

**Voices from the Southern Oral History Program**

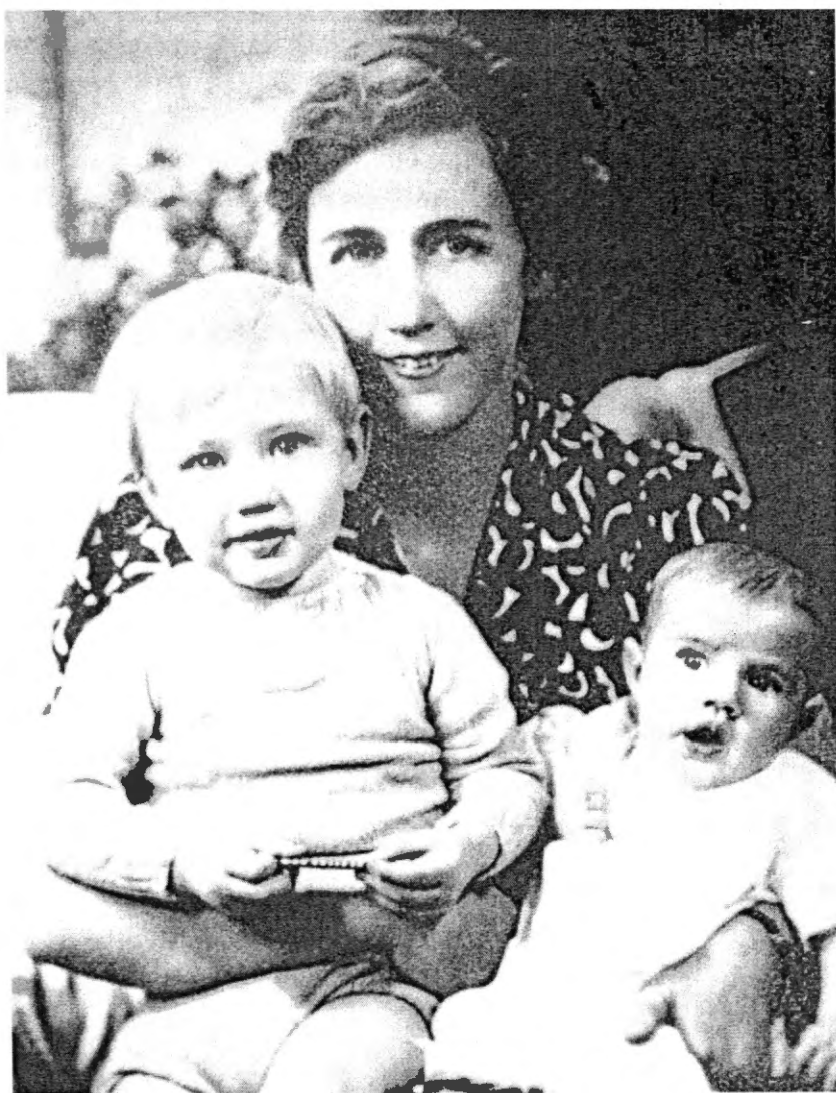
Learning from the Long Civil Rights  
Movement's First Generation

Virginia Foster Durr

FROM INTERVIEWS BY M. SUE THRASHER,

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*Virginia Foster Durr became active with the Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee, especially its work to abolish the poll tax, and with other like-minded New Dealers — including Eleanor Roosevelt — became one of the founding members of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. Durr continued her work for voting rights throughout the 1940s, all the while raising four daughters. Virginia Foster Durr, with son Clifford, who died at age three, and daughter Lucy, born in 1937, courtesy of the Birmingham Public Library Archives.*

