

A Fractal: From “Looking Back” to the Present Moment

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Today I've come to realize just how Protest organizes hate and establishes the interface between inside and outside, psychic and social, personal and political, and as analysts we are tasked to deal with the whole of human experience.

Reading and rereading the CPC document, I experienced an unexpectedly powerful response—a response so particular and personal, that I don't know if it has contributive (if that's a word) value to the CPC project. But here goes...

To begin with, aside from the specifics contained in “Otto Fenichel's Rundbriefe...”when I read those letters, *I hear my father's voice!*

On his 80th birthday, my father (born Franz Gerd Oppenheimer) produced his own kind of ‘Rundbrief’ to pass along to his children, nieces and nephews, a personal document in which he outlined—in considerable detail-- the story of his life from birth to 80. He called it (all 415 pages) “LOOKING BACK: 1906 – 1986.”

His reminiscences are divided into sections-- (Section 1 is called “Birth and Laughing”) -- from poignant and humorous ancestral tales through carefree childhood (clearly, secure attachment), through adolescent pranks, law school, engagement to my mother, and the birth of my older sister. Then comes Section 17, entitled “Hitler.” Here my father lets me know what's going on.

(Page 161.) “The rising power of Hitler hardly touched my social or political life. The law practice prospered. All this changed dramatically on April 1, 1933. On that day, all non-Aryan government servants were dismissed, non-Aryan attorneys were disbarred ... It was the day of the boycott of all non-Aryan businesses and homes. ...A stormtrooper was posted outside of my parents' home.”

I try to picture the stormtrooper but in that very moment quite another image interrupts.

Our extended family has gathered at my parents' country home. Far away from that dark day of 1933, it is 1965. We are all sitting out on the patio while my father barbecues the shish-kabobs. My 7 year old niece, Shelly—observing the process, exclaims, “I *hate* mushrooms!”

“Hate?” my father says in his “educate the children” tone, “Hate??” And Shelly repeats it, more adamantly this time- “I *hate mushrooms !*”

“I don't *hate* anything.” her grandfather declares, and I rush to the rescue. “Oh come on Daddy, you gotta be kidding!” But he stands his ground. And I say, “What about Hitler? You must hate Hitler!”

Now it's like he's speaking to us from another planet—oddly distant but insistent. “I don't hate anything or anyone.”

And now, like Dorothy in “The Wizard of Oz,” a tornado hurdles me backwards into my father's Brief again.. We are on page 164 and I hear his voice once more present and clear.

“Both Eva and I had no desire to stay in Germany. My German Rhenisch patriotism, which had been strong, vanished completely. I felt like a husband who loves his wife, and finds that she has betrayed him. My Uncle Julius offered me a job in his shoe factory... It was also suggested that I should emigrate to Holland or England, where I had relatives and good relations. Judges of the court in Duesseldorf sent messages and urged me to stay home. The whole Nazi nightmare would soon pass, they thought. But Eva and I were convinced we could never be happy again in Germany. Nor did I favor any emigration to any country of Europe. I anticipated trouble in Europe and recall the indelicate saying of a German playwright:

“Ich finde Europa zum Kotzen.”

And then, neatly contained in a parenthesis, my father translates the phrase, (“Europe makes me vomit.”)

But he never hates anything or anyone, you understand. And yet...I pause,,,

Only now, in this very moment and for the first time, something new occurs to me. Toward the end of the section on Hitler (page 213) my father asserts:

“Enough of political events. I mention them here because I lived through them. They were very important and I am afraid that they will be too soon forgotten. It is a famous saying that if you do not remember history, you are bound to repeat it.”

What strikes me now is that my father’s experiences are remembered and set down in exquisite detail, and the way he relives his stories evokes a whole range of emotion from laughter to tears. But for some reason he has banished the deeply negative or threatening affects-- including hate-- from consciousness. Not Hitler, for example, but Hate.

