

# Teaching African American Discourse: Lessons of a Recovering Segregationist

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In the early 1970s at the University of Georgia I developed and taught a course in “Black Rhetoric” seven times. (Later we were fortunate to engage an African American professor to adopt and further develop the class.)

The first challenge, after compiling a working prospectus, was getting the course approved. At this time there was no Black Studies program at the University of Georgia, only isolated courses in such disciplines as history, sociology, and probably literature. After submitting a proposed syllabus and extensive reading list to the Curriculum Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences, sometime later I was called before those representatives from the sciences, social sciences, fine arts, and humanities to explain why Black rhetoric should be studied at a university. A professor asked, “Are you going to teach our students to speak like Stokely Carmichael?” one of the many advocates included in the syllabus. Eventually the proposal was approved.

Looking back on that time, over forty years ago, I was probably among a number of white teachers feeling increasingly concerned and guilty about the long season of abuse experienced by African Americans in the United States in general and my southland in particular. We were presenting and hearing papers at conventions on the need for African American studies and the difficulty of accessing copies of speeches, writings, and other materials by African American activists that could be made available feasibly to students. Thinking about it now, my efforts in the classroom at the time, when contrasted with the dangers confronted by African Americans daily and when sitting-in restaurants, marching in hostile streets, confronting police dogs and fire hoses, and being jailed, were tame indeed. Hopefully some students benefited.

Because the class I taught would be something of a pioneering effort, at least at our university, and was open to all undergraduates, I wrestled with exactly what to cover, how much, and how. (Since few courses in African American studies were available, a graduate student or two audited this class, helping with assignments, doing further research, and writing papers.)

I reduced the content to four units. First we began studying Arthur L. Smith's (later Molefi Kete Asante) *Rhetoric of Black Revolution*, one of the few sources known to me at the time that students could purchase. From Asante's book we identified recurring persuasive strategies employed by Black activists that we could apply in our analyses of their discourse throughout the term.

Secondly we explored efforts to abolish slavery. Drawing upon Patrick Kenicott's dissertation, his article in the *Journal of Black Studies*, and a variety of additional sources, we investigated how Black southern and northern preachers opposed bondage in the nineteenth century. We read about "local Black agents" sponsored by anti-slavery societies. We found "fugitive agents" recalling personal experiences to dramatize abuses of slavery. We dissected arguments communicated by advocates such as Charles Lenox Remond, Fredrick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Henry Highland Garnet, and William Wells Brown.

The third unit consisted of viewing excerpts of speeches by contemporary African American speakers on film. With funds from the department of communication studies, I purchased Technicolor films from *Time-Life* for \$500.00. About four minutes long, each film provided a workable and valuable overview of the philosophy and rhetorical approach of a particular speaker. For example we observed *what* Bayard Rustin, Rap Brown, Shirley Chisholm, and Coretta Scott King advocated and *how* they persuaded audiences. Viewed in light of Professor Molefi Kete Asante's explanations of strategies, topics, and audiences, we began to better understand the motivation, role, discourse, and influence of Black spokespersons active from anti-slavery to recent times.

The fourth unit incorporated individual and group assignments: oral reports, a brief essay, and role playing. To assist with these requirements, I provided an extensive bibliography of library holdings plus numerous articles from the Bobbs-Merrill Reprint Series in Black Studies on such topics as "The Rural Negro Minister: His Work and Salary," "The Professional Fugitive in the Abolition Movement," "The Klan Revival," "Douglass' Mind in the Making," "History of the Black Man in the Great War," "The Forgotten Years of the Negro Revolution," and "The Real Benjamin Banneker." I also supplied reprints of picture-essays on Black advocates from *Life Magazine* that cost twenty-five cents each. Students were encouraged to browse on their own through old documents, including newspapers, journals, letters, and diaries on microfilm.

Informed by these various sources, each student gave a brief oral report and wrote a short essay on a particular subject of her or his own choosing. One young white woman interviewed a local Black preacher and visited his church on Sundays, certainly a new experience for her. Concerned about their own heritage, several African American students researched particular anti-slavery speakers. Others examined the discourse of contemporary leaders. One individual researched the "ghetto as audience."

We also relied upon role playing. Usually the class enrolled between sixteen and twenty students, divided somewhat equally between Blacks and whites; interesting, because few African Americans were enrolled at the University of Georgia at the time. These groups were asked to represent four factions active under slavery: politicians, scholars, preachers, and anti-slavery speakers. Portraying these roles, individuals in each of the groups addressed the class as a whole using arguments identified with their characters.

From the first day, students were informed that ideally members would consider exchanging experiences and views against the backdrop of Blacks' opposition both to slavery and current separate-but-unequal conditions and opportunities. Even on the quarter system we met two days a week for two hours, providing time for the various initiatives in class. When not viewing films, to promote discussion we often sat in a circle.

