

THE NASHVILLE LUNCH-COUNTER SIT-INS

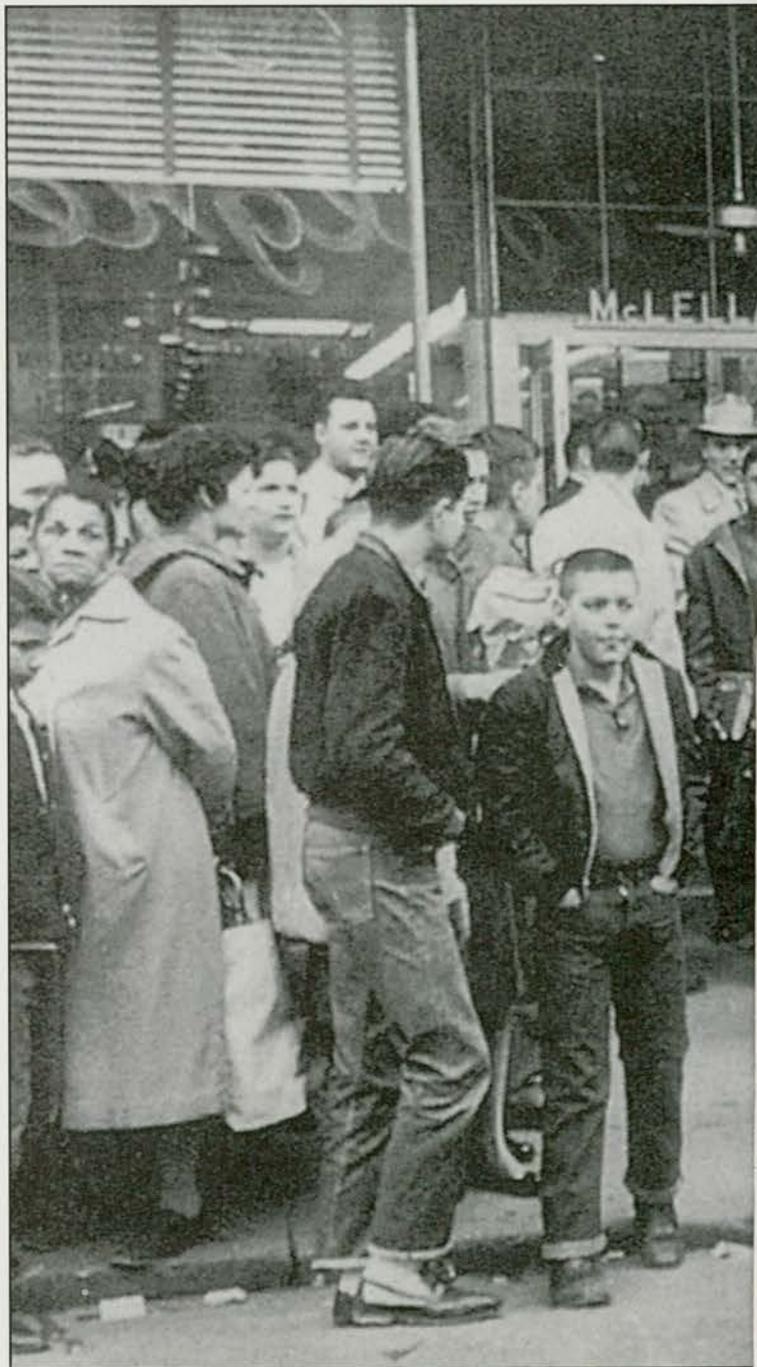
BY JOHN LEWIS

The leaders of the Nashville lunch-counter sit-ins in 1960 were not much more than children, but they achieved what most of their seasoned elders hardly dared to contemplate. They insisted that African-American patrons of Nashville's downtown five-and-ten-cent stores receive the same service as white patrons—and they won. The combination of courage, self-discipline, and innocent idealism that led to this victory also led many of these young people straight into the heart of the developing battle for civil rights. John Lewis, who tells his story of the Nashville sit-ins in the article that follows, went on to become one of the heroes of the movement. As a Freedom Rider, he took part in the often dangerous efforts to desegregate interstate buses in 1961; he was a principal organizer of the 1963 March on Washington and shared the podium with A. Philip Randolph and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Lewis was in the thick of efforts to register black voters in Mississippi during the summer of 1964—and saw the hopes of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, born that summer, dashed at the 1964 Democratic National Convention. And he was nearly beaten to death during the Selma-to-Montgomery March in 1965. Through all this—and through his subsequent career as an elected political leader—John Lewis has remained constant to the principles of justice, equality, and love that animated him as a young man in Nashville. That's why his story is so worth reading and why we are proud to reprint a part of it here.