"You think you are the first generation who's ever done this; you ought to go out and learn some things." Louisville activist Anne Braden, whose own work with southern progressive movements began in the 1940s, offered that advice to Sue Thrasher, a Braden protégé and student organizer in the 1960s. That call to learn from an earlier generation inspired Thrasher, along with historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall and fellow student activist Leah Wise, to begin recording in the early 1970s the memories of veteran southern progressives. At the time of the project's inception, all three women were working in Atlanta for the newly formed Institute for Southern Studies. In 1973 Hall left for the University of North Carolina, where her commitment to recovering voices from the South's earlier radical traditions became one of the driving impulses behind her founding of the Southern Oral History Program (SOHP). Two years later, that ongoing interest in learning from first-generation Civil Rights activists, combined with a new SOHP initiative on southern women, brought Hall and Thrasher to the Wetumpka, Alabama, home of Virginia Foster Durr. Like her longtime friend Anne Braden, Durr stood as a living embodiment of what Hall would later term the "Long Civil Rights Movement."<sup>1</sup>

Born in Alabama in 1903, Durr grew up in Birmingham hearing stories of her slaveholding ancestors. Though the family's wealth had declined significantly by the early twentieth century, Durr formed an early identification with elite society that never completely faded, even as she later fought against institutions of race and class privilege. "You could not be around Virginia without acknowledging and just observing that she did lay claim to coming from aristocracy," Thrasher recalled.

Durr took pride in her aristocratic roots but also demonstrated an early unwillingness to play the role of the stereotypical southern belle. Her entry into political activism came in the early thirties, when she and her husband, Alabama attorney Clifford Durr, moved to Washington, D.C. There Clifford served in the Roosevelt administration, while Virginia became active with the Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee, especially its work to abolish the poll tax. In association with other like-minded New Dealers, including Eleanor Roosevelt, Durr became in 1938 one of the founding members of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, one of the South's first interracial organizations that actively opposed segregation. Her work for voting rights continued throughout the 1940s, and she served as a lead organizer for the National Committee to Abolish the Poll Tax, all the while raising four daughters. She was an ardent supporter of Henry Wallace's 1948 bid for the presidency on the Progressive Party ticket and ran that same year for the United States Senate as the Progressive Party's candidate from Virginia. In 1951 the Durrs returned to Alabama, where Clifford established a law practice in Montgomery. For a time, Virginia scaled back her political activism, partly in an effort to shield her family from reprisal. Yet, in 1954, she came under



*Virginia Foster Durr's interviewers, Sue Thrasher (left) and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall (center), with Leah Wise in 1976. Photograph courtesy of Sue Thrasher.*

public scrutiny when Senator James Eastland, from Mississippi, called her to testify in New Orleans before his Internal Security Subcommittee. Eastland failed to draw convincing links between Durr and “subversive” activity; her chief sin, as Durr later put it, was not in being a Communist but rather in refusing to become an anti-Communist. The publicity surrounding the hearing, however, did expose Durr as an opponent of segregation. From that time on, she made little attempt to conceal her racial politics and became an active supporter of the emerging Civil Rights Movement, most famously giving aid to Rosa Parks during the years surrounding the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

With Clifford at her side, Virginia sat with Hall and Thrasher for initial interviews in the spring of 1975. That fall, Thrasher began taping additional sessions.<sup>2</sup> By that time, Clifford had died and Thrasher found herself becoming “enmeshed in Virginia’s life in a way that I wouldn’t have thought was going to happen. She needed someone to be near and to talk to at that point.” Thrasher spent several months living in the Durr home, interviewing in the mornings, conducting library research in the afternoons, and frequently attending evening dinners that Durr hosted for her wide circle of friends. The interviews during that time exposed “a rawness to Virginia’s emotion” that was partly the result of her recent loss of Clifford. She also expressed disillusionment, both about what she saw as youthful disregard for her generation’s achievements, as well as self-doubt about her legacy. Thrasher thinks that the confusion of the mid-1970s tempered Durr’s



*Virginia Foster Durr (left, ca. 1981) was an early supporter of the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee, formerly known as the Highlander Folk School, where hundreds of Civil Rights activists had met since the 1930s to train for their work, and in the 1950s she arranged for her friend Rosa Parks (right) to spend time there. Photograph courtesy of the Birmingham Public Library Archives.*

mood. “Things were moving fast,” Thrasher noted. The Civil Rights community was no longer united around a single cause, and activism “felt a lot harder.” Durr “wasn’t quite sure where things were going to go.”