Here I have to say that I resonate with Jany’s translation of Wilhelm Reich who writes that “the ‘unmanageable destructive drives’ to which human suffering is attributed are not biological, but rather social.” And sometimes I forget that the “provable” facts in our current political climate carry no clout with the proponents of “the big lie.” I want to say that facts provide the necessary bricks to build an argument but affects are the mortar. So the question is, how do we, as psychoanalysts with “an unrelenting dedication to the social,” provide for an educative experience in which negative affects such as Hate can be owned, and transformed and brought safely into consciousness.

And there is one more thing I have to tell you about my revelation on reading the CPC project.. Associating to my father’s disavowed hate, I fast forward 30 years from April 1st 1933, to May 30th 1963, when I boarded a bus headed for Jackson Mississippi to protest the brutal behavior of helmeted policemen with guns and billy-clubs bearing down on school age black children marching and singing, “We shall overcome...” Sitting at home watching TV with my own two children, aged 4 and 6, I witness these helmeted policeman grab up the kids and toss them in the paddy-wagons that carry them to their crowded prison in the stinking Fairgrounds strung around with hog wire. Concentration Camps. I am teaching my eldest the Pledge of Allegiance and this is what takes place before us.

I hated what I saw. I thought then, and assumed until now, that my mission in Mississippi was prompted by the plight of these children as well as my own . It would be more than 20 years before my father’s

Rundbrief, and a full decade before beginning graduate studies in psychology! Today I realize that my journey—at least in part—was motivated by a powerful wish to work through my father's Hate and in some strange way, vindicate his suffering.

As a rather lengthy footnote, I provide my own Rundbrief—which is also the final chapter of my forthcoming book: Body Words and the Analyst's Use of Self (coming out in April 2024) The chapter, first written and published in 1963, bore the original title of "Why I Went To Jail."

Coda—Bodies and Embodiment, 1963: The Person of the Analyst

In the final days preparing this book to submit to the publisher and while rummaging through a box of old family papers, I came across an essay I wrote in 1963, nearly a decade before beginning graduate studies in psychology. As I read the forgotten document, it hit me that this brief piece—written in another lifetime when I was Barbara Massar, married to my first husband, and our children were six and four—reflected both the person of the analyst and my earlier experience as an implicated person—rendered no less in body words. So, I have chosen to include this essay, which can be read as an extended reverie.

The Jackson City Jail is full of echoes, and I heard the footsteps of the guard approaching long before he had to tap against the cell window for my attention.

"Barbara Massar!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Come over here so's I can talk to you."

"Sir?"

"You been in here three days. You been tried, you been found guilty, you been sentenced to four months. You been appealed an' Lawyer Hall is downstairs right this minute with your bail. Now I'm not threatenin' you, you understand. I just want to ask you a question."

"Yes?"

"If we arrange to have your bail go through, if we let you get outa here, what will you do?"

"Go home," I answered.

He eyed me testily. "I bet you won't. I bet I'll see you right back in this cell tomorrow, or the next day."

I shook my head.

"Your place is with your husband and your children," he whispered. "That's where you belong."

"I will go home," I told him softly.

And later when the jailer with his strap of heavy iron keys unlocked the door marked "WOMEN WHITE," my first reaction was a surge of joy because the worst was over, and I'd been released at last.

Yet I was wrong. And sometimes when I sit alone with thought too long, it frightens me to find myself regarding jail in Jackson, Mississippi, as less confining than the quaint New England village where I live.

But I should start from the beginning—

I'm twenty-eight. My children — Andrea and David — are six and four. I married young, and until recently it seemed impossible that I could ever separate myself from those on whom I so habitually depended. My husband, Ivan, leaves home all the time. As a magazine photographer, assignments often take him out of town. But even then I'm not alone. There's always Mrs. Carpin, our widowed housekeeper, who's been in the family for years. A hefty, dark, explosive woman, she reminds me of a mother bear — especially the way she guards us with a stern administration of her "loving care."

