



## ***JOURNAL OF ORDINARY THOUGHT*** **Authors of History** **Summer 2008**

*JOT* writers from [Bezazian](#), [Hall](#), [King](#), and [Mabel Manning](#) Branch Libraries; [Albany Park Community Center](#), [Cara Program](#), [Herzl Elementary School](#), Project Hope, Lindblom Park, San Lucas Church, and [St. Leonard's House](#) on the theme of where were they when...

Cover image "Blues for Fred Hampton" by [Tony Fitzpatrick](#).

Photography by Serhil Chrucky.

Introduction by [Salim Muwakkil](#), senior editor at *In These Times*.

### **Introduction**

Where we were helps define where we are. History situates us and we often base our sense of esteem on our interpretation of the past. We do this despite the fact that now is our only reality and the past exists only in memory, as wisps of neural impulses. All human events take place in the unscripted present, but humanity prefers the security of an established past or the anticipation of a projected future.

In some ways, this tendency is understandable; the now is utterly ad hoc and we need patterned consistency to make sense of our lives. Thus, we become preoccupied with allaying fears born of history by seeking security in a hypothetical time to come. We turn away from the radiant spontaneity of now. This, alas, is the human condition (a condition, the Buddhists call "suffering"), and though only now is real, the past is prologue. When Sharon F. Warner writes, "We will remember Emmett, Till racism is erased..." she is making this point, as are Nicole Huddleston, Yolanda Nieves, Malvin Jeffries, Delores Tolliver and all the other contributors who write about the tragic murder that spawned the Civil Rights Movement. Americans have reached a cultural consensus on the meaning of Till's murder and it has become a prominent signpost to situate us.

We often recall prominent signposts to illuminate our past and give meaning to our life narrative. Contributors to this volume recall events like the 1963 march on Washington, when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., delivered his "I Have A Dream Speech," the assassination of President John F. Kennedy a few months later, or the 9/11 terrorist attacks to provide the narrative illumination. These events are prominent in our memories because of their important historical meaning.

However, sometimes events without historical significance move us more. When LeLa Hunt writes about steppin' to the music of Al Green, or Emily A. Dunn about her Englewood neighborhood, Donna McCamey about falling in love, or Pennie Brinson about the man with the Oprah Tshirt, we begin to understand the unique quality of our selective recall.

When recounting memorable occasions from my past to others, I invariably include events like watching Malcolm X speak from a platform on 125th and Lenox Ave. in my native Harlem, N.Y., or

standing on the National Mall in 1963 watching Dr. Martin Luther King give his “I Have A Dream” speech. Or maybe I mention watching stores burn on 125th street during the Harlem riot of 1964—the first of the so-called “long hot summer” riots of the ’60s. If pressed, I’ll note the irony of going unscathed in the military during the Vietnam era only to be shot by an enraged white southerner after returning to the states, or of joining and leaving the Black Panther Party. I recall these events to others perhaps to lend more significance to my personal narrative.

However, in my personal revelry, I remember looking at motes of dust in a sunbeam at 8-years-old and imagining they were souls ascending to heaven. I recall with great clarity looking out of my window on the sixth floor of a Harlem apartment building expecting to see another King Kong climb the Empire State Building, 107 blocks downtown. I have powerful memories of playing cowboys and Indians with torn pieces of newspaper; the cowboys were the white newsprint, the Indians were the multicolored comics.

Perhaps these memories of my personal past situate me more in the now than the momentous historical events through which I lived.

Which past is your prologue?

*Salim Muwakkil*

## **AT TWILIGHT** **Radmila Lunić**

When the day fades at twilight,  
I feel changes in the air—the thickness, nightly wetness, smell.  
Change in the grass I’m walking through—grasshoppers  
jumping, crickets starting an evening concert,  
stag beetles, ants and other insects crawling.  
The trees by the path and scattered birds, not flying through the air  
but hopping from branch to branch,  
from one tree to another, calling mates, singing (lullaby like).  
On the sand—low tide, wet sand left behind, full of little creatures.  
Bush bird with its tiny legs, running fast, picking insects from  
sand and tiny willow offshoots.  
On the lake shore—on a concrete sidewalk, a young couple in love strolls,  
leans on a concrete wall, looking toward the lake, living in the moment of love,  
feeling they’re in another world.  
The water, a dark lead color. Above it, mild, wet fog. Small fish, jumping up  
from the water to catch insects for their last evening meal.  
Observing those changes makes me tense.  
My blood pressure is rising.  
All senses are alert.  
Every second new things happen, but a bit differently than  
a previous night, or yesterday, or a day before it.  
The shadows lengthen. Creatures are looking for  
night shelter, getting ready to repose.  
Others are beginning to explore the area, searching for food.  
I feel I’m at the center of the event, of an occurrence on the  
continuously changing Earth.  
I feel I’m part of the Universe. I’m alive.

## REFLECTIONS (JANUARY 12, 2008)

John Collins

As I sit on this early morning, I am reflecting upon some of the important moments of my past. However, nothing is as great as the present. Most and foremost, I have reached that age milestone of "old man." I shall not become more physically strong, however I will become older and wiser. These are aspects of a person's life, as long as we flow within the river of life. I am very happy to be basking in the wonders of the river's flow. I no longer have the same aspirations as I did in my youth. The lure of wealth, the preparations for "a rainy day." Today the rainy day is here. My concern is maintaining my life so as to achieve longevity. The rewards of longevity are mainly memories of the good times and bad times, and how those times caused me to be the person that I am. I shall continue to drink deeply of the river of life's abundant knowledges, and bask in the wondrous currents that flow.

*Authors of History is dedicated to John R. Collins (March 3, 1927 – June 17, 2008), member of the Hall Branch Library Writing Workshop and husband of Virdajean Towns-Collins. We'll always remember your example and words.*