A shared commitment to activism united Durr and her chief interviewer, even if they viewed the world with different generational perspectives and class sensibilities. Thrasher, who came from a white working-class family in rural Tennessee, teased Durr about her “aristocratic need to keep up with everybody’s bloodlines.” Yet, the two bridged their differences and developed a deep mutual affection. “Virginia and I got along very well. I think she appreciated the fact that I was a southerner and a woman and absolutely hung onto her every word.” For her own part, Thrasher remembers the months spent with Durr as a “magical time.” She

found herself “swept up” by Durr’s “powerful personality.” And while Thrasher embraced the spirit of the sixties more fully than Durr, who was “absolutely appalled at the freeness of the sixties generation,” Thrasher saw in Durr a different type of boldness. “In truth,” Thrasher said, “it felt safer to me to be active in the sixties than it did when she and Cliff were doing things. . . . There were more people involved, there was a mass movement in the sixties, and there wasn’t that in the 1950s.” Thrasher believes that Durr never fully overcame a tendency towards racial paternalism that was “bound up with class,” but Thrasher is quick to add that her own generation struggled with similar tendencies: “I think for white people we mostly don’t ever overcome that.”

Thrasher came away from her interviews with Durr with a renewed sense of the Civil Rights Movement as unfinished work: “It felt grounding to me to get in touch with people who had been involved in trying to create an interracial movement in the South during the thirties and forties. So it felt like it wasn’t just about the 1960s, it was a part of a longer tradition of southern struggle, and it made me understand that it probably wasn’t going to be over. That we weren’t going to win the battle either, that it was a whole process of change.” That sense of an ongoing struggle led Thrasher in 1978 to join the staff of the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee, formerly known as the Highlander Folk School, where hundreds of Civil Rights activists had met since the 1930s to train for their work. (Incidentally, Durr was an early supporter of Highlander and in the 1950s arranged for her friend Rosa Parks to spend time there.) Today Thrasher coordinates the Public School Partnership of the Five Colleges Consortium in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Virginia Foster Durr died in 1999 at the age of ninety-five. Her oral histories are housed in the SOHP’s collection and formed the basis of her autobiography, published in 1985.<sup>3</sup>

## Virginia Foster Durr in her own words . . .

### ATTENDING FINISHING SCHOOL IN NEW YORK AND ASPIRING TO FIND A “RICH YANKEE HUSBAND”

We took something called the Mensendieck Exercises, which was supposed to make us graceful. You lie on the ground and wear a sort of a leotard and learn to enter a room and cross your legs, and you would be graceful. The whole thing was not to be strong, but to be graceful. Then, on Friday afternoons, we would have tea and every girl would in turn have to take her turn at the tea table. You would learn to pour tea, you see, and put in the sugar and cream and be graceful and not





*Virginia Foster Durr: "[Hugo Black] thought that I was an absolute idiot for leaving the Democratic Party." Justice Hugo Black, 1937, courtesy of the Collections of the Library of Congress.*

spill the tea. We were always being given lectures on how to deal with a staff, which meant our servants, because it was always assumed that we were going to have a large home and a staff of servants. It was a very ridiculous thing in a way, because they were educating these girls as though they were all going to be mistresses of huge mansions with a large staff of servants.

I suppose that I thought maybe I would get a rich husband and have a large mansion and a staff of servants. [Laughter] This was the ideal, to be a popular, beautiful southern belle and get a rich Yankee husband, and this was supposed to be sort of the fairy tale. [We felt that way] because the southerners were just too

poor. We were and still are, in my opinion, a colony of the North. After we got beat in the Civil War, they bought us up for a nickel on the dollar or whatever it was, and they still own us.