She and I were watching television on the morning that the news showed the sit-in demonstration in the Jackson, Mississippi Woolworth store. Lewd and laughing teenagers closed in on the stoic college students at the lunch counter, squirted mustard on their heads, emptied ketchup bottles in their hair. Certainly the sight was no more hideous than the hatred on display in Birmingham or Oxford. But where all previous atrocities set me aflame with righteous

indignation, the Jackson filming put me into contact with myself and what was happening like an electrical connection.

Typically, I focused on the stony-faced professor sitting with his students. And suddenly the pride this person evoked was shattered by a blinding sense of shame. Somebody socked him in the eye. All at once I caught myself in the middle of a dreadful act of immorality. They started pouring salt into his bloody wound. What strange conceit inspired me to take so freely of another man's experience? What sort of liberality had I allowed myself whereby I took a stand apart and in the shadows like some "peeping Tom," participating in the agonies and climaxes of other people's living? And in doing that so long, I had developed the audacity to feel their struggle as my own!

A burly expoliceman knocked a Negro^[1] to the floor and kicked him in the face— in the face again and again.

"Somebody help!" I gasped.

"Fightback you crazy Negro!" shouted Mrs. Carpin from behind me.

"No, that's wrong, I keep on telling you." Turning to Mrs. Carpin, I discovered that the children had come back into the kitchen and were hanging on her dress enthralled. *"For God's sake get them out of here!"* I yelled.

Swiftly she complied, despite their crying protests, and her movements — like an undercurrent in the din — drew my attention to her silent rage. "I didn't mean to yell," I called out to the yard, "honestly." Mrs. Carpin made no indication that she heard. The news was over. I turned the television off. In an effort to

clear my head I sank down at the breakfast table with the fingers of both hands pressed hard against my temples.

So this is how you bring up kids, I thought. First you fill them full of trust, and then you train them in the virtues such as loving and sharing and telling the truth no matter what.

You take them to church and you send them to school and you help them learn their daily pledge and then you're trapped and there is no way out. You're trapped because like "love" and "truth" your country's "liberty and justice" is an all-or-nothing proposition, and if you have to chase the children from the kitchen to protect their innocence, you are preparing for that day when they will fit you in with the rest of the world and never will forget how mother taught white lies.

Mrs. Carpin strode into the kitchen.

"School bus come for Andrea?" I asked.

She nodded. With casual precision, she leaned back on the stove, folded her huge brown arms across that massive chest of hers and waited.

I knew what she was waiting for, to see if I would dare bring up the subject of

nonviolence again, to see if I could find among my ready favorites (Jesus, Thoreau, Gandhi, Martin Luther King) some quote explaining why I'd been ashamed to let my children witness the great principle in practice.

I preferred her temper to this new inscrutability against the stove, this mute indifference. She stood there rubbing on her upper arm as if to soothe some burning pain, as if to say "your pretty speeches don't put me to sleep at night, don't make it easier for me to look into my mirror and respect myself. So you take all your holier-than-thou beliefs and put them in a pile and let me know how it stands up against the hell that's going on in Jackson."

That was Wednesday morning, May 29, 1963, I spent the next morning with Alan Gartner, Boston's head of CORE, the afternoon with my children, and the early evening driving into town with Ivan where I kissed him good-bye and boarded the bus for Jackson, Mississippi.

Summer dusk. The bus backed out of the depot groaning through its nose and with a wheeze of resignation, headed toward the open highway. I squeezed my eyelids shut to minimize the image of my husband heading home alone. Not yet. Not yet. Wait until the dark to cope with the images.

Numbly I became aware that I had actually made it on the bus without once asking Ivan for permission. This whole business wasn't like me. Not after nine years of such a wifeliness that even when we'd cross the street, I wouldn't pay attention to the traffic, just hang onto his arm, and let him lead me through. By what odd contradiction then, what fear and what desire had mixed up in me that I should suddenly require him to give up my providing for a week or two and every single ounce of his protective instinct! I squeezed my eyelids shut.