To some extent, the results of class discussions could be unpredictable. In the fall of 1973, a white student from New Jersey commented, "I simply have never been around many colored people." A young Black woman responded: "It's obvious you have never been around many Black people; in my high school if you had said 'colored,' you would have been in trouble." Participants spoke of the significance of self-identity. Some contrasted the appropriateness and inappropriateness of saying "Negro" and "Black." (At the time "African American" was not as widely spoken.) Dick Gregory had recently talked on campus, teaching us how to say "Black" and why. Others questioned or debated the relevance of such "white" celebrations as Fourth of July, referring to Frederick Douglass' assessment of that occasion. Some students discussed openly; others did not. Near the end of one term, a young Black woman read the following statement to the entire class:

I see the pale, blank, expressionless faces of our "white" classmates who, while listening to Nikki Giovanni—STARE, fidget at their nails, and STARE. They are so conditioned to coldness that they cannot warm up and feel—feel like human beings. Their blue-green eyes sweep and survey as if trying to find some understanding. What does it take to break the ICE around your heart, your mind, your precious soul. If you are ignorant, ask to allude yourself of your ignorance. If you are afraid, VOICE your fears in order to overcome your fear.

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Should I attempt to teach a course today in the history and criticism of public discourse for undergraduates, I would still have to decide what to teach, how much, and how. Some challenges would be the same, others different. First I would review the wide scope of literature published in recent years on issues of race, probably

better understanding the complex forces at work in issues of race in contemporary society. Maybe the content would be equally distributed between historical and present issues, strategies, and ideologies.

I wonder what views Black and white students would bring to such a class today, in contrast to those enrolled during the 1970s. Were the public and/or private schools they attended more racially integrated today or less, and with what results? What topics and concerns would the students bring up? What subjects would they choose to research? In class would more students or fewer participate readily or withdraw? In general would whites and Blacks today be more receptive or hostile to issues that arise and to each other? Would they think that conditions and opportunities for African Americans are better or worse? In what ways?

Probably many contemporary examples of situations confronted by African Americans would be discussed, maybe good and bad. Would they consider a wealthy owner of a National Basketball Association professional team advising a friend not to accompany Blacks to his games to be representative of attitudes among whites or unique? Is racism more subtle today than during the day of rigidly segregated restaurants, buses, schools, motels, and restrooms. In what forms does one find this more subtle abuse? What strategies are being devised and deployed by African American spokespersons to meet this more cunning means of racism?

In teaching the class today one thing would not change. While attempting to serve as an informed and concerned mentor, I would plan the instruction so that students could hear, read, study, analyze, and discuss the concerns and choices of African Americans expressed in their discourse.

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What led me, one socialized in rigid racial segregation, to plan, submit, defend, and teach a course in African American public address? Certainly I had enough to do teaching courses in public speaking, group discussion, social movements, and rhetorical criticism. And I had not been taught content needed for a class in African American discourse. Indeed, in my own graduate programs in speech (now communication studies), there was no course or seminar in the history and criticism of African American discourse, only the mention of the varying emphases of Booker T. Washington and W. E. DuBois.

To explain why I decided to teach African American discourse, I will describe my transformation from one separated from Blacks by law, custom, and choice to an individual seeking a better way. In planning and teaching this course, I drew, not only from the diversity of sources noted above, but also my own personal experiences growing up in Pine Apple, Greensboro, Evergreen, and Auburn, Alabama, and beyond.

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*Figure 1. (Photograph property of Birmingham Public Library, taken from inside the church looking outward. Courtesy of Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Catalog Number, 85.1.22.)*

On Sunday, September 15, 1963 at 10:22 a.m., dynamite set off by at least three white men at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama killed four young African American girls who were attending Sunday school and injured numerous others. Approximately thirty minutes later, Mary Jo, Michael—our 2½-year-old son—and I were driving home from Sunday school on 17th Street, across Kelly Ingram Park from the bombed house of worship. The following photograph

is of damage done to the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama, by dynamite, 1963.

That morning around 9:00 a.m., we left our rented home on Arkadelphia Road across from Birmingham-Southern College and drove to Trinity Methodist Church on Oxmoor Road in Homewood, following a route through downtown that took us past Kelly Ingram Park, 16th Street Baptist Church, and over Red Mountain by the Vulcan statue.

In 1961 I finished the master's degree at Florida State University in speech and took a job the following year at Birmingham-Southern, a Methodist liberal arts college located in the city. I taught public speaking and oral interpretation and coached the debate team. I can recall that at the invitation of the local chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), Charles Morgan, Jr., a young lawyer from Birmingham, spoke at the college on racial problems confronting society and what responsible people should do to solve them. (Mr. Morgan passed away in 2009.)

When we first moved to Birmingham in 1962, we rented an apartment in Homewood. Each morning when I drove to Birmingham-Southern College to teach, because of congested traffic downtown, I skirted the city. In 1963, when an old home owned by Birmingham-Southern College just across Arkadelphia Road from the campus became available to rent, we moved there, but we continued to worship at Trinity United Methodist Church in Homewood. On that fateful Sunday morning, we arrived at Trinity United Methodist Church around 9:30 a.m. After Sunday school, about 10:55 a.m., deciding not to attend the 11:00 a.m. worship service, we got into our two-toned 1958 Ford and started home.