—Editor

WE WALKED out of the church, 124 of us, two abreast, quiet, solemn, into the snow and toward downtown Nashville. Passersby didn't know what to make of us. They thought it might be some sort of Saturday morning parade. Or maybe a funeral.

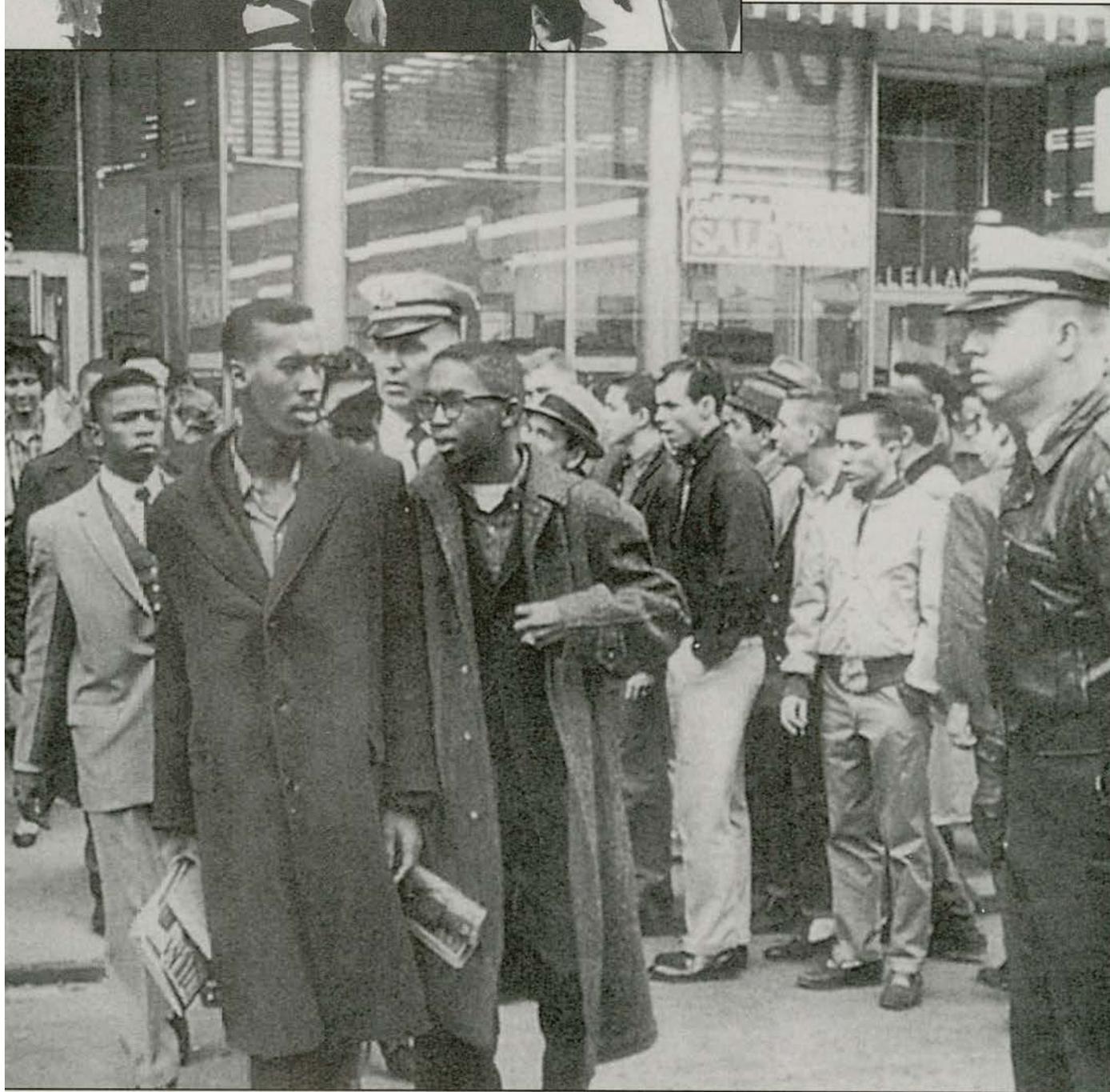
Several city blocks away we arrived at a place called the Arcade, an old mall of sorts, an open-air marketplace built back in the 1920s. The building was a couple of stories high, but the ground floor was open at both ends. You walked in one end, past vendors and small shops, and when you came out the other side, you were on Fifth Avenue, Nashville's busiest shopping street. Kress's, Woolworth's, McClellan's—all the five-and-dime stores were right there on Fifth Avenue.