Such a sacrifice was just too much to ask of any man. I could not add the burden of permission to it. I could only tell him how I felt I ought to help to deserve the role of mother, citizen, and, in an abstract way,

the woman he loved. And we had spoken only briefly — keeping in the silences our common knowledge that if Ivan said, “I cannot let you go to Jackson,” I would never mention it again.

But instead he said, “Are you prepared to sit in jail?”

“I don’t intend to get in any fistfights, Ivan.”

“Then what,” he said, “are you planning to bear witness to?”

“There are people in our country,” I retorted haughtily, “whose basic civil rights have been denied. Now I’m allowed to say so if I happen to believe it—it’s a free country...”

“And if that’s the point you want to make,” he said, “you can’t avoid the jail. Bearing witness is no bargain, Barbara, and unless you’re willing to pay full price, I can’t afford to finance you.”

“All right. I will.”

“Then find out about the bail. Speak to somebody who knows what’s going on and where you’re needed most. After all,” he said, “if you want to do some good beyond your own self-satisfaction, you had better find out where the best place is to do it.”

It struck me with considerable wonder that, for all my high-flown principles, I’d never tried to contact any of the local action groups. My only membership was in the Unitarian Church whose sermons on “The Preciousness of Every Human Life” and “Man’s Responsibility to Man” had taken me no farther than the Sunday Evening Seminars held in the parlor.

“You must really think I’m nuts,” I half apologized to Alan Gartner, “and maybe there’s a lot more I can do right here instead. I’m ready to contribute any way you say.”

He consulted with his New York office and relayed the verdict. This particular weekend, the most important contribution could be made in Jackson.

I didn’t understand quite what the contribution was yet couldn’t seem to gather up the words to question it. Thursday already, May 30, Memorial Day. “Do you know of many housewives, Alan, who go down and do this sort of thing?”

“I know one.”

“Who?”

“You.”

“Check with Jackson to make sure,” I said, remembering a time when I was young and at a carnival and standing on the roller-coaster line with ropes on either side and people shoving me up forward from behind. A small insistent whim had set itself to motion, gained momentum, caught me in its whirlwind, and had dropped me down and left me at the mercy of a moving bus.

The numbness of my leaving was replaced now by another numbness coming from the sound of speed into a dark unknown and the air conditioning that blasted at my feet (I should have had the sense to

bring a coat!) and the exhausting effort to combat regret. Taunted by recall of sleep in my own bed — the whiteness of the sheets, the feel of Ivan's back against my side — I told myself the next stop was New York, and when I got there, all I had to do was turn around.

I walked into the Port Authority Terminal at 2 a.m., a huge and dimly yellow place with the smell of disinfectant rising through the stale remains of vanished crowds. I wondered where to go. According to the timetable, I had to spend an hour in New York. There was something, though, familiar in the atmosphere, a concentrate of long-forgotten nightmares. I hurried toward the rest room, swinging a wide arc around the shouting Negro and the cursing Irishman engaged in drunken warfare. The police had separated them when I came out. They left the Negro sitting on the bench immobile and were dragging the aggressor toward a door and telling him to go on home and sleep it off. I went over to the line of phone booths and considered. Who could I call up at this ungodly hour? I dallied at the newsstand, checked the buses back to Boston, and at last allowed the rolling stairs to take me to the lower platform where the bus to Washington and all points south departed.

The cold grey dawn. I should have had the sense to bring a coat. Memorial route through Washington. Washington Memorial, Capitol Building, Jefferson Memorial, Lincoln... . I saw it as I saw it when my grandmother had taken me after grade-school graduation. A perfect gift, she had decided, for the first in the family born in America. Freedom child—that was me. Richmond.