Anticipating that the downtown streets would be deserted on Sunday, since the stores were closed and many residents would likely be at home or in church, we decided to return home by the same route that we had come to Sunday school. From Oxmoor Road we drove down Red Mountain on 26th Street to the Vulcan statue, where 26th becomes 20th Street, the main thoroughfare through Birmingham. We drove thru Five Points South, under the railroad tracks, turning west onto 4th Avenue. We turned north onto 17th, a two lane street, and came to Kelly Ingram Park situated across from the 16th Street Baptist Church.

As we drove adjacent to Kelly Ingram Park across from the east side of the dynamited church, we came up behind cars that had stopped in the road as if there were a wreck up ahead. People scampered about as if leaving a fire. Wondering what was happening we looked out the windows of our Ford into the angry faces of young African American men lining the curb on the side of the road.

Suddenly there was a loud crash that seemed to come from inside our car. Then we saw young African American men standing at the curb with concrete coated bricks in each hand, one brick hanging down in the left hand at the ready and one



*Figure 2. (Photograph property of Birmingham Public Library. Courtesy of Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Catalog Number 85.1.9.)*

drawn far back for throwing in the other. With angry shouts and all their might, they hurled bricks onto our car, striking the side and the back, their momentum causing them to lunge off the curb into the street. Nearby was an old building that had collapsed, seemingly making available an endless supply of bricks reinforced with concrete.

Mary Jo and I were frightened and curious as to what was happening. We were sitting targets, bumper-to-bumper with cars in front and behind. There was no escape. We quickly locked ourselves in the car. Sensing the heightened tension, little Michael began to cry. I urged Mary Jo to squat down in the floor with Michael. Doing so, she placed Michael beneath her as well as she could. I was holding on to the steering wheel and trying to keep the clutch of our straight-shift drive pressed down so that the car wouldn't stall. From inside the car each smash of a brick sounded like an explosion. Fearing that a brick would crash through a window, we attempted to turn away, half-duck, and shield our heads with a free arm and hand. The following picture is another photograph of the bomb scene, with the church to the right.

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Some seven years earlier, in 1956, during combat training in the U. S. Marine Corps at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, I was crawling in the dirt with back pack and M-1 rifle under barbed wire, bullets flying overhead and explosions going off all around me. In January of that year, after nearly two years enrolled at Alabama Polytechnic Institute (later Auburn University) in sociology, I had taken the train from Auburn to Montgomery to join the Army. Upon finding that the Army recruiter was away for lunch, I went next door and joined the Marine Corps for a three-year tour of duty.

Immediately the Marine recruiter in downtown Montgomery had me transported to a large hangar at Maxwell Air Force Base out from town where several hundred other men were sitting around waiting for orders. I assumed they all had joined the Marine Corps. Over the public address speaker we heard this loud command: "All men who joined the Marines step up to the desk." Only two persons stepped forward, amidst wisecrack warnings from the other recruits—Isaac Ward, a young Black man whom I had never met, and me. Later I learned that Isaac Ward was from Dothan, Alabama, where Mary Jo, my wife, grew up.

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I was born in 1935, and reared in small towns in Alabama—Pine Apple, Greensboro, Evergreen, and Auburn—where schools, churches, movies, restaurants, motels, rest rooms, water fountains, and bus stations were racially segregated. Wherever one went there were written signs as well as unspoken mores separating "whites" from "coloreds." By legal and cultural definition, whites and Blacks as a rule did not mingle unless Blacks provided some service. I had only communicated with Blacks from what we whites in the South and beyond perceived as a superior social and racial status, a perception that gave rise to many of our personal and communal misconceptions and prejudices.

As a result I knew many Blacks but always on my terms. For example, when at ages five and six I played with "Tom" in Pine Apple, I assumed that he was visiting as a friend, only to learn later that this young African American was only accompanying his Mother, "Mary," our cook. Certainly we did not play at "Tom's" home. Once Mama apparently sent "Tom" home, or perhaps had "Mary" send him home, when a white boy visiting with us began taunting him. She didn't want "Tom's" feelings hurt or him to get into trouble. At this time that was probably a typical solution when it came to matters of race, sending "Tom" home rather than confront the racist ridicule practiced by young whites. "Tom," my brothers, and I rode horses barefooted in the dirt driveway made from chinaberry limbs. "Tom" told us about his father who had seen turtles in the "islands" so big one could ride on their backs. Since we had seen how big turtles at the branch behind our house actually got, not for a second did we believe him.

On occasion in Pine Apple several of we white boys walked across the pasture behind our house, careful not to wear a speck of red, because of the giant bull that guarded the grounds, crawled up behind a log, and spied on residents of “colored town” as if we were looking down upon aliens. There were many smoking pots, as a number of African American women took in washing, doing it over outdoor fires.