In spite of the fact that all of you younger people—and, you see, we are separated by nearly a gap of forty years—were in the Civil Rights fight and the anti-war fight, I think that the great thing that separates us is the Depression. I've had Civil Rights workers here to stay—and they have been living on very little money—but they have no more concept of what poverty is, because they have never actually been hungry. And they have denied themselves and lived off hamburger, but they have never just had nothing to eat. Then, they take things so for granted. They take buses and airplanes and automobiles and McDonald's hamburgers, and they may live on a very simple scale, but they have no concept of real poverty. I really think that is the thing that has separated the generations more than anything else: the poverty. Although, I think that you young people have been very brave.

#### SUPPORTING THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY AND HENRY WALLACE'S PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN IN 1948

[My brother-in-law, Hugo Black,] thought that I was an absolute idiot for leaving the Democratic Party. Well, [my husband] Cliff didn't leave it either, you see. I was the only one. And did I catch it. Cliff was very nice about it, but Hugo just gave it to me up and down. He didn't think too much of Harry Truman, but he thought that he had to stick by the party.<sup>4</sup>

The thing was that Harry Truman was starting up the Cold War both at home and abroad. Now, Harry Truman, I think, wasn't mean or didn't mean to be a vicious man, but he was. He took all this anti-Communism that had caused so much trouble and made things so miserable.

[I decided to run for the U.S. Senate from Virginia on the Progressive Party ticket because] they wouldn't even put [Henry] Wallace's name in the paper. So, we ran local candidates, which we knew never would get elected, but we ran them so that the papers would have to mention that Wallace was running for president. They couldn't ignore the fact that I was running for the Senate from Virginia. It was just an effort to get something in the papers or on the radio because their policy was just to never mention his name and act like he never did exist.

But down in Norfolk—I will just give you one little episode of the campaign—I got there, and we were going to have a big rally on Sunday afternoon for Wallace. And he was going to speak. So, we had engaged the city auditorium, and there had been a very firm commitment that they would let us have it unsegregated. We got a good deal of publicity and went on the radio. So, when Sunday afternoon came, we got down to the auditorium and the place was surrounded by the police. And



*"The police were just about to move in—they were on either side of the stage, they were just about to swoop in and arrest us—and Henry Wallace [here, in 1939] appears walking down the aisle just as unconcerned, completely oblivious to everything." Photograph courtesy of the Collections of the Library of Congress.*

they said that we had to obey the segregation ordinance. The place had already filled up, and they were not segregated. So, they said that we were all going to get arrested.

Well, [my co-organizer] Clark [Foreman] was standing there with me and arguing with the police, and he turned to me and said, "Look, let's run down the aisle and start the meeting and hold them off as long as possible, and maybe by that time Wallace will get here. And I don't think that they are going to arrest us with him here." So, we ran down the central aisle, and Clark jumped up on the platform and said, "The meeting will come to order and Mrs. Durr, who is chairman of the Virginia committee and is running for the Senate, will preside."

I stood up there not knowing what to do, and Clark said, "Get somebody to pray." Oh, we prayed and prayed. And then the prayer got over and Clark said, "Sing 'The Star Spangled Banner.'" So, we sang all four or five verses; it got very weak toward the end. Then, the police were just about to move in—they were on either side of the stage, they were just about to swoop in and arrest us—and Henry Wallace appears walking down the aisle just as unconcerned, completely oblivious



to everything. So, he comes down and gets on the platform. He makes a very good speech and gets quite a lot of applause, and then people come up and speak to him. So, we had broken segregation in Norfolk—with the police there.

