this, yet they have persisted in carrying forward this combustible affair.” The paper begged for a “rediscovery of reason.” After the march the Tribune let out a sigh of relief. “The planners and participants can consider their job well done, and the residents of the capital, who had to put up with a day’s inconvenience, are entitled to acknowledgment of their patience. Such oratory as there was less overheated than might have been expected.” (The oratory included the “I have a dream” speech of Dr. Martin Luther King.) Around 300 marchers returned to Chicago and demonstrated outside the Sun-Times. They’d expected better from that paper. “It was quite obvious that the [Washington] rally was composed largely of responsible and substantial people who were in control,” the Sun-Times editorial page allowed. Nevertheless, “the time has come for the demonstrations for civil rights to be taken off the streets and into the conference rooms.” The paper hoped that among the march’s leaders “were some who agree with this advice for the future conduct of the civil rights crusade.”

Two years ago the Library of America published a two-volume anthology Reporting Civil Rights, a history of race in America from 1941 to 1973 as written on the fly by journalists. The anthology’s one shortcoming is that it misrepresents civil-rights coverage. The journalism it presents is distinguished. A vast amount of the journalism it omits was dismal.
A two-volume anthology presents a history of race in America from 1941 to 1973 as written on the fly by journalists. The journalism it presents is distinguished. A vast amount of what it omits was dismal.

Eighteen days after the 1963 march four black girls died when a church was bombed in Birmingham, Alabama. "Only criminal insanity can explain such a despicable act," said the Tribune editorial page. But the right to vote is one thing, the right to vote another. In March 1965 President Johnson asked Congress to pass a voting rights bill. "To those who like that sort of thing," snorted the Tribune, "Johnson was credited with hitting a note of high emotion." We suggest that the legislative process works best when emotion is wrong out of the discussion. There is far too much emotion already about what are called "civil rights."

In the Tribune's view the right to vote was a so-called civil right. "In massive coupling voting with the ideal society," the editorial continued, "Mr. Johnson again presented himself as a miracle man who will bring about the reformation of mankind's soul, spread brotherhood to the farthest shore, educate and make everyone healthy, wealthy, and wise. This is a brand of socialist nonsense which even such medicine men as Upton Sinclair never had the temerity to preach in their palmist days."

"If the price of a free black vote was socialism, America would be nuts to pay it," Poverty is overcome by men able and intelligent enough to hold a job," the Tribune lectured. "It is overcome as the post-war West Germans overcame it—by working harder, while their neighbors, the British in especial, hit the featherbed. It is not overcome by beatnik lies and the riots of mobs in cities and on campuses. Nor will it be overcome by visionary bondogglies, politically inspired."

That is the essence of how far the Tribune has come since. Federalism has come a long way too. In the 1860s it grew fat on segregation, taking up the states' rights argument for allowing jim crow to die in the bed. The Tribune couldn't countenance the Birmingham bombings, but William Buckley's National Review, which would champion Barry Goldwater for president the following year, was able to. "Let us gently say," it said, "the fiend who set off the bomb does not have the sympathy of the white population in the South; in fact, he set back the cause of the white people there so dramatically as to raise the question whether the American Negro will never be content so long as the white race continues to fly by journalists."

"A Negro's right to vote was a so-called civil right."

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^The Straight Dope by Cecil Adams

Exactly what was the deal with Operation Able Archer? I was right smack in the middle of that whole thing (as a soldier stationed in Germany), but I still don't know what exactly happened except that a number of history books hint that we were actually closer to war in October 1983 than we were during the Cuban missile crisis. —Bill Owen, Cincinnati

The Straight Dope

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We welcome Dr. Andra McKamey to our team. 8 years exclusive cat practice experience!

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