, breaks the rhythm deliberately, a snag that makes the resumed onward flow more satisfying) Martin Luther King is not our leader!" ("Nol" The form makes them say it, but with hesitancy. They will trust him some distance; but what does he mean? The "Sho nuff is not declamatory now; not fully interrogatory, either circumflexed.) Our leader Yes?" is the man ("What man?" Who?" Who?" Reverend Aber— nathy? Is he already trying to supplant King? The trust is almost fading). who led Moses out of Israel." ("Thass the man!" Resolution; all doubt dispelled; the bridge has been negotiated, left them stunned with Bevels virtuosity.) Our leader is the man who went with Daniel into the lions den. (Same man!" Talk some.") Our leader is the man who walked out of the grave on Easter morning." ("Thass the leader!" They have not heard, here in

hamboneland, that God is dead.) "Our leader never sleeps nor slumbers. He cannot be put in jail. He has never lost a war yet. Our leader is still on the case." ("That's it." "On the case!") Our leader is not dead. One of his prophets died. We will not stop because of that. Our staff is not a funeral staff. We have friends who are undertakers. We do business. We stay on the case, where our leader is.

It is the most eloquent speech I have ever heard. I was looking forward, a day later, to hearing Bevel again, before a huge audience in the Mason Temple. He was good and gave an entirely different speech. But the magic of his talk to the sanitation workers was gone. It was not merely the size of the crowd (though that is important the difference between an intimate combo and some big jazz band only partially rehearsed). The makeup of the crowd was also different. Those in the Union Hall were predominantly male. Men accompany; women compete they talk over the preachers rhythms. Their own form is not the jazz combo, but the small group of gospel singers, where each sister fights for possession of the song by claiming a larger share of the Spirit. In a large place like the Mason Temple, women set up nuclei around the hall and sang their own variations on the sermon coming out of the loudspeakers.

But that night on the bus, there was no fighting the jolly voice that mused on Dr. King's death. Responses came, mingled but regular, like sleepy respirations, as if the bus's sides were breathing regularly in and out. This is the subsoil of King's great oratory, of the subtly varied refrains. "I have a dream ... I have a dream today." He must have been a great preacher in his own church; he could use the style out in the open, before immense crowds. He made the transition more skillfully than Bevel had and far better than Abernathy does. That very day, the Monday before King's funeral, Abernathy had paused long on the wrong phrases: "I do not know...I do not know. He had let the crowd fool him by their sympathy; he took indulgence for a demand to linger. He did not have King's sure sense of when to move. I suppose I heard thirty or forty preachers on that long weekend of religious eloquence; but not one of them reached King's own level of skill in handling a crowd. That was the mystery of King. He was the Nobel Prize winner and a Southern Baptist preacher, and, at places like the Washington Mall in 1963, the two did not conflict but worked together. As the man in the bus kept saying, "He was for us." (Unhehmen!) He was one with us." ("That he was." That he was.")

But King's rapport with his people was not the natural thing it seems now. He had to learn it, or relearn it. The man's voice rose behind us in the bus:

365 MARTIN LUTHER KING IS STILL ON THE CASE

prophet of creative tensions." It was not till someone suggested more likely patrons of non violent rebellion that he began referring to Gandhi and Gandhi his American forerunner referring to them as saints. He never really dis- cusses their philosophy. And his most ambitious defense of civil disobedience the Letter from a Birmingham Jail, written eight years after the Montgomery boycott does not even refer to Gandhi or Thoreau. Instead, King uses tags from Augustine and Aquinas (hardly anti-authoritarians). Nor does the Letter deserve high marks for logic. It offers as the model of civil disobedience, not Gandhi, but Socrates, the stock platonic figure suborned for all noble causes, but something of an embarrassment in this context, since Plato makes him preach history's most rigorous sermon against civil disobedience in the Crito. The Letter gives three qualifications for a valid act of civil disobedience: 1) that it be open, 2) that it be loving (nonviolent), and 3) that those engaged in it accept their punishment willingly. Then he gives as a historical example of this the Boston Tea Party, whose perpetrators: 1) were clandestine (they disguised themselves as Indians), 2) were armed for violence (they forced wharf guards away and were ready to repel any interruption), and 3) evaded all punishment (Sam Adams and his Committee of Correspondence dared England to attempt punishment). Indeed, none of the historical examples of civil disobedience given in King's Letter meets the three requirements he had just set up.