JACK CORVY, NASHVILLE TENNESSEAN

(Left) The climax of the Nashville sit-ins, April 1960: Students Diane Nash and Bernard Lafayette (right) and clergyman C.T. Vivian head a protest march that culminated in a meeting with Nashville's mayor at which he supported desegregating the lunch counters. (Below) John Lewis (at center in light suit and vest) in front of McClellan's five-and-ten-cent store in Nashville, February 1960: A few moments later, he was arrested for taking part in the lunch-counter sit-ins.



NASHVILLE TENNESSEAN, STAFF PHOTO

My group headed to Woolworth's. As we entered we drew looks from the shoppers inside but nothing more. No comments. No confrontations. No one there had any idea what was going on. No one knew how to react.

There were two lunch counters, one on each of the store's two floors. Our target was upstairs.

The first thing we each did was make a small purchase—a notebook, a handkerchief, whatever. No one tried to stop us.

Then we went up. The counter ran along one mirrored wall. Behind the long row of seats was a railing over which you could look down on the first floor below.

As we took our seats, we were careful to leave empty stools among us. This allowed regular customers an opportunity to be served and to sit beside us if they so chose.

A few people were already there eating lunch. No one got up. No one said anything. A waitress came out from the kitchen, stopped when she saw us, then picked up a cloth and began wiping the counter. She didn't say anything, but the next waitress who came out stopped dead in her tracks.

"Oh my God," she said to no one in particular, "here's the niggers."

These were middle-aged women, pleasant enough in their white uniforms and delicate hairnets. There was no anger in them, just bewilderment, nervousness, and maybe a little bit of fear.

As that day's designated leader, I asked if we could be served.

"We don't serve niggers here," one of the women said. A couple of the customers left then. The others soon followed.

Then a woman came out from the back with a sign in her hand, a crude, handwritten sign: "Counter Closed."

Minutes later, the lights in that section of the store were shut off, and the waitresses left. And there we sat, in semi-darkness, alone.

There was natural light enough to read by, and that's what some of us did. Others pulled out schoolbooks and binders and did their homework. Every once in a while I got up and walked the length of the counter, asking everyone if they were okay, making sure everyone stayed calm.

The afternoon passed. Groups of shoppers downstairs gathered and stared up at us, whispering among themselves. One witness later told a reporter it was like a scene from a science fiction movie, where a stunned city is laid siege by aliens or giant grasshoppers.

As the hours went by there were some taunts from a group of young white men who came upstairs and

John Lewis has been Representative for the Fifth U.S. Congressional District of Georgia since 1987. This article is excerpted from his book, Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement, copyright 1998, which was named a New York Times Notable Book this year. It is reprinted with the permission of Simon and Schuster. (American Educator readers can buy Walking With the Wind at a special discount. See page 47 for the discount coupon.)

stood behind us.

"Niggers," they said. "Go home."

"What are y'all doing here?" one of them asked.

We kept our eyes straight ahead. No response. Those men soon left. And then, finally, at about six that evening, word came that it was time to go. We had set up a system of runners to deliver messages from the church to the groups in the stores and to bring news back to the church about what was happening downtown. When our runner said it was time to go, we stood and walked out in as orderly and silent a fashion as we had arrived.

IT COULDN'T have gone any more smoothly. When we got back to First Baptist, it was like New Year's Eve—whooping, cheering, hugging, laughing, singing. It was sheer euphoria, like a jubilee. The other sites had gone just as well as ours. Kress's had closed just like Woolworth's. McClellan's took a little longer but wound up shutting down its counters as well. Diane [Nash, a Fisk University student and sit-in leader] described watching a jittery waitress drop dish after dish on the floor. Two girls from another group told how they left to use the "Whites Only" ladies' room and walked in on an elderly white woman who exclaimed, "Oh! Nigras, Nigras *everywhere!*" before fleeing.

No one wanted to leave the church. Everyone was so up, so elated and eager to keep going. What next, they wanted to know. What do we do next?

Next was that Thursday, the eighteenth. This time there were close to two hundred of us. My group went to W. G. Grant's. Again the counter was closed. Again we stayed the afternoon, this time about four hours. Again there was minimal response from employees or onlookers. White Nashville was just not ready for this. It had never had to deal with black people this way. These waves of well-dressed, well-behaved young black men and women were something no one had seen before.

We *wanted* them to see us. We planned each sit-in to begin around lunchtime because we wanted people to be there when we arrived. We wanted white people, everyday citizens, everyday customers to be exposed to us, to see us as we were, not as something in their minds, in their imaginations. We wanted them to watch how we responded to the people who refused to serve us. And we wanted them to watch those people as well. Among so many other things, this was about education, pricking consciences, teaching one race about another, and, if need be, about itself. If some of these white onlookers went back to their own homes, their own jobs, their own churches and began talking about this in heartfelt terms, about what they had seen, then we had achieved one of our main objectives.

