

# No Other Place to Be

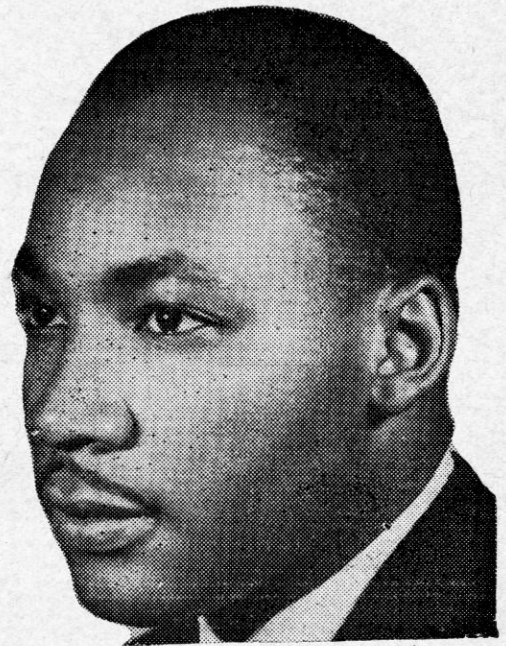
Kay Boyle

I sat under a wide tree across from the Lincoln Memorial, and it seemed to me this was a church gathering, a tremendous gathering of dedicated believers, that I had come to. It was so much a religious demonstration that the motorcycle and military police were out of place. Perhaps if so many of the people there had not been Negroes, this sense of reverence and humility, the presence of collective humility, would not have prevailed. The singing soared under the trees as if in the nave of a cathedral, but instead of cathedral solemnity, there was a spirit of celebration, a muted sound of rejoicing, the kind with which every sermon and every place of worship should be imbued. The good-nature, and the sense of purpose beneath it, were eloquent and beyond argument, just as Negro music is. Whatever the "March" was going to accomplish, or fail to accomplish, it had already produced one miracle: it was bringing together without rancor or misunderstanding for at least one brief day, thousands of people of different faiths, with skins of different pigmentation. And this accomplishment was due in part to that inestimable wealth of warmth and kindness which the Negro has given so freely to men who are less warm and kind, and given for the most part without acknowledgement, and certainly without adequate return.

I listened to Odetta sing, and to Lena Horne pronounce the one word: "Freedom;" I listened to Mahalia Jackson, and Josephine Baker, and Marlon Brando; and to Mrs. Daisy Bates, and Rabbi Prinz, and to Walter Reuther, each speaking in his own voice, in his particular vernacular.

But louder and clearer than their voices were the words on the banners we had carried, for they spoke in a single voice and almost in a single word. They all said: "NOW"! They said "now" for school integration, for equal jobs and equal pay, for decent housing, and for first class citizenship. They asked that there be *now* an end to bias, and a beginning of equal voting rights, not tomorrow or the day after, but *now*. The locusts in the great green trees, in the branches of which men sat listening quietly, began to whisper as the Congressmen and Senators arrived.

It is good for a writer to be able to express himself in action. And it is good to remember that our American Revolution is the only revolution in history that did not destroy the intellectuals who had given it a framework and a tongue. Albert Camus knew how to come out from behind the writer's closed door and act, not only act on the stage, but as a socially aware citizen. James Baldwin knows when to push the typewriter aside and march through



Martin Luther King

the streets, in the cause of the redress of grievances. It is a deeply personal matter, a thing no one can decide for another, but I am glad when the writers of a country are articulately there. As men and women we cheered the group of walkers from New York, and the man who roller-skated from Chicago to the "March," but it was the culminating speech of Dr. Martin Luther King that sustained in that huge crowd the spirit of brave humility. "We refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt," he said, in asserting his faith that the bad check, the defaulted promissory note which had been given the Negroes in America, was about to be redeemed. This speech that stirred emotion in the blood, that exhorted the Negro to return to his ghetto, to his State in the deep South, but to know that from now on he was not alone, was the rarest of accomplishments. It aroused one to gentleness, to forbearance, and at the same time to commitment from which there can be no turning back. I lost two of my children, and my friends, in that enormously gentle and goodnatured crowd, and I could not get close enough to see the speakers, but their voices, and their presence, filled the church-like hush under the trees. And I knew that if one was American, and believed in the equality of men, on the 28th of August, 1963, there was no other place to be.