When Daddy left his job teaching vocational agriculture in Pine Apple to become Assistant County Extension Agent in Greensboro, Alabama (Hale County), Mama wanted “Mary” the cook to move there with us. Reportedly “Mary” wanted to go, but another employer somehow wouldn’t allow it. He was likely the same clerk that Mama upset one day. The clerk was waiting on a Black person when Mama came into the store. When the clerk shifted his attention to what Mama wanted to purchase, she told him that the Black customer was there before her and should be waited on first. Mama said that the clerk was infuriated by her stand. Mama mailed Christmas clothes and other items to “Mary” for the rest of her life. Still, thinking back, I cringe at the assumption that “Mary” would be asked to leave her family and community to travel with a white family segregated from her by race to a different locale.

Mama grew up in Bay Minette, Alabama. She was graduated from Agnes Scott College in Atlanta in French and music and taught school in Luverne, Alabama, where she met Daddy. My three brothers and I were born in the house in Bay Minette where Mama was reared, in the care of her father, a physician. Our grandfather, the doctor, apparently treated African Americans and whites medically the same. Whoever came in his office first, he probably saw first. Day and night, on “house calls,” he drove—first in horse and buggy and later in a Dodge—to both white and Black homes, often on rough dirt roads. In the 1930s, the “Tar Plant’s” union voted to drop Granddaddy as their physician. Only two voted for him, both Blacks. Like many of us early on, however, in some ways he was captive of the nineteenth century, providing separate waiting rooms at his office.

In Greensboro “Arabella” served as “Mary’s” replacement as family cook. In the fourth grade or so, when I first walked into “Arabella’s” home, right across the dirt road from our own house, I was surprised to find it so orderly and well appointed, another example of the negative and inaccurate assumptions we whites learned early in life. When we left Greensboro, “Arabella” informed Mama that, because of her age, she could no longer look after her dog, Jack. He went with us to Evergreen. When Jack was dying of cancer, Mama held him in her lap and fed him aspirin water. Such good deeds occurred more often than one might think, however, at times they also enabled we whites to deny and rationalize the subservient segregated conditions under which African Americans were forced to struggle.

I never knew the family names of those African Americans whom I encountered so often in our homes and beyond in the small Alabama towns where we lived. While I was taught to address “Mary” and “Arabella” as “Ma’am,” “yes Ma’am,” and

“no Ma’am,” I was not required to address African Americans with “Mrs.” or “Mr.” Eventually one would have to be peculiarly insensitive or acutely socialized in racist traditions to overlook the indignity of this discriminatory practice.

We moved to Auburn in 1948 when Daddy became the 4-H Club Leader for the State of Alabama, following three years of service as County Extension Agent in Evergreen (Conecuh County). Daddy grew up in Troy, Alabama, and was graduated from Troy State, a two-year college at the time. Later he received the B.S. and M.S. degrees in agriculture from Auburn University.

Our first Sunday in Auburn, Daddy parked the Ford on Gay Street equal distance between the First Methodist and First Presbyterian churches, and announced that “each person could go to the church of his choice.” My older brothers, Mickey and John, began walking toward the Methodist church, while Daddy, Mama, and young Lamar started in the opposite direction. In Pine Apple, Greensboro, and Evergreen we all were active in the Methodist Church. Earlier, however, while Daddy was enrolled in Alabama Polytechnic Institute in Auburn, he and Mama had been members of First Presbyterian. Hesitating, thinking my older brothers wouldn’t want me tagging along, still I stayed with the Methodists, among whom later I would meet the Reverend Ashland Shaw. As is often true even today in many main-line churches, at that time few if any African Americans worshiped in “our white” services.

I recall, soon after arriving in Auburn, walking up to the counter in Wright’s Drug Store, where an African American woman and child were already waiting to order ice cream. The server looked beyond them to me, a thirteen-year-old, and asked what flavor I wanted. I knew that it was unfair for me to take precedence, but unlike Mama, I didn’t protest. If these discriminatory experiences began slowly to wear on some young whites, one can only imagine what humiliation and anger African Americans endured. The advantage of courses in African American studies such as my own is that these incidents and feelings can be fully expressed, explored, explained, and opposed.

Later on I drove from Auburn to Opelika, the Seat of Lee County, Alabama to register to vote. When the official called me back in the office of the Court House, I saw an elderly African American man sitting at a desk concentrating upon what appeared to be an official document. After I had filled-out a registration form and was leaving, I noticed that the senior African American gentleman was still working thru the document in order to “qualify” to vote. As was true when I was sold ice cream first, I knew that this treatment of the elderly citizen was wrong. But like most whites I did not question this discriminatory way of denying African Americans their civil rights, placing me in the category that Dr. Martin Luther King assessed as good people doing nothing so that evil could thrive.

One day Mama and I were in our living room at home on Brookwood Drive in Auburn. As the young Black carrier rode up on his bike to deliver our newspaper, we

heard white kids say something like, “get out of here n\_\_\_\_r.” When she heard the ugly racist remark, I noticed that Mama bit her lower lip, shook her head in shame, and shed tears, a rare protest at the time. As curious as it sounds, Mama and Daddy taught and required us always to show respect to all individuals regardless of race. Had I insulted any individual Black or white person at any time, when we returned home, I would have paid dearly. Daddy was a tough disciplinarian. But we also were required to obey the verbal and nonverbal signs that separated “whites” from “coloreds” throughout the region. From birth, in one way or another, we learned these racist attitudes and practices at home, church, school, store, street, and playground.