#### RETURNING TO ALABAMA IN 1951 AND NEW LESSONS IN RACE RELATIONS

I had thought in Washington I had rid myself of prejudice, but I had been associating with the very top element of the black community: professors at Howard, [prominent New Dealer] Mrs. [Mary McLeod] Bethune, [suffragist and club-woman] Mrs. [Mary Church] Terrell, the newspaper women and the newspaper men, the people who were head of the [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]. I had been associating with the very top level of the black community. Now, there in Virginia I had had servants, and I had gotten active in the fight for the schools over there. But there I was connected with the preachers and the teachers. But I had never gotten down on the nitty-gritty in the black community. And I thought that when I got back to Alabama that I had gotten rid of my southern bigotry or prejudice. I certainly didn't regain them at all. But the thing was, I was just astonished at the level on which so many black people lived. I mean the level of poverty, in the first place, and the level of joblessness. I was struck mainly by their ignorance and illiteracy—the terrible education they'd had. Because you see they would come to [Clifford's] office and so often they couldn't even sign their name. And then I was struck too—it was a strange thing—in the rural part of Alabama, and also in Montgomery, they had a very strong family structure.

Now Mary's family, as I remember, were tenants. Anyway, they all lived down there in Macon County. They had this very strong family structure. If they had a funeral, they'd almost always wait until Sunday to bury them, so people could come. I used to take Mary over there to that church. And the funeral would start right after service, at 12:30, and then it would go on and on and on forever. And of course it was about 115 or 112 [degrees]; it was so hot. So the first time I took Mary to a funeral, I had on a pair of sandals and no stockings, thin summer dress, and no hat. And Mary of course had on white gloves and a hat and a white dress, white shoes, and white stockings. So I could see that Mary didn't care about my coming in the church. And she said, "Miss Virginia, I think you just better stay out here where it's cooler, because it's going to be so hot in that church."<sup>6</sup>

I said, "Well Mary, I meant to come in and pay my respects."

"No, ma'am, I think you better stay out here where it's cooler."

So I could see she didn't want me to come in the church. So I sat out there in the car, which of course was hotter than the hinges of Hell. And the funeral went on for about four or five hours. So the next time a funeral came, she came up to



*"During those years, I was just trying to keep things going, to keep the house going, the children going, and Cliff going. But I did have this feeling of freedom. Everybody knew then that I was against segregation." Virginia and Clifford Durr, ca. 1945, courtesy of the Birmingham Public Library Archives.*

me, "Miss Virginia, this time I would like for you to come in the church, but Miss Virginia," she said, "I would like for you to put on stockings and a hat and gloves and look like a lady."

Well, I was really reprimanded. So I put on white shoes and silk stockings and white gloves and white pearls and a big hat and a pretty light dress. At that time, Mary introduced me to everybody. Evidently she thought she could be proud of me at that point; I was respectable.

#### WINNING NEW AFRICAN AMERICAN ALLIES AFTER BEING CALLED BEFORE SENATOR JAMES EASTLAND'S ANTI-COMMUNIST SUBCOMMITTEE IN 1954

You know, during those years, I was just trying to keep things going, to keep the house going, the children going, and Cliff going. But I did have this feeling of freedom. Everybody knew then that I was against segregation. I suppose some people thought I was a Communist and a dangerous person too, but I don't think many people thought that Cliff and I could overthrow the government by force and violence.

And after that I started going to the Council on Human Relations. We formed



*"I can remember Joan Baez [at a wedding] singing like an angel and looking so beautiful and then lying down on the floor and going to sleep. And everybody had to step over her. . . . I think that's pure exhibitionism." Joan Baez at the Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C., 1963, courtesy of the Collections of the Library of Congress.*

an integrated United Church Women here, and I began to know the Negro community. One of the curious things was, one of the first telegrams we got was from a long list of names, said "the Women's Democratic Club of Montgomery." I didn't know whether it was black or white. It was the strangest telegram to get, saying we are with you and our prayers are with you and we are proud of you. It was really a very fulsome, glowing praise, and signed by lots of names, which I didn't know. So as soon as I got back I asked [local Civil Rights organizer] Mr. E. D. Nixon who they were, and he said it was a black women's Democratic club. And I got to know all of them quite well. A lot of them were teachers over at Alabama State [University], and they became extremely prominent in the Martin Luther King struggle. And so, [one of the group's leaders, Irene West,] invited me to a meeting of her club. When I got there, I was so amazed to see all these women gathered there, all very nice-looking and well-dressed and educated women.<sup>7</sup>

I asked them, I said, "Before I say anything I would like to know why you,

without knowing me, having never met me even, you took my side and sent me that wonderful telegram and invited me here this afternoon."

