

number of times when, at the edge of a town, we would find ourselves confronted by police who would inform us that we weren't going to be allowed to walk through. We had a constitutional right to walk through, and a few people in the group were always in favor of simply saying, "Try to stop us!" or saying nothing at all—and marching forward. What we actually did, always, was to stop the walk for an hour or two, drive into town and discuss the matter with the chief of police. We would talk very quietly and always show him courtesy, and respect for his proper authority (for example, where traffic control was concerned), but in the course of the talk we would let it become clear to him that he would save himself a lot of trouble by letting us walk through; we knew what our rights were and had been to jail before for them and weren't afraid of going again. Time and again, after a certain amount of bluster on the chief's part, we would be allowed to walk. A few people in the group were always dissatisfied with this way. For it felt like deferring to the authorities. If we had simply marched forward, of course, feeling very bold, we would not have made our way through the town—we would have made our way right into jail, the authorities doing with us what they liked. The action that felt less bold won us our way.

All this is relevant, I think, to discussions going on now in the Movement about how to pass from protest to resistance, from merely "symbolic" actions to "practical" ones. To define clearly which actions are symbolic—and which more than that—one has to look twice. A bold foray that is absolutely certain to be stopped is, surely, symbolic action. For example, those who rushed up the steps into the Pentagon on October 21st—to be thrown back at once by the troops, and quite predictably—were surely engaged in symbolic action; whereas those who tried to communicate with the troops confronting them, and were able to cause at least two defections from those troops, were surely engaging in action that

was more than symbolic. The whole subject is infinitely complex. I am hardly saying that bold forays are never in order; but I am saying that dialogue with the other side is deeply practical.

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How Many Will Answer?

Again I can imagine certain readers interrupting—to remark that I am overlooking, in this essay, one fundamental point. It is all very well to talk of the advantages of nonviolence, they might say, but how many are going to answer the call to such battle? A certain form of struggle can hardly be called practical if one cannot recruit very many men to try it; and to get most men to fight, one has to offer certain things which nonviolent struggle does not offer. I have heard people state, for example, that men from the ghettos would never turn to nonviolence because it does not allow them to speak out the full measure of their hatred for the white man. I have heard others say that few people would turn to it because it does not offer them the chance to feel, for once, like men. How a certain action makes one feel is not irrelevant.

But if nonviolent action is boldly taken it does allow men to speak out their deepest feelings; and if it is boldly taken, it does allow them to feel that they are standing up to others like men. It may not permit them to act out their hatred for others by taking revenge; but it allows—it requires—they to act out all the truth they feel about what the other has done, is doing to them, and to act out their determination to change this state of things. In this very process, one's hatred of the other can be forgotten, because it is beside the point; the point is to change one's life. The point is not to give some vent to the emotions that have been destroying one; the point is so to act that one can master them now.

What is it to assert one's manhood—one's human rights? Let me quote Fanon again. He