Two days later, on Saturday, the twentieth, we marched, 340 strong, to the same 4 five-and-tens we'd been to before. We also added Walgreen's to the list. Now there were hecklers inside the stores and small angry crowds outside, complaining to reporters that they now had no place to eat lunch.

The stores were now beginning to counterattack. The managers at Kress's and McClellan's ordered employees to stack goods—wastebaskets, blankets, lamp-shades,

pots and pans—on the lunch counters to keep us from studying. There was no violence, but temperatures were rising. This could not go on forever. Sooner or later the city would have to respond in one way or another.

That night the store owners asked for a moratorium, promising to come up with a response, what they

called a proposal. Jim Lawson [a clergyman, disciple of nonviolence, and mentor of students participating in the Nashville sit-ins] met with us, the central committee, and we agreed to wait. But by the end of that week, when we'd heard nothing, we said *enough*. Saturday we would sit in again.

Walking With the Wind

John Lewis begins his memoir with this story of his childhood. It is also a parable of the civil rights movement, and Lewis believes that it describes what people of good will must do whenever any kind of catastrophe threatens their society or nation. That is undoubtedly why he told the story during the December 1998 impeachment hearings in the U.S. House of Representatives.

THIS IS a simple story, a true story, about a group of young children, a wood-frame house and a windstorm. The children were my cousins: Roy Lee and Jinnie Boy, Naomi and Leslie and Willie Muriel—about a dozen of them, all told—along with my older sister Ora and my brothers Edward and Adolph. And me, John Robert.

I was four years old at the time, too young to understand there was a war going on over in Europe and out in the Pacific as well. The grownups called it a world war, but I had no idea what that meant. The only world I knew was the one I stepped out into each morning, a place of thick pine forests and white cotton fields and red clay roads winding around my family's house in our little corner of Pike County, Alabama.

On this particular afternoon—it was a Saturday, I'm almost certain—about fifteen of us children were outside my Aunt Seneva's house, playing in her dirt yard. The sky began clouding over, the wind started picking up, lightning flashed far off in the distance, and suddenly I wasn't thinking about playing anymore; I was terrified. I had already seen what lightning could do. I'd seen fields catch on fire after a hit to a haystack. I'd watched trees actually explode when a bolt of lightning struck them, the sap inside rising to an instant oil, the trunk swelling until it burst its bark. The

sight of those strips of pine bark snaking through the air like ribbons was both fascinating and horrifying.

Lightning terrified me, and so did thunder. My mother used to gather us around her whenever we heard thunder and she'd tell us to hush, be still now, because God was doing his work. That was what thunder was, my mother said. It was the sound of God doing his work.

But my mother wasn't with us on this particular afternoon. Aunt Seneva was the only adult around, and as the sky blackened and the wind grew stronger, she herded us all inside.

Her house was not the biggest place around, and it seemed even smaller with so many children squeezed inside. Small and surprisingly quiet. All of the shouting and laughter that had been going on earlier, outside, had stopped. The wind was howling now, and the house was starting to shake. We were scared. Even Aunt Seneva was scared.

And then it got worse. Now the house was beginning to sway. The wood plank flooring beneath us began to bend. And then, a corner of the room started lifting up.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. None of us could. This storm was actually pulling the house toward the sky. With us inside it.

That was when Aunt Seneva told us to clasp hands. Line up and hold hands, she said, and we did as we were told. Then she had us walk as a group toward the corner of the room that was rising. From the kitchen to the front of the house we walked, the wind screaming outside, sheets of rain beating on the tin roof. Then we walked back in the other direction, as another end of the house began to lift.

And so it went, back and forth, fifteen children walking with the

wind, holding that trembling house down with the weight of our small bodies.

More than half a century has passed since that day, and it has struck me more than once over those many years that our society is not unlike the children in that house, rocked again and again by the winds of one storm or another, the walls around us seeming at times as if they might fly apart.

It seemed that way in the 1960s, at the height of the civil rights movement, when America itself felt as if it might burst at the seams—so much tension, so many storms. But the people of conscience never left the house. They never ran away. They stayed, they came together and they did the best they could, clasping hands and moving toward the corner of the house that was the weakest.

And then another corner would lift, and we would go there.

And eventually, inevitably, the storm would settle, and the house would still stand.

But we knew another storm would come, and we would have to do it all over again.

And we did.

And we still do, all of us. You and I.