Like Moses, he was not the brainiest." He only knew one book well-the Bible. It was enough. All the other tags and quotes are meant to give respectability to those citations that count the phrases sludged up in his head from earliest days like a rich alluvial soil. He could not use these with the kind of dignity he aspired to unless he were more than just a preacher." Yet the effect of that more was to give him authority as a preacher. By trying to run away from his destiny, he equipped himself for it. He became a preacher better educated than any white sheriff; more traveled, experienced, poised. He was a Hambone who could say "œno" and make it sound like a cannon shot. It is interesting to contrast him with another preacher's son-James Baldwin. Baldwin became a boy preacher himself as a way of getting out into the secular world. King became a student as a way of getting into a larger world of religion, where the term "preacher would not be a reproach. He needed a weightness in his work which only that Doctor could give him. He needed it for personal reasons yes, he had all along aspired to be "De Lawdand in order to make Southern religion relevant. That is why King was at the center of it all; he was after dignity, which is the whole point of the Negro rebellion. His talent, his abilities as a quick study," his versatility, his years studying philosophy and theology (for which he had no real natural bent) were means

367 MARTIN LUTHER KING IS STILL ON THE CASE

telephone amplifier on, so that visitors can hear both ends of a conversation; and when a newspaperman with a pronounced Eastern accent called him for some information, he amused local journalists, who happened to be in his office, by mimicking the foreigner in his responses. When a group of white suburban wives went to his office to protest his treatment of the garbage strikers, he listened to them, then slyly asked the five who had done most of the talking where they were from; and his ear had not betrayed him—not one was a native "Memphian." He has a good ear for classes, accent, background. He wanted to know where I had gone to college. The South is very big on society.

But Loeb has no ear at all for one accent the thick, slow drawl of men like T.O. Jones. He knows they haven't been to college. I asked him whether he thought he could restore good relations with the Negro community after the sanitation workers settlement. "There is good understanding now. I have Negroes come to me to firm up communications I won't say to reestablish them, because they had not lapsed." I told him I attended a mass rally at Mason Temple, where more than five thousand Negroes cheered as preacher after preacher attacked him. "Well, you just heard from a segment of the community whose personal interests were involved. Why, I have open house every Thursday, and just yesterday I had many Negroes come in to see me about different things." Imagine! And Massah even talked to them! And they came right in the front door, too. It is the conviction of all Henry Loeb that the great secret of the South, carefully hidden but bound to surface in the long run, is the Negroes profound devotion to Henry Loeb. After all, look at everything he has done for them. I took the responsibility of spending fifteen thousand dollars of city money multiplied many times over by federal food stamps to feed the strikers." Noblesse oblige.

The odd thing is that white Memphis really does think that as citizen after citizen tells you race relations are good." Its spokesman cannot stop saying, "How much we have done for the Negro (the Southern bigot is nothing but the Northern liberal caricatured we have all done so much for the Negro). A journalist on the Press-Scimitar, the supposedly liberal" paper in town, says, "We have been giving Negroes the courtesy title" (that is, calling Mr. and Mrs. Jones Mr. and Mrs. Jones) ever since the Korean War. (It embarrassed even the South to call the parents of a boy killed in action John and Jane Jones.) But the executive secretary of the local N.A.A.C.P. was considered a troublemaker when, arrested in a demonstration supporting the strikers, she held up the booking process time after time by refusing to answer the officer's call for "Maxine instead of Mrs. Smith. ("Why, isn't your name Maxine?" one honestly befuddled cop asked her.)

370 GARRY WILLS

curb at his funeral came through storm to hear him speak on April 4. Abernathy called the Lorraine and told King he could not disappoint such a crowd. King agreed. He was on his way.

Abernathy filled in the time till he arrived with a long introduction on King's life and career. He spoke for half an hour and set the mood for King's own reflection on the dangers he had faced. It was a long speech almost an hour and his followers had never heard him dwell so long on the previous assassination attempt, when a woman stabbed him near the heart. The papers quoted a doctor as saying that King would have died if he had sneezed. If I had sneezed," he said, he would not have been in Birmingham for the marches. If I had sneezed" ("Tell it!" He was calling the roll now, talking and a half," tolling the old cadences.) He could never, had he sneezed, have gone to Selma; to Washington for the great March of 1963; to Oslo. Or to Memphis.

