

By now the hearing has started. But there are more constituents, or self-proclaimed representatives of constituents, to be seen. He greets them, one after another, listens, nodding agreeably for a few minutes, and turns them over to his executive aides. But he worries. He gets a lot of votes by helping constituents, and this service is one of his major assets during campaigns. He knows it takes up half the time of his staff, time that he needs for help on the issues. And besides, even though he helps these people, he knows that most of the things they ask are wrong or antithetical to the public interest.

If a call from his office to the Veterans Administration causes the disability file of John Jones to be pulled from the middle of the pile and placed on top, it only means that all the others are set back one. Jones doesn't care about the others, of course, and the others won't find out, but it's a funny way to run a country. It is past eleven o'clock when he gets to the committee hearing. During the walk over, his legislative assistant gives him a hurried, capsule briefing, just enough to confuse him. In the hearing he asks the wrong questions. So do other senators who come and go every few minutes. The questions that get to the heart of the matter are so rare as to seem accidental, and the needed follow-up question is almost never asked. By ten minutes of 12:00 he has picked up the thread, but it's time to get to the Senate floor to insert into the Congressional Record a number of press releases just handed him by his head speechwriter. ("If I get there late, I'll be late for lunch with my campaign finance chairman. He can't be kept waiting.")

There are two afternoon committee sessions. He goes to the one that's being televised. As for the other, a closed session where legislation is being drafted, he sends his proxy to the chairman. By four o'clock he leaves the televised hearing (the camera has been shut off) to have his picture taken on the Capitol steps with a high school class from back home. Afterward he takes them into the Senate Reception Room, makes

a little speech, shakes hands, and presents each visitor with an embossed ballpoint pen. ("They'll all be voters in three or four years, and their parents are voters now.")

He is late for his 4:30 appointment at NASA, but he knows that the top men there will wait for a senator. ("Come to think of it, why didn't I have the meeting scheduled in my own office?") He is accompanied by businessmen from his state who are bidding for a government contract. The meeting is mercifully short. ("I loused up my presentation, but I gave them that I'll-remember-at-appropriation-time look and I don't think they'll give me the runaround again.") Lobbying for businessmen eats up his time in great chunks. He sometimes feels that he is forever appearing before a regulatory commission or testifying before the Senate Appropriations Committee at the behest of some business or other.

Back in the office at 5:45 for some paperwork—but his secretary hands him a list of twenty phone calls that must be returned. He picks out six from the array of home-state politicians, reporters, and contributors; he turns the rest over to his administrative assistant. He finishes the calls at 6:30 and asks his staff in. They have been waiting for a crack at him all day on matters they think are urgent. But those matters must wait; today is the last day he can name his state's quota to West Point. Awash in papers, he starts trying to balance the grades of boys he doesn't know against the recommendations of people he owes favors. He finally scribbles the prescribed number of names, and that's that.

By now his aides can tell from his gray countenance that he is bushed, so they don't press him for decisions. Everyone has a drink or two, the talk is pleasant and general, and gradually the chief's energy revives. His cleaning is brought in and he changes. He has dinner scheduled tonight with a columnist who has seven outlets in his state. ("I'd better not have that third drink.") And after that, he has promised to take his wife to an embassy party.

He hates the thought of it, but he hasn't seen her for three nights, and tomorrow night he will be speaking for a \$1,500 fee in Pennsylvania. ("She's always telling me how tired I look and how I ought to slow down and get some rest, but she sure likes those parties.") Maybe when he gets home, around midnight, he'll take an hour to dig into his briefcase, to read that material on the population explosion, on a new idea for housing in the ghetto, on the missile defense system, on the currency crisis, on the nuclear proliferation treaty. Yes, he's been trying to get to that briefcase for days.

From "Legislate? Who, Me?" February 1969. James Boyd is now retired and living in Virginia.

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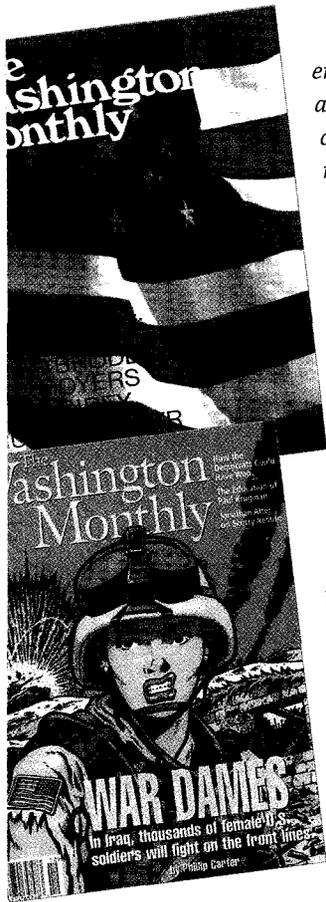
TAYLOR BRANCH ON RACE IN THE SOUTH

In the summer of 1969, Taylor Branch took a job registering rural black voters in his home state of Georgia. He kept a diary of his experiences, which he later turned into a Washington Monthly article detailing how the gains of the civil rights



THE WE DECADE?

