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White Women in the 1960s Freedom Movement, From Memory to History: The writing of “Shiloh Witness,” a chapter in *Deep in Our Hearts* (2000)

Joan Browning

Guest editor's note

Joan C. Browning, a white woman from rural Georgia, became an antiracist activist in the early 1960s. She worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and other organizations until 1963 and participated in the Albany Freedom Ride of December 1961. In the following essay, she discusses the writing of an autobiographical chapter for *Deep in Our Hearts* (2000), a collective book published by nine white female veterans of the 1960s Freedom Movement.

This is an exceptional document in many respects. First, it is a rare primary source framing its author's personal experience within the context of the Southern Civil Rights Movement. As such, it is a powerful example of the interconnection between memory and history. This text also contributes to the construction of a contested collective memory. It reveals the tensions between the myriad individual stories told by veteran activists and the academic narrative developed by historians. Throughout this essay, Browning ponders over the stakes of self-writing from a historical perspective, from the most intimate considerations to ethical, scientific, and political issues. She especially engages scholars to think more deeply about the place of private information in the writing of history. Her critical discussion of feminist historians' use of women's sexual history as academic material is particularly stimulating.

Interestingly, this article is also an opportunity for Browning to develop a new, challenging interpretation of the movement she participated in, based on recently found evidence. Her essay thus ends with a heated discussion of highly controversial issues such as sexism within SNCC, and the shift from nonviolence to Black Power after 1964. Especially relevant to the theme of this

dossier, are her regrets about her chapter in *Deep in Our Hearts*. At the time of her writing in 2000, she did not describe her emotions, feelings, and personal opinions for fear of triggering hostile reactions. Having found new factual material, she can use the following essay to rectify part of her story by including original comments, some of which are very critical of SNCC after 1964. Her insistence on updating the historical narrative by adding to it emotions and subjectivity reflects one the latest epistemological trends in the study of social movements. It confirms the highly contested character of history as an academic field under the ongoing influence of social activists.

- 1 In 2000, the University of Georgia Press published *Deep In Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement*, a collection of autobiographical essays by white female veterans of the 1960s black liberation movement. I was one of the nine authors. Like the two project leaders, Sandra “Casey” Hayden and Constance “Connie” Curry, I was involved in the nonviolent Southern movement from its early stages. As white women in a majority-black movement, we constituted a distinctive, hardly visible minority. The *Deep in Our Heart* Project took shape in the mid-nineties, at a time when the history of the so-called Civil Rights Movement had become a contested field where veteran activists increasingly challenged scholars’ interpretations in a spate of autobiographical narratives. In the book that resulted from the project, nine white women—including myself—told their personal stories of the black Freedom Movement. I titled my chapter “Shiloh Witness.” The present essay probes into the questions raised by writing this story: it is my story of writing of “Shiloh Witness.” It is an “autobiography of an autobiography,” as one reviewer very aptly put it. This is the personal journey of one outside the formal study of the literature on issues relevant to memory and history. During the many drafts of “Shiloh Witness,” it was simply titled “My Story.” This contribution is my description of how the group came to write together. It begins with Casey Hayden and Connie Curry speaking for themselves. I describe how I used historical research and personal memory to write the history of my time in the Freedom Movement. I address the questions: How did I proceed with remembering and researching? How did I decide what to include and what to exclude? Who was I writing for, i.e., who was the expected audience? What do I regret omitting?
- 2 The collaboration that resulted in the publication of *Deep in Our Hearts* began with a call to each of the writers from Sandra Cason, known by her Freedom Movement name, Casey Hayden. As she explained at the first meeting, in May 1995, she traced this book idea to about 1978, when she wrote a proposal to interview the women who had lived in the Literacy House, a small residence near the Tougaloo College campus in Jackson, Mississippi, that was occupied during the early 1960s by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). “We were all very fragmented, a ‘diaspora’ of the Movement,” she said. “And I think that was the motivating force that made me want to do some work that would gather up remnants of the Movement” (*Deep in Our Hearts* writing group). Casey’s proposal lay dormant until the 1994 Freedom Summer reunion in Jackson, Mississippi. “I got there and there was a lot of talk about telling your story,” Casey said. “Tell your story. We have to get it out there. It’s not out there. [...] So I started reading everything and I realized that the history was so erroneous. I was reading Mary King’s book, *Freedom Song*, and I said we should all get together” (*Deep in Our Hearts* writing group).
- 3 The first meeting of the women who became the *Deep in Our Hearts* writers was held in May 1995 at Connie Curry’s beach house at Hunting Island, South Carolina. Connie

described how she came to be part of the writing group. Connie said: “I started writing my book [*Silver Rights*]. I was very aware that the truth needs to be told in history. And I had never been aware of that as much as I was when I was doing research and writing and there was a lot of stuff that was not being told correctly” (Deep in Our Hearts writing group). Ten women responded positively to the call to come to Connie’s beach house at Hunting Island, South Carolina. Other meetings were held in October 1995 at Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina; in June 1996 in Weston, Vermont; and in April 1997, as guests of Washington & Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, for a week before making the group’s first presentation about the project, at the annual conference of the Mid-Atlantic Oral History Association.

- 4 *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement* presents individual autobiographical writings around overlapping experiences and a common theme. All of the writers were volunteers, staff, or allied with the SNCC for some of the years from 1960 to 1966. The purpose is summarized in the book’s preface:

These are the stories of the costly times we wouldn’t have missed for the world, and of the people and places and events that filled them. We speak to several questions: Why us? Why did we, of all the white women growing up in our hometowns, cross the color line in the days of segregation and join the Southern Freedom Movement of the sixties? How did we find our way? What happened to us there? How did we leave, and what did we take with us? And, especially, what was it like? (Curry *et al.* xiii)

Each writer would speak only for herself, the group agreed.

But we all speak concretely and intimately. We are coming from our hearts. We have tried, in telling our stories, to be true to the best of what we learned in the movement—to be brave and kind and radical and honest [...]. Our book is about girls growing up in a revolutionary time and place. It is about love and politics and the transcendence of racial barriers. We offer this work to enrich the chronicle of a social movement that forever changed the country and our lives. It was our privilege to have been there. (Curry *et al.* xix, xv)

Would I accept the invitation to be a part of the Deep in Our Hearts writing project? If yes, how? I was one of those that Casey described as in the “diaspora.” After remaining in Atlanta through the early 1970s and working on short-term grant-funded assignments in several human relations organizations, for the past many decades I had made my home on Fort Hill in Greenbrier County, West Virginia. All my effort had gone into creating a life, working at jobs paying inadequate income, and becoming a citizen in my new place.