They laughed and said, "Well, you ought to know the reason for that."

And I said, "No, I really don't."

And they said, "We knew if Jim Eastland was after you, you were pretty good."

#### MEETING SINGER JOAN BAEZ AT A WEDDING AND BEING SHOCKED BY CHANGING CULTURAL MORES

I can remember Joan Baez singing like an angel and looking so beautiful and then lying down on the floor and going to sleep. And everybody had to step over her. Then the next morning, here was Joan Baez and a whole crowd of folk singers. So I asked one of the boys, I said, "Would you be good enough to get me a package of cigarettes?"

And somebody had some cigarettes, and they offered me one, which—you know—don't have a tip on them. "Oh, I can't smoke those," I said. "Please get me a package of cigarettes."

And she spoke up and said, "I suppose you're used to ordering black people around all of your life, so you think you can order us around."

I said, "My Lord, I don't know why it's such a terrible request to ask a young boy to go out and get you a package of cigarettes."

"Well," she said, "you just bring that southern arrogance with you and just think you can order people around, because you've been ordering black people around all your life."

Have you ever heard anything as rude in all your life? I was absolutely astonished. I said, "Well evidently you don't approve of anybody from the South."

Well, she got on a long diatribe about the South and the way we were treating the blacks and all. And then she said, "You don't approve of me either, do you?"

I said, "Well, no, actually I don't." By this time, I was furious.

She said, "Why don't you approve of me?"

And I said, "Well, in the first place, I thought yesterday at the wedding that your behavior was extremely odd and very rude. I think if you want to take a nap—why you had to go down and lie in the middle of the floor and go to sleep and everybody had to step around you. You're just making yourself so conspicuous, and you certainly caused other people to have a good deal of inconvenience so they wouldn't step on you. I think that's pure exhibitionism."

Oh, she just practically bared her teeth at that and said, "Well, I think I have a right to rest when I want to, and the kind of thing that makes us so different is the conventionality. If I was tired, I had a right to lie down on the floor and rest."



*"I don't know why our house was so full then, but it was. . . . I can't remember all of them that came through. But these were young people, whom I came to have a tremendous affection for, because they were right on the front line of the battle I was in. And I found them really very delightful, warm-hearted, good people." The Durrs' home in Alexandria, Virginia, courtesy of the Collections of the Library of Congress.*

I said, "Well, you might have, but you certainly caused a lot of inconvenience, and I thought it was very bad manners."

"Well, what else do you think is wrong with me?"

"Well, I think the way you're dressed is absolutely disgraceful. You just told me you're going on the train to Boston. Look what you've got on. You've got on a bikini and a brassiere and long hair, and barefooted."

Oh, she got furious at that. We had it. She was so rude to me, so I decided why should I take her rudeness?<sup>8</sup>

#### DEVELOPING AFFECTION AND ADMIRATION FOR THE 1960S GENERATION OF ACTIVISTS

So one night I got a telephone call from this young man who said his name was Tom Hayden. He and a friend. Said he was just out of jail—and said could they spend the night with us?

So, I don't know why our house was so full then, but it was. And I said, "There's no place to sleep at all but on the floor. Literally, we don't have a bed vacant."

He said, "Well, Mrs. Durr, I've been sleeping on concrete for some time, and just a soft floor would do me."