As the 1970s drew to a close and Americans prepared to bid farewell to a decade that had begun in hope and hippiedom and ended in cynicism and polyester, *Washington Monthly* founding editor Charles Peters unleashed "A Platform for the Nineteen-Eighties" (February 1979), a thirteen-page manifesto calling on Americans to make the 1980s a new era of idealism. Peters wanted to put an end to "the politics of selfishness"; he argued that mediation should replace lawsuits, national service should be mandatory, and corporate greed should give way to labors of love. The '80s, he declared, would be a time for Americans to come together and shed their lavish lifestyles. Alas, Gordon Gekko wasn't a *Monthly* subscriber.



era were being systematically undermined by corrupt police in the rural South. The experience also sparked the idea for Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954–63, Branch's Pulitzer Prize-winning narrative history of the civil rights movement.

All right, get the money off the table," said Bubba-doo Wiggins, the proprietor of the Big Apple in Cuthbert, Georgia, as he jumped from his perch with a can of Colt 45 and a fistful of house-cut dollars. In what

resembled the routine panic of a grammar school fire drill, he herded all the card players across the hall into a small closet on the mysterious side of the shack. The younger people scattered. The white man, a graduate student visiting the town, followed the pack, disoriented, and was the last to squeeze into the tiny room.

"What the hell is going on?" he whispered to his fellow loser.

"Beer truck," he replied, obviously amused at the other's perplexity.

Through a crack in the door, the stranger could see Bubba-doo behind the bar. He saw the proprietor put down his Colt 45 to greet two uniformed white men who ambled up and began some small talk.

"Who's that, the sheriff?" whispered the white man to the loser.

"No, the police," he said. "They go around with the beer truck every Friday."

The screen door closed again, and a rotund white man soon came into view, wheeling a half-dozen cases of beer up to the bar. He was wearing a Schlitz uniform and smoking a cigar. He left for another load.

Bubba-doo soon rapped on the door with the all-clear sign, and the poker players tumbled out into the hallway. The white man ran to a window in time to watch the beer truck stir up the red dust, with the police car right behind.

Unfortunately, the poker game had evaporated. As the others filed past on their way home for supper, the stranger decided that their interest in him was directly related to whether or not his pockets were full.

"No more game here, man," observed his fellow loser.

The two losers walked across the room, past the jukebox, and out onto the Big Apple's front porch, where the strains of a twilight hymn from the revival floated on the summer air.

"Whatchew doing down here in niggertown?" came a voice from the police car, which had drifted back down the road, evidently having finished its beer run.

"Sir?"

"I said whatchew doing down here in niggertown?"

"I'm, you know, I'm doing a manpower survey for the university. Uh, I'm seeing about the kind of jobs these people have around here."

"You what?" The stranger walked down the steps and over to the passenger side of the police car, experiencing all the physical symptoms of acute fear—shaking, sweating, burning skin, gulping, pounding heart, dry mouth, cold hands, wobbling knees, cloudy, swirling brain.

"You ain't down here trying to stir up our niggers, are you?"

"No, sir."

"We treat our niggers real good around here, so we ain't had no riots or anything, and we aim to keep it that way. Do you know you could get knifed down here easy as that?"

"No, sir," said the accused, looking surprised and hoping that the policeman would take him for a bumbling student, which seemed accurate enough.

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From the white people's point of view, the operation of the law is a distinctly informal business in

southwest Georgia. Few local whites are ever arrested, other than a drunk or two, and the main concerns of the law are traffic tickets and the maintenance of calm among the black people. Neither task draws much attention from most white people, and keeping the lid on the black parts of town seems so easy that it produces boredom.

If policemen seem rather overlooked by the white people, the Negroes act in compensation, for black people see them as the symbol of white power. The policeman represents more than violence or the fact that whites inevitably win any interracial legal battle. The man who rose from the pool room to the police car symbolizes the unpredictability of law enforcement for blacks. Lacking the restraint and formality of schoolbook law, he uses his badge as he sees fit and is often governed by an ornery mood.

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The farcical tragedy of law and order in the black belt lies in the exclusion of black people from even a sniff of fairness. Enforced lines of discrimination still separate balcony from ground floor in theaters and courtrooms, front from back in laundromats, and white from black in hospitals. The hospitals of small counties are bastions of segregation, and the towns are rife with tales of bed switching or employees' jumping into beds when the inspectors come. One clinic has survived such inspections without indoor toilets for black patients, who must walk two hundred yards to the outhouse or have relatives there to handle bedpans. The sanitation facilities are generally indicative of the quality of care in that institution.