- 5 My contacts with the Movement community were scarce. Over the years Connie Curry and I stayed in touch. Friends had given me Mary King’s *Freedom Song* and Tom Hayden’s *Reunion*.
- 6 Part of my income also came from transcribing oral history interviews. I transcribed Connie Curry’s interviews with about a dozen people for her book, *Silver Rights* (1995). These transcriptions immersed me in first-person stories of personal heroism to desegregate public schools and to register to vote. Other oral history interview transcription clients included Adam Fairclough for his *Race & Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (1995); another British historian who had conducted interviews for a proposed book about Casey Hayden; and West Virginia’s *Goldenseal Magazine*. In the process, I learned much about the craft of oral history.
- 7 Connie was in residence in 1990 and 1991 at the University of Virginia on a post-doctoral fellowship near my West Virginia home. She introduced me to West Virginia

novelist Mary Lee Settle, who was writing a fictional piece that included white women in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, *Choices* (1995). Connie told Mary Lee that I was a more likely person for background as I was more “on the front lines” than she herself had been. Connie and I were guest speakers in Julian Bond’s University of Virginia classes on Civil Rights Movement history, and I was also introduced to a swath of 1960s historians and former activists. Connie and Julian examined the little box of papers that I had saved from the Movement and declared them important. “You must do something with these notes and letters from jail,” Julian said. “Write, write your memories. [...] There’s a great shortage of first person accounts in civil rights history. FILL THAT VOID!” (Bond). Connie concurred. Joanne Grant joined Casey, Connie, and Julian in urging me to write about my time in the movement. In my copy of her 1998 book *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound* (Grant, 1998), Joanne inscribed: “To Joan—One of Ella Baker’s children and who has an accurate memory of our past. Joanne Grant 4/15/98.”¹

- 8 What did I really remember? Before reading anything about the Movement, I spent about three months deliberately writing what I actually remembered all those years later. Some memories were clear, some were sketchy, some I questioned. I prepared timelines of where I was when and who was also there. I jotted down notes about different “roles” and who played which roles in my story. I went back to childhood and remembered every encounter with an African American. I tried to remember what I knew and when I knew it. I remembered. And occasionally recollection led to weeping and laughing.
- 9 I put the notes and letters I had written on paper towels and toilet paper while I was in jail as an Albany Freedom Rider into archival quality envelopes. I transcribed the smudged and scribbled notes and put them into chronological order.
- 10 And then I read. First I reached for the books in my home. Mary King’s *Freedom Song, A Personal story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement* (1987), of course, and Tom Hayden’s *Reunion: A Memoir* (1988), both gifts from one of the few people who knew about my participation in the early 1960s freedom struggle. I read again Lillian Smith’s *Killers of the Dream* (1949), which I had bought “17 March 1964.” And W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (1903), that I had bought “8-11-61.” I remembered this paragraph from Du Bois’ 1903 essay about the Freedmen’s Bureau, “Of the Dawn of Freedom”:

I have seen a land right merry with the sun, where children sing, and rolling hills lie like pensioned women wanton with harvest. And there in the King’s Highway sat and sits a figure veiled and bowed, by which the traveler’s footsteps hasten as they go. On the tainted air broods fear. Three centuries’ thought has been the raising and unveiling of that bowed human heart, and now behold a century new for the duty and the deed. The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line. (Du Bois 14)

I read again Numan V. “Bud” Bartley’s *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950’s* (1969) that I had kept over the years for its clear description of the Jim Crow world in which I came of age, and because Bud had included me in his acknowledgements. Two of Pat Watters’ books helped me to learn and to understand more about the times and events in which I was sometimes a part: *Down to Now: Reflections on the Southern Civil Rights Movement* (1971) and (with Reese Cleghorn) *Climbing Jacob’s Ladder: The Arrival of Negroes in Southern Politics* (1967).

- 11 Others that I read and re-read during this research included C. Vann Woodward’s *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955), a gift from the 1962 Fisk University Race Relations

Institute group, for which I had been the secretary. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* and "On Civil Disobedience"; and Will D. Campbell's *Race and the Renewal of the Church* (1962). Julian and Connie had introduced me to Patricia Sullivan at the University of Virginia. I devoured her work about the generations before the Civil Rights Movement, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (1996). And upon Casey's recommendation, I read Sara Evans' *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement & the New Left* (1979).

- 12 My reading then expanded. Fortunately, I happened upon the Jefferson-Madison Regional Library (Charlottesville, Virginia) book sale the year that University of Virginia professor, Paul M. Gaston, donated his library, so I brought home a small truckload of more academic books.
- 13 All those books! Surely everything and everyone important to telling the Freedom Movement story had already been written. And yet discrepancies caught my attention. I was surprised that Connie Curry and Casey Hayden, my prototypical "white women in the Freedom Movement," seemed inadequately and inaccurately included in the histories. If history accurately recorded those two, I had thought, they would adequately represent all the "white women" of my generation. But they were not.
- 14 I found myself in two of Howard Zinn's books. In *The Southern Mystique* (1964), in the chapter titled "Is the Southern White Unfathomable?", he first describes me as "a young white girl of about nineteen, slender, shy, a student at Georgia State College who came from a small town in South Georgia," whom his wife had invited to their house after meeting her at a lecture on Spelman campus in 1961. He goes on to recall the second time he saw me, in December of the same year, during the Albany Movement:

Every time we create a new situation of encouragement, another human being steps out of the shadows and comes forward. One autumn evening in 1961, my wife returned from a lecture on campus and with her was a young white girl of about nineteen, slender, shy, a student at Georgia State College who came from a small town in South Georgia. She had heard that an interesting lecture was being given at a Negro college on "the other side of town"; she became curious, and so, that evening, found herself sitting and listening in a mostly Negro audience. On the way out, she and my wife had begun a conversation, and then there she was in our living-room. We talked for a while, and she left.

We didn't see her again. In December, I traveled down into Southwest Georgia, to the city of Albany, in an uproar at that time after Negro demonstrations. At a mass meeting in a Negro church my first night in Albany, I listened to the chairman offer welcome to a group of students who had just been released from jail. They came down the aisle to the front of the church, and one of them was the slim, shy girl who had visited our house that night in Atlanta. (Zinn, 1970 80-81)

The little box of materials I had saved from the sixties proved that this was indeed me. I kept notes of that lecture: "Nonviolence, Civil Disobedience and the Future of the Negro." The date was "12 October 1961, Thursday, p.m.," and the lecturer was "Dr. M.L. King." In distinctly different penmanship was written, "Roslyn & Howard Zinn, Spelman College" (Browning, 1961).