For the trip to Memphis was an important one. He did not so much climb to the mountaintop there as go back down into the valley of his birth. Some instinct made him return to the South, breathing in strength for his assault on Washington, which he called the very last hope for non violence. He was learning, relearning, what had made him great learning what motels to stay at; what style to use; what were his roots. He was learning, from that first disastrous march, that he could not come in and touch a place with one day's fervor; that he had to work with a community to make it respond non violently as Montgomery had, and Birmingham, and Selma.

It is ironic that the trouble on that first march broke out on Beale Street, where another man learned what his roots were. W. C. Handy did not come from Memphis, like Bessie Smith; he did not grow up singing the blues. He learned to play the trumpet in Alabama from a traveling bandmaster, a real Professor Harold Hill. Then he went North, to tootle transcribed Beethoven on "classical cornet, afternoons in Chicago. It was only when he came back South, and saw that the native songs worked better with audiences, that he began to write down some of those songs and get them published.

King, after largely ineffectual days in Chicago, returned to Memphis, the deracinated Negro coming home. Home to die. His very oratory regained majesty as he moved South. He had to find out all over what his own movement was about as Marc Connelly's "Lawd learns from his own creation: Dey can't lick you, kin dey Hezdrel?" Bevel said the leader was not Martin King. That was true, too, in several ways. In one sense, Rosa Parks was the true leader. And T.O. Jones. All the unlickable Hezdrels. King did not sing the civil rights blues from his youth. Like Handy, he got them published. He knew what worked and despite all the charges of the militants, no other

374 GARRY WILLIS

leader had his record of success. He was a leader who, when he looked around, had armies behind him.

This does not mean he was not authentic as a leader. On the contrary. His genius lay in his ability to articulate what Rosa Parks and T.O. feel. Mailer asks whether he was great or was hamboing; but King's unique note was precisely his ham greatness. That is why men ask, now, whether his kind of greatness is obsolete. Even in his short life, King seemed to have outlived his era. He went North again "not to school this time, but to carry his movement out of Baptist-preacher territory and he failed. The civil rights movement, when it left the South, turned to militancy and urban riots. Men don't sing the old songs in a new land.

Yet it may be too soon to say that the South's contribution has been made. After all, the first two riots in 1968 were in South Carolina and Tennessee. The garbage strike opens a whole new possibility of labor racial coalition in those jobs consigned exclusively to Negroes throughout the South. And, more important, the Northern Negro, who has always had a love-hate memory for the South, begins to yearn for his old identity. The name for it is soul.

The militant activists insist on tradition (Africa) and religion (Muslimism, black Messianism, etc.) and community (the brothers). Like the young King, many Negroes feel the old Baptist preachers were not dignified. Better exotic headdress and long gowns from Africa than the frock coat of De Lawd." But the gowns and headgear are exotic foreign things that men wear stiffly, a public facade. There are more familiar Negro traditions and religion and community. Black graduate students have earned the right to go back to hominy and chilins and mock anyone who laughs. The growth of "soul" is a spiritual return to the South but a return with new weapons of dignity and resistance. Religion, the family, the past can be reclaimed now without their demeaning overtones. In this respect, the modern Negro is simply repeating, two decades later, King's brilliant maneuver of escape and reentry. He got the best of both worlds the dignity that could only be won outside, and the more familiar things which that dignity can transform. King was there before them all.

He remained, always, the one convincing preacher. Other civil rights pioneers were mostly lawyers, teachers, authors. They learned the white man's language almost too well. King learned it, too; but it was always stiff. He belonged in the pulpit, not at the lectern. Bayard Rustin, with his high dry professional voice and trilled r's, cannot wear the S.C.L.C.'s marching coveralls with any credibility. The same is true, in varying measure, of most first-generation respectable leaders. Some of them would clearly get indigestion from the thinnest possible slice of watermelon. Adam Powell, of course, can

375 MARTIN LUTHER KING IS STILL ON THE CASE