From 1941, when I entered the first grade in Pine Apple, through 1960, when I received the B.A. at Auburn University, no Black students, as a rule, had been allowed in “our” public educational institutions. In 1961, I wrote my master’s thesis at Florida State University on “The Status of Speech Education in the White Public Schools of Alabama.”

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Only once, before meeting Isaac Ward at Maxwell Air Force Base in 1956, had I conversed with African Americans on an equal status. This occurred in 1955, when as a sophomore at Auburn University, motivated by Reverend Ashland Shaw, I attended the Student Volunteer Movement Quadrennial Conference in Athens, Ohio. The meeting was planned in part by Ms. Margaret Flory, one of the leaders of the ecumenical movement of the twentieth century. More than half the 4,000 students attending came from outside the United States. Upon returning home, I had my film developed of that racially integrated interaction, but I hid the pictures. Figure 3 is one of the pictures taken with my camera on our way to the Ohio conference that I hid. (I am second from the left.)

Even so, my sense of racial justice was growing more acute through participation in the Wesley Foundation at Auburn where, under the leadership of Reverend Shaw, we had begun to discuss and question the evil of the separate-but-unequal treatment imposed upon African Americans in which we were participating. While some later wrote that we were the silent generation, actually many of us then were quite vocal in small groups, if short on action. While Mama was demonstrating opposition to abuse of African Americans at home, Ashland Shaw was reforming my consciousness at the Wesley Foundation. Elsewhere African American activists such as Dr. King were being increasingly heard on television from Montgomery, Selma, and Birmingham, along with journalists such as Ralph McGill of the *Atlanta Constitution*.

When Isaac Ward and I walked up to the desk of the U. S. Marine master sergeant whose dress blues were covered with medals of service and heroism, we probably both needed a friend, but neither one of us spoke. Instinctively, even before boot camp, we both knew there were times when one should just listen and obey.



*Figure 3*

After my physical exam, when I covered the same weak eye twice so I could pass the test—a decision on the rifle range at Parris Island I would regret—I looked around for Isaac Ward, but he was gone. I did not see him again until the next morning when I boarded the train in Montgomery for Parris Island, South Carolina, via Atlanta, Georgia. I had stayed the previous night at a very nice hotel in Montgomery, courtesy of the U. S. Government, a new experience for me. When I naively asked Isaac Ward where he disappeared to after our physical exams, he replied matter-of-factly that he had spent the night in a part of Montgomery that I did not see, another situation to be examined in a minority studies class.

Surprisingly we were able to sit together on the train trip from Montgomery to Parris Island, a new experience for me. When we got off the train in Atlanta for a layover, I was upset by the separate waiting rooms and decided to sit with Isaac Ward in the “colored” section of the depot. I guess I assumed that Blacks would be less likely to protest my presence in their waiting room than would whites oppose Isaac Ward in theirs (ours). Certainly that was a rare experience for me. Isaac Ward didn’t express an opinion. Looking back now, one can only speculate what Isaac Ward was thinking and how he was adapting, growing up in the segregated Deep South, now volunteering to serve his country in the Marine Corps, having been assigned the night before to a separate hotel in Montgomery. I suppose many who

did not grow up in the South under this segregated system will have difficulty understanding all the forces at work, a condition that students could closely examine.

While waiting for the train to Parris Island in Atlanta, together Issac Ward and I walked over to the *Atlanta Constitution* building to speak to my brother, Mickey, who covered college sports for that paper. I probably assumed that a newspaper that published Ralph McGill's columns in support of equal opportunities for African Americans would likely be more receptive to racially mixed guests.

Little did I realize that day on the way to Parris Island that a few years later, while working on a doctoral dissertation at Louisiana State University, I would be sitting in Ralph McGill's office, taping an interview with him about his many speeches on human rights. Having returned to Auburn in 1958 to complete a B.A. degree in sociology and earning the M.S. in speech at Florida State, in 1967 I finished a Ph.D. at Louisiana State University in the history and criticism of public address. My dissertation was on the theory and practice of Ralph McGill's persuasive discourse.

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All units in the Marines in which I served during the three years were racially integrated, also a new experience for me. I learned later, however, that there were no African American drill instructors (DIs) at Parris Island during my time there. Isaac Ward and I became relatively close during our training at Parris Island.

Just before our scheduled graduation from boot camp, I came down with pneumonia and was told to go to the base hospital. Hospitalization meant that all my buddies in Platoon 6 would graduate without me, go home for a 30-day leave, and return for combat training as a unit without me. After my leave, I would have to join a unit of strangers for combat training and deployment to a permanent duty station.

When I returned from the physician's office to pack my sea bag for the hospital, 70 fellow Marines in our platoon and the Drill Instructor looked on. For a reason known only to himself, the drill instructor yelled, "Private Ward get up here and help Private Logue pack his sea bag!" Isaac Ward and I spoke few words as we both held the sea bag open and placed my personal and military articles in it. We managed only an awkward farewell more appropriate for the drill instructor than for each other, a rare pause in the unremitting day and night training.