- 15 And so, thanks to Howard Zinn, I was in history, though without a name. In his report on the Albany Movement in December 1961, Zinn named me and quoted me in *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*.

Shiloh Baptist Church was packed that first night after the prisoners came out of jail. People stood up and sang Freedom Songs. In front, leading the singing, holding hands, was a line of SNCC workers, among them, several who would later become

known throughout the nation as the Freedom Singers: Bernice Johnson and Rutha Harris of Albany, Bertha Gober, and Cordell Reagan. In the middle of the meeting, Joan Browning, the young white girl who had been arrested with the original riders from Atlanta, walked down the aisle to the microphone. She had just been released from jail, and was out of breath. She spoke briefly in her soft Southern accent: "First time I've ever been in jail. It's a funny mixed-up feeling to hate being in a dirty place—but to be glad you're there for a good reason [...]" (Zinn, 1964 132)

Howard Zinn had included me in the history as one of the Albany Freedom Riders, and that was enough attention for me. But even as careful and contemporaneous a reporter as Howard Zinn did not identify Casey Hayden as one of the Albany Freedom Riders, nor did he describe how Connie Curry drove Ella Baker to Albany during those weeks when a thousand local people were jailed. Connie and Ms. Baker, as well as Frances Pauley—one of these older Southern white women who actively supported the 1960s movement—were in Albany to offer assistance to persons coming out of jail.

- 16 Since the writing about the very identity of the Albany Freedom Riders was so incomplete and/or plain wrong in facts and interpretation, and almost all writers ignored Casey Hayden as one of the Albany Freedom Riders, I agreed to consider joining the Deep In Our Hearts group to write about my slice of Movement history. One of my driving purposes was to put Casey Hayden on the Albany Freedom Ride. I also hoped to demonstrate the importance and value of the role that Connie Curry and Casey Hayden, among many others, played as "observers" in sit-in demonstrations, pickets, and Freedom Rides.
- 17 As a test of Freedom Movement historical writing, I looked at writing about the Albany Freedom Ride, an event that was clear in my memory and documented in detail in my letters from the Albany jails, newspaper reports, the Southern Regional Council's reports, the SNCC and Albany Movement press releases, and other primary sources.
- 18 The result of this research was published as "Invisible Revolutionaries: White Women in Civil Rights Movement Historiography," in the Fall 1996 issue of the *Journal of Women's History*. I wrote: "A literature review of this one simple event in which I was a participant is discouraging in its diversity of error. The ways that even careful and sympathetic writers can distort the historical record are shown below" (Browning, 1996 187). The *Journal of Women's History* article was written for a Marshall University College of Graduate Studies course on Gender and Leadership. During 1995 I also completed a Marshall University graduate class on historiography, where I learned more about historical research and writing techniques and ways to weigh evidence. I used the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill oral history process to learn more about conducting oral history interviews. I began attending meetings of historians, especially the Shenandoah Valley Regional Studies Seminar. And finally I was ready to make appointments for oral history interviews with relatives: Aunt Frankie Alfred Walfield, Aunt Ruth Browning Livingston, and Aunt Helen Browning Moore; my older brother Wayne Browning and younger brother Bobby Browning; and my sisters Joyce Browning Ashley and Polly Browning Montford. And I started visiting archives: Georgia College and State University, successor to Georgia State College for Women; the SNCC and Southern Student National Student Association Southern Human Rights Project collections at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, in Atlanta, Georgia; the Southern Regional Council Papers at Atlanta University; and I searched for others, especially the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity. Later I would spend time at the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University in the

Federation of Southern Cooperatives papers, and that is where I discovered the Fisk University Race Relations Institute files.

- 19 I also ordered Georgia newspapers on microfilm: *The Telfair Enterprise*, a county weekly that I would have read from about 1950 until I left for college in 1959; *The Wheeler County Eagle*, another weekly in the county in which I was born and lived until I was four; *The Statesman*, published by Eugene and then Herman Talmadge; and the *Augusta Courier*, which had been mailed to me in Atlanta in 1961 and 1962.
- 20 That research was used to prepare papers presented at various conferences, such as “A Quiet and Sinister Tyranny: Public Scrutiny of White Women Who Violated Segregation’s Color Line in Atlanta, Georgia, 1940-1965”; “Freedom and Unfreedom: Breaking Out of the Cage of Race”; “Who Runs Georgia 1948-1998?: A Symposium on Democracy in Georgia Then and Now”; and “The Power to Witness: Religious Motivation for ‘Putting Your Body on the Line’ as a Freedom Rider.”
- 21 As they had in the movement era, Connie and Casey were supportive and encouraging as I worked through this process. After reading a draft of “Invisible Revolutionaries,” Casey wrote,

Dear Joan, I think your paper is just brilliant. It is the only instance I’ve seen that takes a particular historical event and critiques it. You have done what the rest of us talked about. I think it should be a part of the book. I think you should include it with your biography when (if) you mail out the March 1 draft. I was moved by all the hard work and attention that went into it. I can see you doing this work, using your life this way to light up a truth for others. This is the real heart of it all. [...] you might distinguish the Albany Freedom Ride white female participants as Southern.² I think it is important to say how regional the movement was at the beginning. Historians discount this by pointing to James Forman and others who were not Southern. We, of course, were, and should say so. The implications of actions like you took in your own backyard are different from going somewhere else to do good. Sara Evans also left you out. At the beginning [when I was in Atlanta] Mary King wasn’t around. It was you, me, Connie, Dorothy [Dawson Burlage]. Before that, Jane [Stembridge]. Mary was later. All the early white women were Southern. We crossed over into new territory, the integrated life, exploring and mapping as best we could, risking everything. (C. Hayden, 1996)

And yet I was reluctant to write about myself. I did not feel that I had done anything special enough to write about. I struggled with issues of privacy. How does one write about oneself as part of such a populated movement without writing also about other people? A quote from the *New York Times Book Review* from the 1990s haunted and still haunts me. A woman whose unauthorized biography had been printed compared the experience to being attacked by “flesh eating bacteria.” I would not knowingly inflict flesh eating bacteria on anyone else’s life story, nor on my life.