Children holding hands, walking with the wind. That is America to me—not just the movement for civil rights but the endless struggle to respond with decency, dignity, and a sense of brotherhood to all the challenges that face us as a nation, as a whole.

That is the story, in essence, of my life, of the path to which I've been committed since I turned from a boy to a man, and to which I remain committed today. It is a path that extends beyond the issue of race alone, and beyond class as well. And gender. And age. And every other distinction that tends to separate us as human beings rather than bring us together. □

This time, though, the city was set to respond. Late that Friday afternoon, we got word from Nashville's chief of police, a man named Hosse, that anyone involved in further protests would be arrested for disorderly conduct and trespassing. There were also rumors of planned attacks by groups of young whites, attacks which the police would do nothing to stop.

This was what we had prepared for. That night Bernard [Lafayette] and I let ourselves into the ABT [American Baptist Theological Seminary, where Lewis was a student] administration building—as a janitor, I had my own set of keys—and “liberated” a ream of mimeograph paper. Though many of the students who would be sitting in the next day had been trained, our numbers were swelling so fast that there were hundreds who had not. So I wrote up a basic list of dos and don'ts to be distributed the next day:

DO NOT:

1. Strike back nor curse if abused.
2. Laugh out.
3. Hold conversations with floor walker.
4. Leave your seat until your leader has given you permission to do so.
5. Block entrances to stores outside nor the aisles inside.

DO:

1. Show yourself friendly and courteous at all times.
2. Sit straight; always face the counter.
3. Report all serious incidents to your leader.
4. Refer information seekers to your leader in a polite manner.
5. Remember the teachings of Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Love and nonviolence is the way.

May God Bless Each of You

The next morning there were fewer than a hundred of us gathered in the pews at First Baptist as we listened to Will Campbell, a white minister, warn us of the danger waiting for us downtown. He'd heard from some of Nashville's white community leaders that the police did indeed intend to make arrests that day. He said there might be violence as well, attacks from onlookers.

There was no question we would continue, no de-



FROM THE ANGELINE BUTLER "VOICES OF A SIT-IN" COLLECTION

Violence at McClellan's, February 1960: Paul LaPrad, a participant in the sit-ins, has just been pulled from his stool at the lunch counter and beaten by the angry crowd.

bate, no protest from any of the adults. We knew that sooner or later the stakes would be raised. It was a natural step in the process, a step we had practiced and prepared for. Our workshops had been like little laboratories in human behavior and response to nonviolent protest. Now we were seeing real humans respond in almost exactly the ways Jim Lawson had taught us they would. The danger waiting for us this day was to be expected, which didn't mean I wasn't a little bit nervous. But by now I was so committed deep inside to the sureness and sanctity of the nonviolent way, and I was so calmed by the sense that the Spirit of History was with us, that the butterflies were gone by the time we left the church and headed downtown.

As soon as my group entered our target store, Woolworth's, we were confronted with a group of young white men shouting, "Go home, nigger!" and "Get back

to Africa!" They jabbed us as we passed and chided us for not fighting back. "What's the matter? You chicken?" they teased, trying to force the situation onto terms they were comfortable with—fists and fighting.

We weren't playing by those rules, of course, and that infuriated them even further. No sooner did we take our seats at the upstairs counter than some of these young men began pushing the group at the downstairs restaurant off their stools, shoving them against the counter, punching them.

We immediately went down to join our brothers and sisters, taking seats of our own. I was hit in the ribs, not too hard, but enough to knock me over. Down the way I could see one of the white men stubbing a lit cigarette against the back of a guy in our group, though I couldn't tell who it was in the swirl of the action.

I got back on my stool and sat there, not saying a word. The others did the same. Violence does beget violence, but the opposite is just as true. Hitting someone who does not hit back can last only so long. Fury spends itself pretty quickly when there's no fury facing it. We could see in the mirror on the wall in front of us the crowd gathered at our backs. They continued trying to egg us on, but the beating subsided.

At the same time, we would learn later, the same thing was happening in the other stores. Yellow mustard was squeezed onto the head of one black male student in Kress's while the crowd hooted and

laughed. Ketchup was poured down the shirt of another. Paul LaPrad, being white, attracted particularly brutal attention over at McClellan's. He was pulled off his stool, beaten and kicked by a group of young whites with the word "Chattanooga" written on their jackets—a reference to recent white-on-black attacks in that city that had followed a series of sit-ins there.

A television camera crew was at McClellan's, recording the scene as LaPrad's attackers spent themselves. It filmed Paul—bloody and bruised and silent—pulling himself back on his chair. When the footage aired that night on national television, it marked one of the earliest instances where Americans were shown firsthand the kind of anger and ugliness that the peaceful movement for civil rights was prompting in the South. Many viewers were sickened by what they saw. They would see more in the years to come.