Some weeks later, when I returned to training from the hospital, that drill instructor met me at the bus, arranged to have me join a new platoon that—thankfully, like my original platoon—was close to graduating from Parris Island, and walked me down to a base seamstress to have PFC (private-first-class) stripes sewn on shirts and coats. In Figure 4 I'm pictured at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, 1956, my first permanent duty assignment soon after finishing boot camp, trying to look "salty."

At Parris Island at that time, drill instructors employed intimidation to motivate

young Marines-to-be for war. Most of the persuasive coercion was more mental than physical. Reverend Ashland Shaw had served in the Army, and when he heard that I was dropping out of Alabama Polytechnic Institute to enter the military, he somehow arranged to meet me at the depot to warn me of the psychological pressures I would experience. With my train on the way, there was no time for indirect counseling. He expressed no doubts about my managing the physical demands, but was concerned about the emotional strain.

Fortunately, Daddy's cowboy belt discipline and three years of grueling football practices under Coach R. L. Beaird at Auburn High School had braced me well for boot camp mentality. Reverend Shaw also cautioned me about the risqué side of military service, and asked if I knew the "hand method" on which to rely if necessary. Once while our small survey unit was camped in concert with an engineering company deep in the interior of Luzon Island in the Philippines, a local resident rolled a sad-appearing prostitute to the fringe of the encampment in a makeshift wheelbarrow. Figure 5 shows a photograph of Reverend Ashland Shaw.

During boot camp training, the Drill Instructor who later met me at the hospital bus and directed me to the base seamstress, yelled out to the squad bay for "Private Logue to get in here." Following the careful regimen taught to all Marine recruits, I knocked three times firmly on the wall outside his office. Upon his order, I marched into the small forbidden office and stood rigidly at attention, looking straight at the wall. He commanded me to look down by the numbers. Glancing down and back up quickly, I saw a fellow recruit lying on his back, the drill instructor astraddle his stomach and a bayonet at his throat.

The drill instructor said, 'Private Logue what should I do with this n\_\_\_\_r!'" I was scared speechless. Once again, as often happened in the South, an African American was placed in a defensive and dangerous situation, another circumstance students would do well to explore and discuss in a Black studies program. Finally the drill instructor let the young African American recruit stand and ordered me to "fight him." At Parris Island no recruit dared disobey an order, any order; just as few whites and Blacks in the South did not risk ignoring the ever-present



*Figure 4*



*Figure 5.*

written and unwritten signs requiring racial discrimination and separation. Trying to appear to obey the drill instructor's command that I fight, without actually following through, I edged forward and asked meekly, "Private \_\_\_\_ do you want to fight me?"

There was also a practical dimension to this Parris Island dilemma. Having gotten to know and respect this private well during our rigorous training, I knew that in any fight he would beat me badly. In response to what I perceived as a military order, rather than do something that would get me maimed by my fellow recruit and further upset the drill instructor, such as telling him, "Sir this is wrong" or "Sir this is not right"—attempts at moral suasion some might have tried—I managed somehow to do nothing. Finally the drill instructor dismissed us to the squad bay, terrified but unharmed. The drill instructor was from Alabama and I believe he assumed that I, also an Alabamian, would welcome an opportunity to humiliate and frighten a Black recruit. He was damn wrong.

Once while our platoon was standing at attention in front of our racks (beds) waiting for inspection, this same drill instructor stopped before me and stated or asked something that I can't recall now. Without warning he hit me hard in the stomach with his ample fist, bending me to catch my breath, tears dropping



*Figure 6. (Photograph from Platoon 6 Graduation Booklet given to us upon graduating from boot camp, Parris Island, 1956.)*

directly onto the deck (floor of the squad bay). “Private Logue,” he demanded, “are you going to cry! Why aren’t you standing at attention!”

When a recruit marched out of step, the drill instructor compelled him to run around the entire platoon, his 9.5 pound M-1 rifle held high above the head, as his buddies marched smartly in unison. There were also the usual pushups for punishment. Those several who failed to qualify with the M-1 rifle at the range were required to wear their clothes backwards and straggle along behind the qualifiers, who at this stage of our training marched with marked precision, some 70 boot heels hitting solidly as one. Our Platoon 6 is pictured in Figure 6 marching in step at port arms at Parris Island.

Fortunately Daddy taught us to shoot the BB-gun and .410 and 12 gauge shotguns. Also nearly two years of Army ROTC at Auburn University were a benefit, although I took that training far less seriously than I did the Marine Corps. Because I had difficulty seeing the small target several hundred yards away, initially on the firing range I was sent to the base optometrist for glasses.