A black man may walk into the restaurant only to pass the waitress on her way to tell the police that he has "made advances" toward her; and sometimes he may sit down to wait futilely for service or to find that the prices are triple those on the menu and the portions microscopic. Faced with an infinite variety of such obstacles, local black people usually take their food through the ubiquitous side window.

Black subordination in the public realm has crucial ramifications in all areas of racial contact, for blacks have no avenue of recompense for wrongs against them—whether by a restaurant owner or an individual white man. Moreover, they have no means of seeking outside assistance even if they wish to brave its hazards. They find themselves in helpless equilibrium: the local predicament of black people incapacitates them from birth, and incapacitated people are rendered unable to seek outside help even if it is available.

Only 30 percent of the eligible black people in southwest Georgia are registered to vote—primarily because people are paralyzed with fear. This fear, in turn, depends upon the most devastating forms of personal discrimination. Acute fear is itself a measure of the absence of law and order, almost by definition.

From "Black Fear," January 1970. Taylor Branch's most recent book is The Clinton Tapes: Wrestling History With the President.

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JAMES FALLOWS ON THE DRAFT

Six months after the last American troops left Saigon, Washington Monthly contributing editor James Fallows revisited his experience with the draft as a Harvard undergraduate for an essay on how the Vietnam War had deepened America's class divide. Fallows argued that while privileged young men like him believed at the time that they were fighting the war machine by escaping military service on technicalities, such draft deferments actually prolonged the conflict by lowering the stakes for the elites who could have actually done something to stop it—which was why the Johnson administration quietly but deliberately allowed them. The class divisions that determined who did and didn't fight in Vietnam, Fallows warned, would haunt America for years to come.

In the fall of 1969, I was beginning my final year in college. As the months went by, the rock on which I had un-

thinkingly anchored my hopes—the certainty that the war in Vietnam would be over before I could possibly fight—began to crumble. It shattered altogether on Thanksgiving weekend when, while riding back to Boston from a visit with my relatives, I heard that the draft lottery had been held and my birthdate had come up number 45. I recognized for the first time that, inflexibly, I must either be drafted or consciously find a way to prevent it.

In the atmosphere of that time, each possible choice came equipped with barbs. To answer the call was unthinkable, not only because, in my heart, I was desperately afraid of being killed, but also because, among my friends, it was axiomatic that one should not be "complicit" in the immoral war effort. Draft resistance, the course chosen by a few noble heroes of the movement, meant going to prison or leaving the country. With much the same intensity with which I wanted to stay alive, I did not want those things either. What I wanted was to go to graduate school, to get married, and to enjoy those bright prospects I had been taught that life owed me.

I learned quickly enough that there was only one way to get what I wanted. A physical deferment would restore things to the happy state I had known during four undergraduate years. The barbed alternatives would be put off. By the impartial dictates of public policy I would be free to pursue the better side of life.

Like many of my friends whose numbers had come up wrong in the lot-

tery, I set about securing my salvation. When I was not participating in antiwar rallies, I was poring over the Army's code of physical regulations. During the winter and early spring, seminars were held in the college common rooms. There, sympathetic medical students helped us search for disqualifying conditions that we, in our many years of good health, might have overlooked. Although, on the doctors' advice, I made a halfhearted try at fainting spells, my only real possibility was beating the height and weight regulations. My normal weight was close to the cutoff point for an "underweight" disqualification, and, with a diligence born of panic, I made sure I would have a margin. I was six feet one inch tall at the time. On the morning of the draft physical I weighed 120 pounds.

Before sunrise that morning I rode the subway to the Cambridge city hall, where we had been told to gather for shipment to the examination at the Boston Navy Yard. The examinations were administered on a rotating basis, one or two days each month for each of the draft boards in the area. Virtually everyone who showed up on Cambridge day at the Navy Yard was a student from Harvard or MIT.

There was no mistaking the political temperament of our group. Many of my friends wore red armbands and stop-the-war buttons. Most chanted the familiar words, "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh / NLF is gonna win." One of the things we had learned from the draft



HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM

Three decades ago, when NASA engineers were still hammering away on the space shuttle *Columbia*, the first in a planned fleet of reusable cosmic cruisers, the *Washington Monthly's* Gregg Easterbrook took a long hard look at the burgeoning space exploration program. He discovered the shuttles were fraught with safety problems—the cover of the issue begged, "Beam Us Out of This Deathtrap, Scotty!"

In "The Spruce Goose of Outer Space" (April 1980), Easterbrook flagged two particular areas of concern. One was the vulnerability of the booster rockets, the flaming, 15-million-horsepower pillars of steel that propelled the shuttle during liftoff. "Suppose one of the solid-fueled boosters failed," he wrote. "The plan is, you die." The other was the heat-shielding tiles that lined the outside of the shuttle—they were fragile and impossible to fix in space, and if they failed the shuttle would burn up on reentry. Tragically, these were the exact two failures that doomed the *Challenger* in 1986 and the *Columbia*—the source of Easterbrook's initial concerns—in 2003.