Richmond to the Carolinas, evening and into Georgia. Strange Land. Why? Ivan and I had come this way before, our children had been born here, we had lived below the Mason Dixon Line for three whole years! But then it was a slightly different South. The lid was on it still, the bubbling ingredients had not boiled over yet, and if we didn't like the scent of southern cooking, nobody was forcing us to stay. Certainly it wasn't up to us to change the recipe.

"How long will I have to stay in jail?" I'd said to Alan Gartner at the bus station.

"CORE leaves that decision up to you," he answered. "Jail is a uniquely personal and often dangerous experience. You're completely at the mercy of...."

Union Springs. A hideous accident ahead — a car hung half-way off the mountain road, and, to my utter horror, the bus came to a stop beside it. Three men lay scattered face down in the lush green grass.

"You got help comin'?" called our driver to the people who stood staring by the highway's edge.

"Yes."

And I experienced a strange relief. The pressure that had steadily increased since I left Boston lifted. I felt like I had just come out of major surgery.

"Sure there's nothin' I can do?" the driver called.

"Sure."

And we moved onward through the morning sunshine toward Montgomery, Meridian, and Jackson, Mississippi.

Now the bus made frequent stops along the countryside to pick up local passengers — plantation workers, I supposed. Sitting in the front seat watching them come on — as placid, brown, and self-contained as summer turtles — I wondered if my presence made the slightest bit of difference to them. No. These were strangers whom I'd never meet. But maybe on this lonely touch with. And maybe that would be some common thing that touched these people too, but they were not my first concern. I'd seen the nature of my first concern. I had, at least, pulled out that weed of fear that had been choking me so long. I'd grabbed hold of it when I left Boston, and soon after that I tried to let it go again because I sensed that at the very root *I did not want to die!* and this seemed much too corny to take stock of. But resistance only loosened the protective soil that kept the fear embedded. I could not return it to the depths from where it sprung. I could only yank it up through consciousness and struggle with the horror of its possibility.

And then for the first time ever, I had witnessed death strewn in three persons by the highway. I'd seen lush green grass beneath the faceless dead and realized what my fear had been attached to. All I really wanted was a chance to live! "Oh please," I pleaded silently, "I want to come to life before I die. I'm almost there. Just let me get there in the open once and try. I'm not asking for eternity, but just a little bit of living worth my while."

We crossed the Jackson city line. Whatever sort of jail they had I knew it would be roomier than where I'd been. I was ready to take my chances now, glad for the opportunity before it was too late.

I took a taxi to the Masonic Hall where the civil rights groups met. I walked into the hall and there — toward the back—stood forty Negro children in parade formation. Attracted by their neat white shirtwaists, I moved closer. They were holding small American flags, and they were singing "We shall overcome, We shall overcome," which made it radiantly clear that what I'd seen and pleaded for aboard the bus was nothing new to them. I never heard such singing, never saw a bunch of kids so totally unhampered by their puberty, so unbewildered, and so filled with purpose. They embodied all I ever read about The Spirit of '76 and showed me that my recent revelation was, in fact, a revolution old as human history. "The truth will make us free," they sang, and the wisdom of it shone like captured sunlight in the dark smooth satin of their foreheads. Forty children ready to march. I followed them out into the blazing street, these forty unarmed children, and I listened to the giant roar close in on them — enough blue helmeted policemen for a presidential motorcade! Big policemen swinging billy clubs, white citizens with heavy guns strapped to their heavy hips — all mobilized to snatch up children for the crime of a flag and a song and a wish to walk free.

"Where," I whispered to the Negro man beside me, "is the jail?"

"They rigged a special one for children on the Fairgrounds. The stinking exhibition buildings. They took the animals away so there'd be room enough to push the children in. And then they strung it all around with hog-wire."

The kids were singing still inside the paddy wagons — "We are not afraid." But soon the paddy wagons drove away, and there was nothing left except the sunset and the dust. The few adults, like me, who hadn't been arrested, moved as a receding tide along the silent street — and back into the hall.