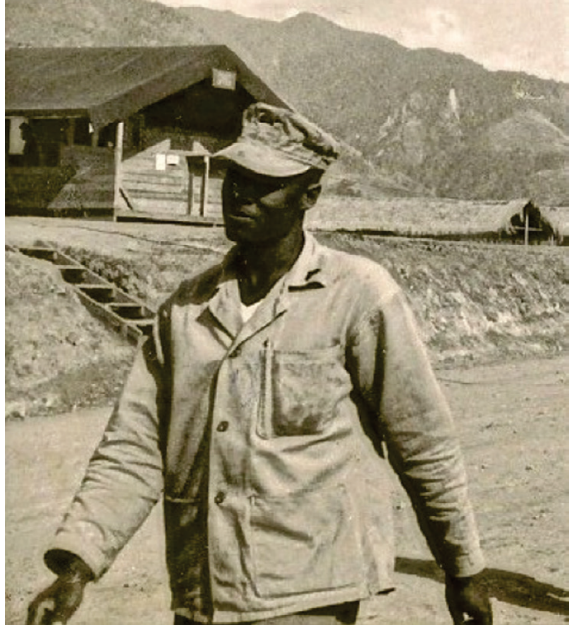
If you blundered by calling your rifle a “gun,” you were compelled to stand nude on a table in the squad bay before some 70 fidgety-footed recruits, holding

the weapon high above your head with one hand, and your crotch with the other, repeating loudly with required accompanying gestures:

This is my rifle,  
This is my gun.  
This is for killing,  
This is for fun.

Over two years after joining the Marines, when I had been promoted to sergeant, I was packed in a troop ship with hundreds of others all dressed down to t-shirts because of the heat. Tensions were high. While exiting a movie in an overly crowded passageway on the ship, I brushed the shoulder of a Black Marine. He grabbed me by the collar, shoved me against the bulkhead, and threatened, "White boy, who do you think you are shoving?" Frightened and anxious to improve my situation, I responded in my native Pine Apple speech: "I realli' wadn' tryin' to push inybody." When my assailant, who apparently was from the North, heard my Alabama accent, things got worse. He said to a few of his Black colleagues gathering around, "Hey man, look what we got here, a FARM BOY!" From such encounters, later, when designing and teaching my course on African American discourse, we could ask why under crowded conditions conflict between the races could flare so quickly. In what ways can such lack of trust be negotiated or resolved. Can it be? Why? Why not? Over the years how have African Americans addressed such incidents in their oral and written discourse?

I'm not sure what would have happened to me had this racial tension aboard ship accelerated. To my good fortune, Sergeant John Williams, a close friend in our small survey artillery unit and a Black resident of the Virgin Islands came along, placed his arm about my shoulder, and with a big smile and clipped speech deplored, "what have you gotten yourself into now, Logue," and then somehow walked me past the angry faces while, at the same time, identifying with their feelings. Figure 7 is a picture of Sergeant Williams of the Virgin Islands, taken when we were practicing artillery fire for six months on Luzon Island, Philippines.



*Figure 7.*



*Figure 8. (Photograph from Platoon 6 Graduation Booklet, given to us upon graduating from Boot Camp, Parris Island, 1956.)*

Near the end of my three-year tour of duty in the Marines, in 1958, after returning to Camp Lejeune from stints at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, California, Okinawa, Japan, and the Philippines, I was walking on the base one day and met Corporal Isaac Ward. We returned to my squad bay for a long chat about where we had been and what we had seen and experienced during our tour in the Corps. Figure 8 is a picture of Isaac Ward practicing the prone position with the M-1 rifle at the rifle range, Parris Island, South Carolina. He was a model soldier and person.

\* \* \*

On April 8, 1956, soon after my boot camp training ended, a drill instructor marched 74 men of Platoon 71 from their barracks into Ribbon Creek, one of the tidal streams on Parris Island, and six of the recruits drowned. This unusual incident led to an investigation by the Marine Corps. Following this review, but after my departure from Parris Island, changes in the handling of recruits at boot camp were said to have been implemented. These planned improvements were designed to retain the drill instructor's authority while, at the same time, disallowing his abuse of it. Ironically, when I returned to Camp Lejeune after a 30-day leave at home, a delay in the cutting of my new orders necessitated that I go through combat training with some of the Marines who had survived the forced march through Ribbon Creek.

\* \* \*

In the early 1960s, while teaching at Birmingham-Southern College, I attended a Billy Graham rally, said to have been maybe the first mass racially integrated public meeting in Birmingham, if not all of Alabama. The Reverend Billy Graham asked that we repent of our sins and accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, refrains I probably heard often in the Protestant churches our family attended regularly in Pine Apple, Greensboro, and Evergreen.

When exiting that Billy Graham revival along with thousands of others, I was shaken to see my former Parris Island drill instructor, dressed immaculately in civilian suit and tie, his some 6-foot 4-inch frame straight as a board, same bold face, towering head and shoulders above most others, marching briskly as if on parade past Blacks and whites leaving the huge football stadium. I hid in the crowd, seven years after Parris Island boot camp.

Several years later, while I was teaching at the University of Georgia, this ex-drill instructor, now disheveled, came unannounced into my office to inquire about a doctoral program in public administration. When he walked into my office, I quickly stood as erectly as I could manage at the time.

Despite its hardships, I am a better person for my voluntary service of two years, eleven months, and thirteen days in the Marine Corps. (I was allowed to leave the military a few days short of my three-year enlistment period to meet the deadline for enrolling in Auburn's forthcoming term).