We didn't sit there long before the police, conspicuous by their absence during the attacks, arrived. I didn't imagine they had come to arrest anyone for assault, and I was right. As the young men who had beaten us looked on and cheered, we were told that we were under arrest for "disorderly conduct."

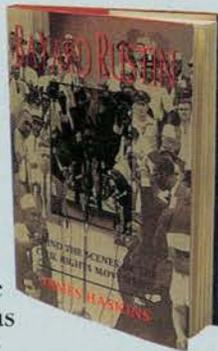
IT WAS strange how I felt as a large, blue-shirted Nashville police officer stood over me and said without emotion, "You're under arrest." A lifetime of taboos from my parents rushed through my mind as the offi-

Bayard Rustin: A Builder of the Beloved Community

BY JOHN LEWIS

IFIRST SAW Bayard Rustin the summer of 1959 when he was speaking at the Institute for Nonviolent Resistance to Segregation at Spelman College. This was the summer before a group of us in Nashville began our own nonviolent resistance with the lunch-counter sit-ins. But it was not until 1963, when I became chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and a founding chairman of the March on Washington, that I came to know and ultimately to admire Rustin.

Bayard was truly awesome. He was far more complicated as a person and an activist than any other civil rights leader I had known. A philosopher and sophisticated strategist, he had the capacity to analyze each situation objectively before reacting. Yet he had a strong and principled core. He was a brilliant organizer and a great show-



man, who was nevertheless content to help other leaders from behind the scenes. And he moved easily among grass-roots blacks, rich white Quakers, and everyone in between.

So imagine my surprise when I was asked to write about a children's biography of Rustin. I

didn't believe that his life and his ideas could be written about in a way that young people would understand. Happily, James Haskins' *Bayard Rustin: Behind the Scenes of the Civil Rights Movement* (Hyperion Books for Children, 1997) proves me wrong. Haskins does full justice to Bayard's pivotal role in the March on Washington, but he doesn't stop there. Young readers will also hear about Rustin's Quaker childhood in West Chester, Pennsylvania, and his early experience with the many forms that bigotry can take. They'll hear how he

adopted and practiced the Gandhian techniques of nonviolence, and how, in later life, he worked to help oppressed people all over the world, whether they were South African blacks suffering under apartheid or Cambodians being butchered by their own countrymen of the Khmer Rouge or Jews attempting to escape from Soviet Russia.

James Haskins has won the 1998 Coretta Scott King Award for this book, and he deserves it. To examine Rustin's life and work is to learn about virtually all of the major movements for social justice in the twentieth century. More important, Bayard's life will teach children a lesson that we cannot repeat too often—that all human beings deserve to be treated justly and that all oppression—even of one's enemies—must be opposed. As a bearer of that message, Bayard did more to create the beloved community than any other twentieth-century protest leader. □

cer gripped me by the bicep of my left arm. *Don't get in trouble. Stay away from Love Street. Only bad people go to jail.*

I could see my mother's face now. I could hear her voice: *Shameful. Disgraceful.*

But I felt no shame or disgrace. I didn't feel fear, either. As we were led out of the store single file, singing "We Shall Overcome," I felt exhilarated. As we passed through a cheering crowd gathered on the sidewalk outside, I felt high, almost giddy with joy. As we approached the open rear doors of a paddy wagon, I felt elated.

It was really happening, what I'd imagined for so long, the drama of good and evil playing itself out on the stage of the living, breathing world. It felt holy, and noble, and good.

That paddy wagon—crowded, cramped, dirty, with wire cage windows and doors—seemed like a chariot to me, a freedom vehicle carrying me across a threshold. I had wondered all along, as anyone would, how I would handle the reality of what I had studied and trained and prepared for for so long, what it would be like to actually face pain and rage and the power of uniformed authority.

Now I knew. Now I had crossed over, I had stepped through the door into total, unquestioning commitment. This wasn't just about that moment or that day. This was about forever. It was like deliverance. I had, as they say in Christian circles when a person accepts Jesus Christ into his heart, come home. But this was not Jesus I had come home to. It was the purity and utter certainty of the nonviolent path.

When we got to the city jail, the place was awash with a sense of jubilation. With all these friends, these familiar faces piling out of those wagons, it felt like a crusade, as if we were prisoners in a holy war. We sang as we were led into cells much too small for our numbers, which would total eighty-two by the end of the day. Cubicles built for three or four prisoners were jammed with fifteen to twenty of us each. The police could hardly keep up with the waves of students who were replacing one another back at those lunch counters. No sooner would one group be arrested than another would take its place. Once word spread back to the campuses about what was happening downtown, students arrived at First Baptist literally by the hundreds, angry, outraged, and ready to put their own bodies on the line.