Reverend Edwin King, his tall frame sagging slightly, leaned against the water fountain talking to his wife. "Well at least they didn't throw them in the garbage trucks this time. The kids were really frightened by the garbage trucks."

A gentle sigh from Mrs. King.

"I'm ready to participate," I said.

"You've only just arrived!"

How odd that I should have forgotten that. "Listen, if those kids can do it."

"The best thing you can do," said Ed, "is stay around awhile. Talk to as many people as you can. Get to know them. Tell them where you come from, who you are, and why you've come. Ask them all the questions that you want."

Really odd. I felt like I had been in Jackson half a lifetime, like I'd always known the Kings. Ed was Chaplain at Tougaloo, an integrated college just outside the city, and Jeannette was everything that made him possible. The two were white born Mississippians ("Southern traitors") whose dedication to the freedom movement kept them in a constant state of danger.

"You must be tired from your trip," Jeannette said sympathetically, "Come on, we're going to take you home."

Home, for the next few days, was with the Kings. We commuted back and forth between the college and the hall — police cars tailing everywhere we went. And I suppose it was the constant danger and the common cause that heightened the importance of each tiny moment and welded brief acquaintance into friendship.

I slept in a room with the Salter baby. John and Eldrie brought her over every night because whoever shot into their house had sent his bullet through the nursery window. And as I realized that a freedom song would someday weave around the pale and stony-faced professor Salter, I could understand his inaccessibility. His pain was too intense for anyone to bear, and out of courtesy to others, he would fold it back into himself. His smile, with just his lips, was like the sealing of an envelope.

It surprised me that Negroes were more open with emotion. I observed the children who had been through jail train younger children in nonviolence: "We got to show them who is beast. The switchblade never showed nobody nothin'." I spoke with Negro mothers, and I asked a lot of questions and began to see into the vastness between "child" and "innocence."

"But when," asked a little boy who watched his friend get thrown into the paddy wagon, "are the Americans coming? When are the Americans coming?"

"And when," I said to Medgar Evers, "will you let me do something!"

"You have already... just by being here." The warmth and the incredible compassion gathered in his face to tell me that I didn't have to go as far as jail to offer me my ticket home. "Your children must be missing

you,” he hinted.

“So must yours,” I hinted back. “You’ve been working day and night, but I guess it’s all a part of our responsibility to them.” “You’ve come a long, long ways,” he smiled, “and I appreciate—”

“Your kids and my kids are going to grow up in the same world, Medgar, and it’s getting smaller every day. There’s no more room for ‘yours’ and ‘mine’ anymore. Our kids are going to have to share whatever world we make for them, and you’ve been working very hard so please let me do some little thing.”

A flash of suffering crossed his face. He sighed. “All right then. Speak at the rally tonight, and we’ll let you go out tomorrow.”

The thought of speaking to a crowd of people who had been through hell and back embarrassed me. But when I walked across the platform to the lectern and the people rose and rocked me with the ocean-tide of their applause, I understood the message that I carried. “Tell them where you come from, who you are.” Well, I’d come out of Massachusetts, and I’d been through Barbara Massar so that these were details now that didn’t matter. What mattered was I could be counted as a woman from America who had cared enough to come.

The temperature climbed up next day to ninety-nine degrees. Shortly before noon, three Negroes and myself walked from the hall to Ed King’s car. Mr. Butler took the flag; the rest of us had placards. Fiorina’s said, “The truth shall not be jailed,” Mrs. Catching’s (whose girl had just been beaten in the concentration camp) said, “Do unto our children as you would do unto yours,” and I expressed belief that “When children suffer, all Americans suffer.”

“The City Hall,” Ed told me as we left the curb, “is set back over a hundred feet from the sidewalk so don’t let them convince you you’re inciting the emotions of a crowd. There won’t be a crowd — not with the policemen and the paddy wagons and photographers.”