My formal schooling in artillery survey motivated and taught me to study, also a novel experience for me. I served with a small artillery unit that measured and calculated distances and directions from 105 and 155 Howitzers—and once in the Philippines, an Honest John missile from the back of a truck—to targets using a 20-second transit. I applied trigonometric functions I failed to master in a mathematics course at Auburn three years earlier. I also benefitted significantly from interacting with African Americans on a daily basis on an equal status.

I will never forget my buddies—Ferguson, Walindoski, Moyer, Long, Schoen, Hagan, Blankenship, Murphy, Sneed, Wilson, Cantrel, Shoffit, Ackerman (the first Jewish person I had ever met), Boyce, Williams, Armstrong, and Ward.

While the formal instruction, challenging training, associations, and friendships were invaluable, at the same time, in a graduate seminar in sociology during my doctoral program at Louisiana State University, I could draw on firsthand knowledge to write a research paper on "Brainwashing at Parris Island." Dr. Vernon Parrington, instructor for that project, had been blinded by an artillery shell during World War II. That distinguished professor had graduate assistants read research literature in sociology to him in French and maybe German. He would serve on the committee to hear my defense of dissertation on Ralph McGill.

\* \* \*

Back on Seventeenth Street North in downtown Birmingham, September 15, 1963, as we returned home from church, because of the threat from bricks being hurled against our car, we became increasingly desperate. There seemed to be little hope that Mary Jo, Michael, and I would get out of this dangerous situation safely. Suddenly there was a firm tap on Mary Jo's side window. We both grimaced and attempted once more to shift away from the thud, assuming a brick had bounced off the pane. The tap grew louder. We glanced over and saw the frantic face of a quite elderly African American man just one inch from the window. Not knowing what to do or what we could do, we looked at him fearfully, the motor of our Ford still running. He tapped again, and signaled urgently with his rotating hand for us to lower the window. Did we dare lower the window?

Most reluctantly, but with no good choice available to us, Mary Jo let the window down about one-half inch. The African American gentleman said firmly through the crack over the noise of the street, "Move over and I'll sit with you." Mary Jo crawled from the floor of our Ford, squeezed the door open, moved over next to me, and held Michael in her lap.

There sat Mary Jo, young Michael, and I amidst a storm that we could not comprehend, with bricks continuing to strike cars in front and back of us, the angry shouting unceasing. We were sweating, shivering, and crying in total fear, with a Black stranger sitting cheek-to-cheek with us in the front seat of our car for all to see, a rare sight in the Deep South under any conditions.

While Mary Jo, Michael, and I were concerned about ourselves, it is difficult to imagine what the elderly gentleman who rescued us was going thru. While our own child was frightened, four of the Sunday school children from the elderly man's church had just been murdered by a bomb, his sacred place of worship badly damaged. By the gentleman's age, one can probably assume the harsh discrimination he had experienced throughout his life. One would think that, after seeing the destruction and killing at his church, surely he must have considered picking up a brick and hurling it as hard as he could. When this incident ended, probably Mary Jo, Michael, and I would return to the safety of our home. This elderly gentleman, however, like other members of his church and community, were left with a life-time of grief and potential rage. "How long, oh Lord, how long," he must have wondered. Even so, somehow he willed himself to walk amidst a bombed site among the debris, smoke, and flying stones to rescue the enemy.

When the elderly African American gentleman entered our two-door car, sat down beside Mary Jo, and closed the door, the bricks stopped. Our volunteer passenger looked straight ahead. Finally the cars in front of us began to move forward, and we inched on past nearby 16th Street Baptist Church where, unbeknown to us, four African American girls, Denise McNair, 11, and Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley, all 14, had been murdered at 10:22

a.m., the moment the dynamited church clock stopped. Sunday school was ending and the four girls were preparing to sing and usher at a worship service.

Many others were seriously injured by the bomb placed at the basement of the church by Thomas Blanton, Jr., Bobby Frank Cherry, and Robert Chambliss, all reportedly former members of the Ku Klux Klan. Among the injured was Sarah Collins Cox, 12, who had numerous pieces of glass removed from her eyes and eventually lost an eye.

One of the Church's stained glass windows that remained in place had the face of Jesus blown away, as pictured in Figure 9.

Wondering if it were safe, I stopped the damaged car down the road a block or two and, without a word, the African American gentleman opened the damaged door and got out. Bent over some from age, he began walking back slowly toward what we read later was the bloody site of the murders. I pray that we thought to thank him. Due to his moral courage and initiative, **we** were safe, but **not the children who had attended his church**. How could I not attempt to help students at the university examine the continuing efforts of African Americans to achieve equal rights, opportunities, and protection for themselves?



*Figure 9. (Photograph property of Birmingham Public Library. Courtesy of Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Catalog number 85.L.16.)*

## Note

1. I would like to thank my brothers (Mickey Logue, John Logue, and Lamar Logue) and sister-in-law (Helen Logue) for providing assistance with this chapter, and Eugene F. Miller for helping to edit the manuscript. I also draw from my "Teaching Black Rhetoric," *Speech Teacher*, XXIII (March 1974): 115–120.

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