- 22 All that remembering and writing about myself was bound to have unpleasant moments. I took to heart what Lillian Smith wrote about the act of autobiography:

So, when a story teller—and every autobiographer is a story teller—starts out to tell his own story, he has to search deep and wide to know what that story really is. This is a spiritual and intellectual ordeal. It is more: it is a creative ordeal for he is actually creating his own Self and his own life as he writes, because he is giving it its meaning. [...] What a courageous, and almost demiurgic task to set out on the quest for the meaning of one’s life, what stoical honesty is required in order to write it down! No wonder most of us settle for smaller matters. No wonder women for the most part have settled for notebooks and diaries and journals. [...] As every

autobiography is an act of penance—but it was also for me, if I may say, a very serious thing, a step toward redemption. (Smith, 1977 48)

By now, I had come to understand that not all of us from the early 1960s Freedom Movement were kind to each other. Although I wanted my writing to meet historians' scholarly standards for verification, I would write only about matters that were proven factually accurate. That was a challenge, as I realized that historical details and interpretation were sometimes vigorously and unpleasantly contested, as David Garrow noted:

When civil rights movement veterans and the historians who write about them get together and discuss the pivotal events of the early 1960s, inevitable differences quickly emerge. The human memories of those who were there and the old but contemporaneous documents relied upon by scholars, sometimes offer very divergent portraits of the people and organizations, who spurred the racial reform of the American South. [...] How the writers struggle to square what they "know" happened with how those who took part now remember what occurred, involves an insoluble human dilemma in which both parties ought to constantly remind themselves that their version of history may be both selectively incomplete and sometimes downright wrong. [...] [T]hose of us who write about the movement ought to be more appreciative, and more tolerant, of the emotional selectivity of human memory. [...] Scholars must adopt an attitude of critical humility toward how complete are the truths we can derive from the thousands of old letters, minutes, and reports. (Garrow)

I did not want to put my entire life on public display but I was looking for a new direction. In the early days of the Deep in Our Hearts project, I was in a year-long discernment process to decide if I were called to be an Episcopal priest. Finally, I chose writing.

- 23 I hesitated as well because my story would not be true without describing how my religious beliefs undergird my activism and I did not know how to talk to scholars about my faith. It was quite a challenge to find a way to be truthful about why I was in the Freedom Movement without sounding churchy or phony. Some of the folks who knew me "in the day" described me as having been "prissy." That is not how I remember myself and certainly not how I wanted to present myself. It is difficult to describe inner convictions so strong that they sustain one through life-threatening danger.
- 24 I am always grateful that my introduction to the philosophy and technique, and indeed the theology, of nonviolent civil disobedience came from the Rev. James Lawson. Further instruction came from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the lecture I attended in October 1961 and in his writings (King 102-105).
- 25 Who would care to read about white women in the Freedom Movement? Early on, Connie and Casey, with concurrence of others in the project, agreed that historians were our likely audience. So I set out to try to predict what historians would find interesting about my life. As I wrote to one of the book's contributors, Penny Patch,
will anyone want to publish our book? Yes, I've always thought that our best placement would be a university press. Several reasons: first, they'll allow us much more control over the content than a trade press. Second, they'll keep it in print much longer, and I do think that it will take a while for our book to find its audience. Third, I have always felt that we were interesting but marginal stories, best suited to quixotic or "exceptionalist" study of recent American history—i.e [...] academia. (Browning, 1998)

To learn about historians' interest in women, Connie, Joanne Grant, and I attended the 1996 Berkshire Conference, one of the largest gatherings of historians of women, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. We attended a session chaired by Darlene Clark Hine of Michigan State University titled "Feminist Biography and the Construction of Racial and Sexual Identities." Estelle B. Freedman of Stanford University presented the first paper at that session, "'The Burning of Letters Continues': Elusive Identities and the Historical Construction of Sexuality." Freedman was writing about a woman prison warden who had a long-term relationship with another woman—a relationship which they both sought to hide from the public and, as time went on, from history. In spite of their obvious desire to conceal this private part of their lives, the scholar insisted on bringing it to light and saying that it is crucial to our understanding of American history to know of the relationship. Since many of the women's papers were in fact burned or otherwise not available to this historian, much innuendo replaced facts, including innuendo regarding a possible lesbian relationship between Eleanor Roosevelt and the warden.

- 26 Next came a presentation by Barbara Ransby, "Ella Baker's Story and the Writing of Black Feminist Biography: a Conversation Between Sisters Living and Dead." Barbara talked about her imagined conversations with Ella Baker in great (and to me quite strange) detail. Then she launched into a discussion of Ella's marriage, suggesting quite strongly that the shadowy figure of Ella's husband was either in fact a lesbian relationship or else a cover for lesbian relationship(s). Anyway, Joanne Grant says that Barbara has misinterpreted the FBI files about the husband, and maybe about other elements of Ella's life. The comments that I recall were by Blanche Wiesen Cook, who connected the two papers to her biography of Eleanor Roosevelt, in which she presents her case that Eleanor Roosevelt was also a lesbian, using papers not intended for public purposes and, I thought, unsubstantiated leaps from slim evidence to conclusions. Most of the questions seemed to come from lesbian historians laying claim to these historical women. The warden, Ella Baker, and Eleanor Roosevelt could perform monumental public good works, but all that seemed of any interest on that day in Chapel Hill was their private sexual intimacy, real or imagined by historical writers.
- 27 All in all, I left the session believing that women/feminists believe that the most important aspect of any woman's life is her sexual history, and that historians are willing to draw conclusions about women's sexual relationships based on the flimsiest of evidence. Of course, I knew or suspected details that I would never divulge about the sexual adventures of my Freedom Movement friends. Further, I was incensed that historians used private documents, clearly not intended for a wider audience. As a long-time almost absolutist civil libertarian, I think there's an *a priori* right to privacy in personal matters that supersedes any public "right to know" and that the individual gets to make that determination. I was angry that Ella's life was treated this way, and Eleanor Roosevelt's.
- 28 As I reported to Casey and Connie,
- I left the session determined to begin my own "burning" before opening my life and my "papers" to the public. For example, I have very private journals in which I write things I planned to use in fiction, but which some damned historian could claim has factual content. Not true! Some is plagiarized from my reading; other is highly fantasized. (Browning, 1997 b)
- In response to an article of hers on the subject (Hall, 1998), I communicated with Professor Jacquelyn D. Hall about my concerns in regard to privacy. I wrote:

My notes have you saying, among other intriguing statements, “The personal is the personal,” and “Our task is to honor the search and the reticence of our value of difference between knowledge and exposure.” My interest, alas, is personal. As one of the women working on the joint autobiography, *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement*, and as someone who has somewhat reluctantly donated “papers” to Emory University Library’s Special Collections, I am opening up parts of my life. I hope, though, that I am opening only the parts that I select. After hearing a session at the Chapel Hill Berkshires Conference on Ella Baker, at which Blanche Cook commented, and talks with other historians of women and women who are subjects of historical research, I want to know more about what historians make of the data trail we leave behind. Ultimately, I want to know whether I can share the unique perspective I have about the original sin of segregation and yet preserve a modicum of privacy. What must I destroy to keep my “personal” forever out of the historical record? Or, as you demonstrated so well with Lumpkin, is it impossible to expunge private parts of my life? Have I, by “telling my story” of my civil rights movement experience, already forfeited all privacy? (Browning, 1999)

Dr. Hall responded,

I admire your project so much. I would be horrified to think that I had encouraged you to expunge parts of your life, although I understand your feelings about privacy all too well. I continually grapple with these tensions in my life and work. In the end, I believe that we must speak and write as fully and honestly as we can. [...] I hope very much that by writing as openly as I am about these tensions, about the search, about the destruction and the secrets, I am not encouraging other women to destroy. That would be the very opposite of what I hope my work will do [...] which is to encourage historians to be sensitive to the issues of privacy and self-representation and to encourage women to create and preserve the documents that will write fully into history. (Hall, 1999)

After I e-mailed Casey to report on the Berkshire session, she responded:

You are in an interesting position, a commentator who is the subject of historical inquiry rather than the inquirer. So in that position you are speaking in favor of your own privacy. However, the issue of one’s sexual history as public history is an important one in women’s history circles. And in feminist circles. [...] Be careful if you are going to defend privacy. It is really politically incorrect.

On a more proactive note, you might suggest areas of historical inquiry which aren’t usually included. In the movement, for example, I spent a lot of time at the literacy house creating space, actual physical space, for people to be in to talk, sleep, eat, cool out, r&r. That kind of work is not usually considered movement work, probably because it is usually women’s work. What goes into it, what are the motivations of those who do this work, benefits to oneself and to the recipients of the work, one’s guests or co-livers? How much of it went on, where, why... I’m interested in traditional womanly tasks as they express themselves in “historically significant” settings... Women in those roles know a lot, as blacks used to, who were always on the scene in white people’s houses and absorbed everything. How can historical inquiry be built around that kind of role?

Another example of the same thinking is your observer as leader idea. That is, you saw support people as leaders. How interesting. Usually support people are not seen as leaders at all. My whole leadership in the nonviolence idea is an expansion of that same notion. [...] The notion that the support people are the leaders, that organizers are leaders, is in some way an examination of the hidden aspects of traditional women’s roles as nurturers, an examination of the actual activity in such roles, and its impact. So instead of spinning off the relationship of women to men, or women’s victim status, or women’s using more literate tools through which their lives enter history (writing diaries, for example) it elevates traditional roles to a new status. I think there is a lot of that kind of work happening in women’s history. (C. Hayden, 1997 a)

Several historians offered valuable critique and suggestions as we of the Deep in Our Hearts writing group circulated drafts. In a response I never mailed, I reacted to comments by Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, September 10, 1997. I wrote:

When I read histories of the Freedom Movement, I never find “poor white” freedom fighters. True, there weren’t many of us, but we traveled a long distance from home to the Movement, and we paid high prices. In the early days, our skin color was necessary to “integrate” the Movement and show the larger culture the “white” in “black and white together.” Is it best that, in Movement history, we remain absent? On the issues you raised—racial polarization in the Movement; relationships with black women/black men (and may I add white men and other white women and other generations of all genders & colors?); gender issues and gender politics within the Movement—my experiences are, I would argue, more “regular” rather than the intense cutting-edge, society-shaping experiences of SNCC organizers. In fact, I describe myself not as an “organizer” but as a “witness.” I came into the Movement from religious upbringing and exploration and because segregation limited my range of choices. Mine was a selfish tearing down of my walls and a witnessing to deeply held spiritual beliefs. (Browning, 1997 a)

I also wrote:

The story I have to offer is that of a white woman growing up in virtual racial and information isolation, coming through the rural church, nurtured by feminine and very strong multi-generations of women kinfolk, and raised to believe I could do anything I wanted to do. When I was born, about half the people in the United States lived on farms. When I finished high school, the number was down to a quarter. Now, it’s less than three percent. So, is my childhood experience so alien to the majority culture’s as to be obsolete, merely a quaint artifact from a dead civilization? (Browning, 1997 a)

I struggled with the issue of using my memory to write my history. What is memory? What is autobiography? Timothy Dow Adams, Associate Professor of English at West Virginia University, wrote: “As fundamental as truth is to autobiography, modern readers have increasingly come to realize that telling the truth about oneself on paper is virtually impossible” (Adams 9). Adams cites Paul John Eakin’s *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*: “Autobiography is better understood as a ceaseless process of identity formation in which new versions of the past evolve to meet the constantly changing requirements of the self in each successive present” (Eakin 36, quoted by Adams 122).

- 29 My notion of memory as a filing cabinet of facts was further informed by how, instead, memory consists of material learned, not by heart, but by soul, in a complicated pattern of psychological self-deceptions and constructions that are explained in detail in Daniel Goleman’s *Vital Lies, Simple Truths: The Psychology of Self-Deception*.

- 30 Another author, Herbert Liebowitz, used the example of St. Augustine to describe the difficulties of autobiography:

No autobiographer has dropped a plumb line deeper into the soul or searched memory more painstakingly for the causes of an infirm and sinful will than Saint Augustine in his *Confessions*; the inside is, for Augustine, the site of divinity and guilt, friendship and carnal desire, a sacred space overcast by the clouds of a corrupt world and a fractious will. Yet that tempting outside, however much it interferes with the access of God’s grace, is never wholly repudiated. (Liebowitz 16)

Time and distance and new information lead to different ways of describing the past. For example, in 1962 I read W.E.B. Du Bois’ *Souls of Black Folks* first published in 1903 and use this quote often: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in

America and the islands of the sea” (Du Bois 23). Yet Du Bois, who remains for me the rock of truth, changed his mind, added nuance, employed the analysis of another half century of experience. In his 1953 preface to the new edition of *The Souls of Black Folks*, he wrote:

I still think today as yesterday that the color line is a great problem of this century. But today I see more clearly than yesterday that back of the problem of race and color, lies a greater problem which both obscures and implements it: and that is the fact that so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellowmen; that to maintain this privilege men have waged war until today. War tends to become universal and continuous, and the excuse for this war continues largely to be color and race. (Du Bois xiii)