Something in my chest began to swell and stiffen. I figured maybe I might stall off rigor mortis if I sang. And the others must have thought it was a good idea because they joined in right away. “We shall overcome, we shall overcome... .” All of us together in one voice. And when we got to “We are not afraid,” it didn’t seem so bad to feel afraid, and what we really meant was we were not afraid to be afraid. “Deep in my heart, I do believe.” Clearly, just as long as we kept singing, we could overcome.

“Okay now,” Ed instructed, “Mr. Butler, put the flag inside your shirt. You ladies keep your placards rolled until you reach the steps. God bless you.”

“The Lord is on our side,” we sang quietly to help each other towards the steps.

I had not considered “God” or “Lord” as part of this at all. And as I placed the placard string around my neck, my only thought was to maintain that level that the singing had achieved, to keep my lips in motion. “Our Father,” as long as we were on the subject, “which art in heaven” The sun beat down like lead pipe on my head. “Give us this day...” I wondered if I’d faint, “and forgive us our trespasses.” That is

when the thing came over me — the unexpected blessing. I could feel the shape and form of it come up into my mouth “as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

“I’m goin’ to ask you to move on,” said Captain Ray. He had to say it in a microphone to make himself be heard, to say it in the company of a bunch of big policemen with blue helmets, leather belts, and guns.

God, I thought, there ought to be a simpler way than forcing these policemen out into the sun with all that heavy armor on.

“You’re blockin’ the entrance to City Hall,” crowed Captain Ray, “move on.”

The City Hall is six miles long, I thought, and we are praying nowhere near the doors. I came here to bear witness, not to make a public fool of you. I don’t want to do it. Can’t you see you’re doing it to yourself? Can’t you see!

“I’m goin’ to ask you one more time.... move on.”

“but deliver us from evil...”

“All right. You’re under arrest.”

I’m sorry, Captain Ray. I *really* am.

The Jackson City jail is full of echoes, and the hollow clang of cell doors closing freedom in. The iron cot, the urine stench imbedded in the mattress, the cockroaches, the tin cup, and the filthy toilet open to the jailer’s view must be expected and withstood in any prison. And none of these can take away the dignity of right. And there is something to be said for Jackson’s jail. When the Negro prison trustee — driven to my window by misguided masters or misguided sex — could see I hadn’t come so far for a relationship with him, he let me be. Policemen and detectives spoke with me, at least, gave me the opportunity to overcome hostility and ignorance (the prisoner in WOMAN WHITE was not a Communist, no fanatic; some people believed in liberty and justice just because they thought that it was right). At least I was permitted in the Jackson jail to *meet the challenges!*

And that is not exactly how it is at home. I have been at home three months and still my three short days in prison make some people feel uncomfortable. And there are attitudes around me that I find more difficult to deal with since they’re hidden and unspoken. The Northern “Liberal But” has found excuses for the fear the Southern Bigot has admitted, and the “Liberal Liberal” (that was me!) does not really wish to face the fear at all.

“But Negroes ought to concentrate on their own improvement first,” says Liberal But who calls a spade a spade and the kettle black. “But they’re biting off the very hand that feeds them!” he exclaims — rejecting peaceful demonstrations that, in fact, comprise his only stay of execution.

And throughout all this the Liberal Liberal remains aloof. I know one who despises agitation — considers it degrading and, if he must say so, uncouth.

“Barbara, you have got to,” he will smile a smile identical to Ross Barnett’s, “give these people *time!*”

“Time and tide,” I try to tell him, but he’s up to his ears and cannot hear me anymore.

And it’s a shame since I would like to tell him that the time is not for me to give or take away, that the evening is already spread against the sky, the moment at its crisis, and the overwhelming question “Do I Dare” will soon be answered one way or another.

[\[1\]](#) In these early days of the Civil Rights Movement, the word *Negro* was the preferred term chosen by the African-American community to describe themselves.