Meanwhile, those of us in jail faced the issue of bail. The NCLC [Nashville Christian Leadership Council] had now raised more than \$50,000 in bail money for us—a mind-boggling leap from the \$87.50 they'd had in their treasury two weeks earlier. The police, wanting nothing more than to be rid of us, dropped the bail from the required \$100 per person to \$5 apiece. But it didn't matter. We weren't about to pay bail. We were in jail because of racial segregation in Nashville. Until that segregation was ended, we had nowhere else to be—we *belonged* nowhere else—but in those lunch-counter seats or behind bars.

We were happy to be in jail for this cause. We welcomed it. If the authorities chose to release us, fine. We would walk out freely and resume the task at hand. But

we were not about to *pay* our way out. We were not about to cooperate in any way with a system that allowed the discrimination we were protesting. Instead, we sang. We sang and we chanted: "Jail without bail!"

It didn't take Nashville's powers-that-be long to realize it was fruitless to try forcing us to pay our way out. At eleven that night, after about six hours behind bars, we were released into the custody of the president of Fisk University, Dr. Stephen J. Wright. With him were reporters and about two hundred cheering students.

We were exultant. Those six hours had been an act of baptism for all involved. We felt as if we'd won a huge victory. We felt that way the next day when we saw newspapers trumpeting the violence and arrests with huge headlines. A rally was staged late that morning, Sunday morning, with more than a thousand students from across the city jammed into Fisk Memorial Chapel to hear President Wright wholeheartedly endorse what we were doing.

Dr. Wright announced that morning that he and many others in Nashville's established black community were with us. He was the first black college president in the country to take such a stand. We were euphoric.

The next day we went to court—the eighty-two who had been arrested, along with more than two thousand supporters. We marched as a group from First Baptist to the downtown Davidson County Courthouse. With us walked Z. A. Looby, the attorney. He, along with his partners, Avon Williams and Bob Lilliard, had offered to represent us, free of charge, of course.

What we faced that day was almost as predictable as what we had faced in those downtown lunchrooms. The judge, a man named Harris, began by announcing his intention to try us in groups of half a dozen or so each. Part of his aim was to demonstrate a conspiracy on our part. Looby immediately objected, making a motion that we be tried individually. Harris would have none of it. He hardly seemed to be listening.

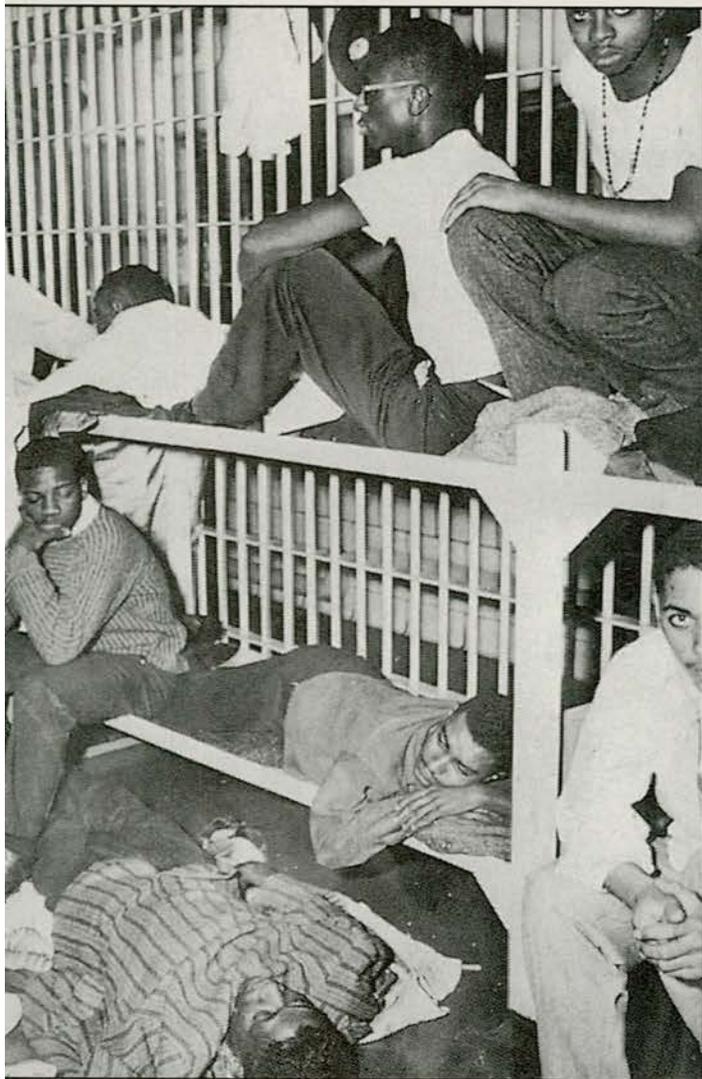
So we were tried group by group. Looby—dark-skinned, in his early sixties, a Trinidad native with a captivating West Indian accent—stood to make our case. He explained that far from disturbing any peace, we had been completely peaceful customers completely compliant with the laws, that it was the mob that had moved in and beaten us and had disturbed the peace. Not only did Harris appear not to listen, he actually turned his back on Looby, swung his chair around and faced the wall as our lawyer made his argument.