While Du Bois’ views shifted and came to hinge on the intersection of racial and economic oppression at mid-twentieth-century, mine have always been focused on the ways religion shapes people’s attitudes to race. Historian Francis Shor raises the question that I am yet unraveling. How did religion, or what Shor called “a sort of universalist Methodism,” lead some people “to think of people not imprisoned in racial categories” while “so many of your Southern co-religionists also used religion to define blacks as somehow inferior” (Shor)? The short answer is that I have not yet untangled this riddle. I still try to understand how similar—often identical—religious beliefs and practices produced such opposing conclusions about race and about how to apply those beliefs to the issues of race. Charles Marsh said it well: “There are no easy patterns for predicting the way religious ideas govern particular courses of action” (Marsh 4). Marsh writes about the religious influences on the actions of Fannie Lou Hamer, Sam Bowers, Douglas Hudgins, Ed King and Cleveland Sellers in the summer of 1964. Mrs. Hamer became a prophetic leader. Sam Bowers led the KKK to burn scores of churches and murder many, including Cheney, Goodman, and Schwerner. Doug Hudgins was Marsh’s father’s friend since their seminary days, pastor of the largest Baptist church in Mississippi, who found scriptural support for arresting any blacks who tried to enter his church. The Rev. Ed King, a Methodist chaplain at Tougaloo College, was jailed, beaten, and nearly killed for Civil Rights Movement activities. SNCC’s Cleveland Sellers grew up in South Carolina, Episcopalian, and became Stokely Carmichael’s right hand in the Black Power movement. Religious beliefs and experiences worked differently in the many adherents.

- 31 I interviewed my good friend Diana Ellison, a white woman about my age who grew up in Atlanta and attended Emory University. She grew up in, and faithfully attended, a very large urban Methodist church and her long-time church is Peachtree United Methodist, a multimillion dollar megachurch. Her childhood church experience was so very different than mine. Her more mainline church, like Rev. Doug Hudgins in Jackson, Mississippi, found segregation of races compatible with religion. Diana moved from that segregationist, white supremacist background to be on the regional and then national staff of the National Urban League. While she was not in SNCC, she was one of the cooks and hostesses and Spanish-language translators in Coretta King’s home during those glum days after Dr. King was assassinated. Diana earned her Master’s degree at Atlanta University at the time that Black Power made being white in the black world somewhat suspect. When the campus heard that Dr. King had been assassinated, other, black, students helped assure she got home safe. Diana did not want me to write about her in the *Deep in Our Hearts* project, so I reluctantly left this important friendship out of “Shiloh Witness.”

- 32 My brother Wayne, two years older than I, grew up in the same environment and church that I did, and to his dying days in 2007, he maintained that God intended the races to remain separate. After decades of estrangement, when I set out to write about myself, I went down and interviewed him. Here is an extract from that interview. Now I suspect that he exaggerated a little to “show off” to me, but underlying braggartism is probably his true beliefs.

Joan: What did you know about [my being in the Albany Freedom Ride] and what did Mother say about it?

Wayne: When she had to get you out of jail in Albany, we all disowned you. You were down walking with the niggers and we would today. I don't accept the niggers. They should have never let the woman vote and they should of never, the niggers should have never got out of slavery.

Later Wayne said, “We just wrote you out of the family.”

- 33 Thus, the same religion that led my brother to reject racial—and gender—equality motivated my own involvement in the Freedom Movement. And yet I struggle to understand how religion affects my action and those of white supremacists. Some other “respectable” Southern whites modeled how their religious beliefs supported their commitment to activism in the black Freedom Movement. Early on I was influenced by people at Emory University Library, where I began working in the summer of 1961—Emory itself being a bastion of Methodists, but one where students and faculty were openly integrationist. My immediate boss was Ira Farber, a Quaker and a pacifist who was nonviolent. He and others introduced me to people at the Quaker House, a sort of mission group. Also, Rev. Vincent and Mrs. Rosmarie Harding ran the Mennonite House, another committed religious group. Dorothy Tilly of the Southern Regional Council was quite advanced in years, but her work for decades with women's religious groups also gave legitimacy to my own religious journey. Religion played a role in the antiracism activism of Anne Braden, Frances Pauley, and writers, especially Lillian Smith... we were not totally alone!
- 34 Casey Hayden and Connie Curry were raised Presbyterian, I a Methodist. Connie and I are now Episcopalians and Casey follows Zen while married to an Episcopal priest. Another un-studied element of faith in the Freedom Movement, especially for us white folk, is the influence of the Episcopal Society for Racial and Cultural Unity (ESCRU). ESCRU's solid witness on the front lines coupled with the Methodist silence drew me to the Episcopal Church, especially the Revs. John Morris and Kim Driesbach. Many interracial meetings in rural places like Rome and Albany, Georgia, were held in Episcopal Churches (Nasstrom). And then in the economic justice phase of the movement, in the mid to late 1960s, I worked with the Freedom Quilting Bee, which was nurtured by ESCRU's Rev. Francis Walters, and the Rev. Austin Ford, who left my Atlanta Episcopal congregation to organize the Emmaus house in the Peoplestown neighborhood in southeast Atlanta where some of us volunteered in social and economic justice projects.
- 35 The influence of other older Southern anti-racist women like Connie Curry and Casey Hayden was essential to me. Connie literally saved my sanity with her steadfast affirmation. She and Casey Hayden are the two white women who most helped me find my new identity as a white Southern person in the black freedom struggle. They were only a few years older but I was really, really young. Since I was cut off from my family, I looked to Connie and Casey and others to help me decide what I should be as a woman. Still today, I love and respect and am eternally grateful to all of them.

- 36 I regret the stilted and defensive way that I finally wrote. In my quest to avoid what David Garrow called “the emotional selectivity of human memory,” I wrote only what I could prove by several sources. In the process, much of the warmth and emotion was written out. And some important illustrations were not included because sources and “proof” were discovered after *Deep in Our Hearts* went to press. I did not write about the 1962 Fisk University Race Relations Institute and those who were fellow students that year, or the 1962 National Student Association’s Southern Student Seminar. Omitted were my paid jobs with the Southern Regional Council clipping newspapers in the Research Department and working on the prison reform project, the National Urban League’s Southern Regional Office in VISTA training and the Rural Development Center, or the American Friends Service Committee’s School Desegregation project. I did not dare to rely only on my memory to write of my participation in organizing the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, nor my work there as the second paid staff. Left out was a frightening and memorable trip to the Ku Klux Klan annual cross-burning on Stone Mountain, Georgia.
- 37 The writing is defensive also because I anticipated harsh criticism from other Movement persons, and harsh criticism came. One example is documented in an exchange on the SNCC listserv. I had mentioned on the listserv the following correspondence between Anne Braden and myself that I had not fully documented at the time of writing “Shiloh Witness.” Anne wrote to me:

Did you give any more consideration to applying for the SNCC job which Bob [Zellner] has been doing? [...] If you should apply, though, you should probably be prepared to have to overcome their male supremacy. I recall last spring, when they thought Bob was going back to school this year, Chuck McDew asked me to be on the lookout for somebody for them, and I said, “It doesn’t have to be a man, does it?” Whereupon he looked at me in horror, as if to say “What other kind of creature is there in the world?” So to explain myself further, I said, “I mean, it could be a girl, couldn’t it?” At that he looked even more horrified and answered in just one word: “No.” My feminist blood was boiling—but at that moment we were in the courthouse in Magnolia, Miss., of all places, for the McComb trials, and surrounded by the enemy, so I did not feel that it was the time or place to have a full-dressed argument with him. So I just said, “O.K. But when you all get ready to fight for the whole human race, let me know.” Anyway, if I were you and wanted the job, I wouldn’t let that stop me from applying and trying to make them see the light. (Braden folder 4)

Another letter to me from Anne Braden on the similar subject reads:

Thanks for the suggestion about Nancy Duvall and for her address. I liked her very much. I hesitate though to write her right now about this project—as I know SNCC has the possibility of several applications for the job right now—and I don’t want to be party to putting Nancy in the position of being rebuffed again. Or I guess it was not exactly a rebuff when they selected Bob [Zellner] instead of her for the job that year—but I’m sure she must have felt that in a sense it was, and I thought some of the SNCC kids were a little cruel when they were interviewing her (I happened to be sitting in on this session). Actually some of the cruelty was surface and some of it had nothing to do with her as an individual if you see what I mean. If Bob had not been available, I think they would have given her the job—but they preferred him, partly because he was a man, I suppose, maybe other considerations. (Braden folder 5)

After I mentioned these views of Anne’s, the SNCC listserv exploded. Dorothy M. Zellner (SNCC staff 1962-1967) and Judy Richardson (SNCC staff 1963-1966) responded:

- 38 As two long-time SNCC staff members, we strenuously object to Joan C. Browning's statement that "Anne Braden asked me to apply to the job of white college visitor that Bob Zellner left—if, as she said, I was willing to brave SNCC antipathy to women. (I did not apply.)" This sounds completely unlike Anne, whom we all knew well and who, at the time Joan C. Browning writes about, was herself a respected advisor to SNCC. [...] It seems highly unlikely that an organization would or could attract such talented and admirable women if it had an "antipathy" toward them. Strangely enough, this conversation does not appear in Joan C. Browning's autobiographical article, "Shiloh Witness," in the book *Deep in Our Hearts*. (Zellner and Richardson)

Zellner and Richardson went on to quote at some length from Dorothy Dawson Burlage's contribution to *Deep in Our Hearts* to argue that "a discussion of this issue but with a completely different outcome that SNCC leadership did support a woman taking on the job of white college organizer does appear in the same book" (Zellner and Richardson). Burlage actually quoted the same letter in which Braden had expressed her disapproval at McDew's objection to hiring a woman, but used it to demonstrate the specific constraints weighing on white women in the southern Freedom Movement. Zellner and Richardson went on:

We quote at length from Dorothy Dawson Burlage's article, "Truths of the Heart," (pp.106-107): "The presence of a white woman with black men was inflammatory for most southern white people. This issue, as well as questions of women's roles, came up clearly in a discussion raised by Anne Braden of the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF), a southern civil rights organization, in early 1963." (Zellner and Richardson)

They concluded: "If this listserve is to have any historical value, we should not overstate our relationship with SNCC, particularly when that relationship was minimal, and be scrupulous, even with failing memories, to be as accurate as possible" (Zellner and Richardson).

- 39 Two of the contributors to *Deep in Our Hearts* responded. Sue Thrasher emphasized the necessity to qualify my statement by adding context:

I wanted to thank Judy Richardson and Dottie Zellner for their response to the comments made by Joan Browning about SNCC's antipathy to women. It saddened me to see one of the co-authors of *Deep in Our Hearts* quote Anne Braden in such a cavalier way. [...] It is true that Anne was a feminist ahead of her time. [...] I don't know the context of Anne's remarks to Joan, this is missing in the post—but such a quote definitely needs context. (Thrasher)

Dorothy Dawson Burlage confirmed:

It is important, as Sue Thrasher said in her post, to be cognizant of the context of these events. As a white woman, my presence could create a risk not only to myself, but to the SNCC staff with whom I would be working. [...] Anne, however, insisted that a woman be considered for the position. The matter was not hidden under the rug, but was discussed openly between Anne, SNCC staff, and myself and was resolved in support of my being offered the job. (Burlage)

Others joined the discussion. Gwen Patton posted:

Hello, Commenting on the wonderful and loving admonition from Dottie, Judy and Joyce to Joan: If we don't have pleasant things to say about our comrades who are now dancing with our ancestors, then don't say anything. And, for goodness sakes, don't use the names of our deceased comrades to validate a personal position. As for Anne: I know no one who unconditionally loved Black people like Anne did. She truly understood and appreciated the implacable depth of racism. (Patton)

Some were willing to consider that my account was accurate. Sheila Michaels responded:

Maybe Anne Braden said that, is that the question? Or is it that everyone suspects Joan Browning of misquoting her, or making it up? Anne Braden was a peerless freedom fighter & so forth, but do you really know her mind, just then? Or maybe she was transferring her feelings to SNCC. No one is simple to figure out. (Michaels)

And Kathie Sarachild posted,

It seems to me that the quote from Dorothy Burlage does support Joan Browning's recollections of Ann Braden's willingness to raise the issue of equality of the sexes and call male chauvinism where she saw it, even in the SNCC she had such deep appreciation and admiration of. SNCC's being ahead of other organizations shouldn't lead to a wall of silence hushing up [...]. (Sarachild)

This was one of several issues that I might have addressed more decisively if I had the "proof" at the time of writing "Shiloh Witness."

- 40 My strongest regret, however, is that I did not insist on including a description of how I came to move away from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. That reason is expressed in the following exchange of email messages with the others in the Deep In Our Hearts writing group.