So they got there late that night. And they were the most filthy two boys I have



ever seen. They were just dirty and smelled to high heaven. I mean they really smelled terrible. I had to hold my nose. They bathed and showered. Cliff provided them maybe with pajamas. But we made them up a bed on the floor, and one of them slept on the couch. And we washed their clothes. I don't think they were lice-ridden, like some of them were. But they had been in jail for some several weeks. And hungry — my God almighty — they ate like they'd never seen food before. You know, you just couldn't fill them up. And I think they only stayed a day or two.<sup>9</sup>

But you see that was the function we performed; Jim [Forman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] would call me up from Atlanta and say somebody was going to Mississippi and they wanted to spend the night in Montgomery and get to Mississippi in the daytime. Now, I can't remember all of them that came through. But these were young people, whom I came to have a tremendous affection for, because they were right on the front line of the battle I was in. And I found them really very delightful, warm-hearted, good people. I felt like it was tremendous, you know, to have all these allies. And I was thrilled over that.

SPEAKING TO A CLASS AT TUSKEGEE  
INSTITUTE IN THE EARLY 1970S

Well, I started out, and I could feel a sense of hostility in the room, a sense of coldness, non-response.

I said, "Look, I don't want to bore you all by telling you the things you already know, and I'd like to know how many people here have read and know about the [1960 voting rights] case of *Gomillion v. Lightfoot*." [The case's lead plaintiff] Dr. [Charles Goode] Gomillion was sitting right there. Not one of them had ever heard of the book or had ever read it.<sup>10</sup>

And I said, "My goodness, that's too bad, because this is about Macon County. And it's about the long struggle for the right to vote that Dr. Gomillion led." No response at all.

I said, "Well, have you ever read Du Bois's book, *The Souls of Black Folk*? Because I think that that is also one of the great classics that everybody should read." Nobody had ever heard of it. I said, "Well, have you read Dr. Horace Mann Bond's book, *Negro Education in Alabama*?" Which I also consider one of the great classics. Nobody had ever heard of that.

And a little girl was sitting right behind me, and all of a sudden she said, "You old lady, we don't want to hear you anyway. You just coming down here to take us down. Have we read this? Have we read that? You just coming here to take us down. We know what kind of folks you are. We don't want to hear you anyway."

And with that the whole class joined in and said, "No, we don't want to hear no white folks."

Well, I was absolutely shocked beyond words. I had never been treated that way



*"They said—this was when Eldridge Cleaver [here, in 1968] was still in Algeria—'Eldridge Cleaver's coming back, and we're going to take it away from the white folks. We want what the white folks have got.' So the meeting ended on that note." Photograph courtesy of the Collections of the Library of Congress.*

in my life by black or white, with just open, insulting, repudiation. So, finally, I said, "There're twenty-three people here. Each one of you have made it perfectly plain to me that you don't care one single thing about what I have to say, but the main thing is, I want to know why all of you hate me so much. You've never seen me before. I'm an old lady." I was sixty-nine or seventy then. "You never saw me before. You don't know anything about me, but you're just expressing all this hatred for me just because I'm white, which I can't help but be. So why do you hate me so much? Let's just get down to the root of the problem."

So I took each in turn, and they told me why they hated white folks. This took quite a while, because they were extremely articulate about why they hated white folks.

I said, "Well, now look, you don't believe that politics is going to do you any good? Do any of you vote? Have you been registered?" None of them had even been registered. So I said, "Well then, you tell me what you think the solution is."



*"There's a whole new fight to fight. And the only thing I regret is I won't be here to fight it. One thing you can't change is you get old." Virginia Foster Durr (center), with Ralph Telferteller (left), a Highlander Folk School Staff member, and Bernice Robinson (right), the first director of Johns Island's Citizenship Schools in the 1950s, photographed ca. 1982, courtesy of Sue Thrasher.*

They said—this was when [Black Panther Party leader] Eldridge Cleaver was still in Algeria—“Eldridge Cleaver’s coming back, and we’re going to take it away from the white folks. We want what the white folks have got.”