Finally Looby threw up his hands. "What's the *use!*" he said, cutting short his comments and returning to his seat.

The judge then found us all guilty. He gave us the option of paying a \$50 fine each or serving thirty days in the county workhouse.

That's when Diane Nash stood and spoke for all of us.

"We feel that if we pay these fines," she said, "we would be contributing to and supporting the injustice and immoral practices that have been performed in the arrest and conviction of the defendants."



NASHVILLE TENNESSEAN STAFF PHOTO

Student protestors in the Nashville city jail, February 1960: Cells designed to hold three or four prisoners were jammed with fifteen or twenty young people who had been protesting the segregated lunch counters.

This was big. This was historic. It wasn't just Nashville that was looking on. The whole nation was watching as we were led back to jail.

It seemed that almost every move the city made backfired. No one had ever had to deal with this situation before. There was no model, no map, no blueprint for the Nashville authorities to follow. They had to make their own mistakes, and they were making them. The sight of many of Nashville's—many of the nation's—finest young men and women being led off to jail was bad enough. But when the city followed through with its workhouse routine, sending these students out into the streets to shovel snow and pick up trash, it prompted outrage from all over the country. Telegrams of support arrived from Ralph Bunche, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Harry Belafonte.

The following day, March 3, the mayor of Nashville, Ben West, ordered our release. Like the city itself, he had a relatively progressive reputation on race. He seemed a pleasant enough man, always wearing a bow tie. You often heard the phrase "a friend of the Negro" used with his name—which could simply have meant

he was not as openly hostile to blacks as many of his counterparts in other Southern cities. It did not necessarily mean he was ready to reach out and risk his job and his reputation to help.

What West did was name a biracial committee to study the situation of segregation in the city. He asked us to halt the sit-ins while the committee looked into the problem, and we agreed.

Nashville's department store lunch counters continued operating as always while the mayor's committee kept meeting. By the last week of the month, we decided we'd waited long enough. On the twenty-fifth, a Friday, more than a hundred of us marched from First Baptist to nine downtown stores, dramatizing our displeasure with the slow movement of the mayor's group. There were no arrests. When footage of that day's protest aired on national television, Tennessee governor Buford Ellington was irate. "These sit-ins," he told reporters, "are instigated and planned by and staged for the convenience of the Columbia Broadcasting System."

But there was no way the governor or the mayor or anyone else could complain that outsiders had anything to do with the stories being written almost daily by a young *Tennessean* reporter named David Halberstam. When we had first begun, he had been the only one covering us. This was his beat, and we always made sure he knew what we were doing. We realized from the beginning how important media coverage was. We knew we needed the press to get our message out, and early on this tall, skinny guy with his big brown eyeglasses was the press. The *Tennessean* was, by Southern standards, a moderate, even liberal newspaper, and Halberstam was allowed by his editors to cover us fairly and accurately.

No one could accuse David Halberstam of being an outside agitator. And no one could say outsiders had anything to do with the next stage of that spring's siege to desegregate Nashville—a black community boycott of all downtown stores.

IT HAD begun quietly, almost invisibly, in late March. No one knew quite where it started, but it became organized and communicated through the churches. "Don't Buy Downtown" was the simple slogan, and it was amazingly effective. Estimates were that black Nashville spent as much as \$60 million a year in the city, a figure which meant even more to downtown merchants who had seen many of their white customers move to the suburbs in recent years and were depending increasingly on the black buyers who remained.

By the beginning of April, those stores stood virtually empty. One leader at a local black Baptist church asked every person in the congregation who had not spent a penny downtown in the previous two weeks to stand. Everyone in the room rose.

White people, too, were staying away. Some were wary of the violence and disturbances caused by the sit-ins. Others joined the boycott as a sign of support for our cause. A few white women went down to their favorite Nashville stores and made a visible show of turning in their credit cards as their own act of protest.

(Continued on page 46)