

# Chapter Eight: One Man, One Vote

In Chapter Eight, titled "One Man, One Vote," the narrative centers on the tragic bombing of Birmingham's Sixteenth Street Baptist Church on September 15, 1963, which killed four young girls. The chapter captures the chaos and destruction from the bombing, highlighted by the recounting of church deacon M. W. Phippen discovering the shoe of his granddaughter, twelve-year-old Denise McNair, among the wreckage. The bombing was a part of the brutal strategy employed by white supremacists to instill fear and maintain Jim Crow laws, a method of violence that, unfortunately, had become commonplace in the tension-laden atmosphere of "Bombingham."

The chapter transitions to John Lewis, who is visiting Troy when he learns of the bombing through the radio. His sense of duty ignites a rush for action, prompting a trip to Birmingham that highlights both the urgency and danger of civil rights work at the time. Upon arriving, Lewis joins other Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) members who feel an intense outrage and a compulsion to take action. They brainstorm demonstrations and civil disobedience tactics, navigating the fine line between their philosophy of nonviolence and the urgent need to act dramatically in the wake of the bombing.

Diane Nash proposes a bold plan for mobilizing a civil rights "army" that includes extensive training in nonviolent tactics and planned direct actions, such as blockades. However, reactions from leaders like Fred Shuttlesworth indicate concerns about the timing and the philosophy of nonviolence during such volatile circumstances. The tension mounts when Nash and Lewis meet with Martin Luther King Jr., who advises caution and prioritizes established methods in light of the recent tragedy.

The chapter also delves into the ongoing struggles in Selma, where voter registration efforts confront unyielding barriers. The actions taken there are rooted in the same philosophy of nonviolence but are increasingly met with severe opposition, embodied by figures like Sheriff Jim Clark, whose brutal tactics highlight the dangers faced by activists. The chapter encapsulates the building momentum for voting rights, fueled by the horror of the bombing, and underscores the challenges leaders like Lewis experience as they strive to balance their ideals against the escalating demands of the civil rights movement.

In conclusion, this chapter vividly conveys the heightened stakes for civil rights during this tragic time, showcasing the complexities and personal conflicts faced by leaders within the SNCC as they respond to violence and continue their struggle for justice and equality.