I said, “It’s economic with y’all?”

They just said, “We want what the white folks got.”

So the meeting ended on that note. I mean they didn’t give a damn about politics or about the right to vote or the right to sit in the bus. It was like when I said to this [young man] that worked for me on Saturday, “Haven’t you ever heard about the big struggle for the right to vote?”

“Huh, Mrs. Durr, who wants to ride on a bus? I want a car of my own.”

I mean, now you see they have absolutely no trust or faith in law or politics. All they want: they want a car; they want a good house; they want a job; they want an opportunity to rise in the world. It was, in a way, the most painful moment of my life, because I felt like all I’ve worked so hard for—and they don’t give a damn about it.

ON HER GENERATION'S LEGACY AND  
HOPES FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

I felt that people voting and being in politics was the answer to the problems. And neither of them proved to be the answer, because we have now among the young whites and among the young blacks a total disillusionment with the system of law, the courts, and the process of voting.

What we won was we got the vote, and we got segregation abolished. But now, there's a whole new fight to fight. And the only thing I regret is I won't be here to fight it. One thing you can't change is you get old.

I'm not going to be here to see the end of [the fight] or even the beginning. And I do regret that very much indeed. Because you have to have another economic system. There's no doubt about that.

Now, all I can say is, it's up to y'all to do it. And God knows, I just wish I could live long enough to see it happen and see y'all get into the struggle.

NOTES

1. All quotations from Thrasher are drawn from Thuesen's phone interview with her, November 17, 2009. For Thrasher's autobiography, see "Circle of Trust," in *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 207–251. On Anne Braden, see Cate Fosl, *Subversive Southerner: Anne Braden and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Cold War South* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 91 (March 2005): 1233–1263.

2. Two additional individuals participated in the interviewing of Durr during this time. Robert Hall of the Institute for Southern Studies was present in March 1975 and labor historian Neill Her-ring in November 1975.

3. Much of Durr's oral history is accessible online through the University of North Carolina's Documenting the American South collection (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/>). The excerpts included here have been edited for readability and length. Every effort has been made to preserve the original context and Durr's style. See Virginia Foster Durr, *Outside the Magic Circle: The Autobiography of Virginia Foster Durr*, ed. Hollinger Barnard (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985). For a close look at Durr's activism during the 1950s and 1960s, see Patricia Sullivan's richly documented collection of Durr's letters, *Freedom Writer: Virginia Foster Durr, Letters from the Civil Rights Years* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003).

4. Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black was married to Durr's sister, Josephine Foster Black.

5. Durr's longtime friend Clark Foreman was a New Dealer, Progressive Party organizer, former president of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, and civil liberties advocate.

6. Mary Harris was a domestic worker in the home of Clifford Durr's mother, where Clifford and Virginia lived when they returned to Alabama in 1951. See Sullivan, *Freedom Writer*, 32–33.

7. Durr is likely referring here to the Women's Political Council, an African American women's organization in Montgomery that became a central organizing force during the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Montgomery's black civic organizations also included the Progressive Democratic

Association, whose membership included men and women. E. D. Nixon served as president of the latter group. See Jo Ann Robinson, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott and the Women Who Started It: The Memoir of Jo Ann Gibson Robinson*, ed. David J. Garrow (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 22–30; Edgar Daniel (E. D.) Nixon was a friend of Clifford and Virginia Durr and a labor and Civil Rights leader in Montgomery. He helped draw both of the Durrs more closely into Montgomery's early Civil Rights Movement.

8. Several years after this wedding, Durr expressed newfound admiration for Baez and her commitment to the Civil Rights struggle. See Sullivan, *Freedom Writer*, 295–296.

9. Hayden was one of the founders of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and a national figure in the Civil Rights and antiwar movements.

10. Durr had a close friendship with Gomillion, a Tuskegee Institute sociologist and voting rights advocate.