SNCC was a hospitable movement home for me. Why? Because they were nice people? Because there were so few? Because we all thought we were likely to be dead within a year or two and there was no time for such silliness as discriminating against each other on the basis of race? I don't know. It was certainly one of the most comfortable "fits" I've ever had. However, I went to Boston from May to December 1963. When I returned in January 1964, SNCC was a very different place and was not so hospitable. (Though as one who had been there in the early days, I felt it was my home and some of those northerners were ungracious guests!)

Even as a young white southern woman, I was quite conservative in many important ways. For example, I remember fondly the strict discipline of my sit-ins, picketings, the Albany Freedom Ride. I remember dressing for these demonstrations in my most conservative "Sunday School" clothing so that as a messenger, I didn't detract from the message. The Movement changed to denims, but I didn't. For example, in 1962 when I sat in at Leb's restaurant in Atlanta, we all dressed in Sunday School clothes and were very polite. We were, after all, trying to change the hearts and minds of segregationists. All of SNCC and the Freedom Movement was disciplined, clean, striving to portray an earnest middle class entreaty for an end to racial segregation.

When I returned to Atlanta in January 1964, after living eight months in Boston, SNCC was an alien creature to me. In the spring of 1964, the Atlanta newspapers reported that SNCC demonstrators began urinating and defecating on the floors inside Leb's restaurant, while robed Klansmen marched outside, and the city and police alternated between harassing SNCC and the Klan. I was disgusted at the Klan—no surprise—but also at SNCC. These rowdies were not expressing the values of the Movement that I shared and treasured. (Browning, 1997 c)

I went on to emphasize the crucial importance of manners to my general outlook, which made it impossible for me to accept the Movement's shift away from nonviolence. Some in the Deep In Our Hearts writing group reacted strongly to the story of how I felt that SNCC changed in less than a year from a highly disciplined, Sunday School attired, polite group of people who were willing to risk whatever it took to demonstrate the beauty of black and white together to a gang of rowdies equally disturbing as the Ku Klux Klan. Some in the group refused to believe that SNCC people were trashing Leb's restaurant, even when I showed the *Atlanta Constitution* newspaper reports about it. Casey Hayden saw how important it was for my moving away from SNCC and into more sedate civil rights organizations. She wrote:

I think loss of manners is very important, critical for those of us from the South, or perhaps I should say critical for me. Manners and the self-effacement they

represent, common to women and to blacks, was at the core of nonviolence. When nonviolence was surpassed by direct bids for power, manners often were also surpassed by militance. I have, as you know, only touched this topic obliquely in my current chapter. No one has addressed it directly to my knowledge, and I encourage you to do so. (C. Hayden, 1997 b)

Although I believe that this change in my relationship with SNCC illustrates who I was—still coming from the bedrock of my religious convictions, and conservative in manners and attire—and explains why, when hundreds of people flocked south and into SNCC I was not with them, I did not include this in “Shiloh Witness” as printed.

- 41 It took me five years to write “Shiloh Witness” as published in the collection. I still wrestle with some of the issues that writing raised: what is the story of one’s life? What is useful to transmit and what is merely interesting to me? What is the ethical way to tell stories that involve other people as well as myself?
- 42 What Lillian Smith wrote became true of my experience: “As every autobiography is an act of penance—but it was also for me, if I may say, a very serious thing, a step toward redemption” (Smith 1977 48). “Shiloh Witness” is an act of penance, a very serious thing, and in ways yet unfolding, it is also a step toward redemption.
- 43 Emory University archivists said that researchers who peruse the original little pile of Joan C. Browning’s collection of jail letters sometimes ask, “What has Joan done since the movement?” To provide resources for answering that question I have now added another 30 boxes of papers to that collection. Perhaps some future writer can solve the riddles that continue to bedevil me, about what it meant to be a white Southern woman in the black Freedom Movement.

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NOTES

1. Joanne Grant was an African American reporter for the *National Guardian* who covered and supported the southern Freedom Movement, a friend and biographer of Ella Baker, and producer of *Fundi*, a film about Ella Baker (Grant, 1981).
2. Of the 436 Freedom Riders, only four were white Southern females: Browning and Hayden, Joan Trumpauer Mulholland and Margaret Burr Leonard.

ABSTRACTS

In this article, Joan C. Browning, a white female veteran of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, reflects on the writing of an autobiographical chapter she wrote for a collective book published in 2000 (*Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement*). Focusing on the dialectical tension between memory and history, she discusses several questions ranging from the genesis of the book project to her regrets at censoring herself in anticipation of criticisms. The essay sheds new light on her personal experience of the Southern Civil Rights Movement—especially her participation in the Albany Freedom Ride in 1961, the role of religion in her commitment to the Movement, and her feelings about the movement’s evolution after 1964. The author describes the profound impact of the Movement on her life and her identity as a white, Southern woman. In addition to this personal account, she probes into the scientific issues of writing the history of the Civil Rights Movement, i.e. the place of women in historiography, the relationship between historians and their living subjects, the question of privacy, the tension between objectivity and subjectivity, and the difficult negotiation between history and activism in the self-writing process.

Dans cet article, Joan C. Browning, ancienne militante blanche du Mouvement pour les droits civiques des années 1960, revient sur l’écriture d’un chapitre autobiographique paru en 2000 dans un ouvrage collectif (*Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement*). La réflexion, articulée autour de la tension dialectique entre mémoire et histoire, aborde plusieurs questions soulevées par l’acte d’écrire son histoire personnelle, de la genèse du projet d’ouvrage au regret de s’être autocensurée en prévision de critiques à venir. Cet essai présente sous un jour nouveau son expérience personnelle du Mouvement pour les droits civiques dans le Sud – notamment sa participation au « Voyage de la Liberté » (*Freedom Ride*) d’Albany (Géorgie) en 1961, le rôle de la religion dans son engagement au sein du Mouvement, et ses sentiments vis-à-vis de l’évolution de ce dernier après 1964. L’autrice décrit l’impact profond du Mouvement sur sa vie et sur son identité en tant que femme blanche du Sud. Au-delà de sa réflexion personnelle, l’article explore les enjeux scientifiques liés à l’écriture de l’histoire du Mouvement pour les droits civiques : la place des femmes dans l’historiographie, la relation entre les historien•ne•s et leurs sujets d’étude encore en vie, la question du respect de la vie privée, la tension entre objectivité et subjectivité, ainsi que la difficile négociation entre histoire et militantisme dans le processus d’écriture de soi.

INDEX

Keywords: Freedom Movement, memory, history, autobiography, Albany Freedom Ride, religion, oral history, leadership, feminist biography

Mots-clés: Mouvement pour les droits civiques, mémoire, histoire, autobiography, Voyage de la Liberté Albany, religion, histoire orale, biographie féministe

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