

The power of one.

ON JUNE 23, 1943, Moses Kiska and Joseph De Horatius, two of Detroit's many ghosts, linked arms at Mack and Chene where Mr. Kiska was murdered. Kiska, waiting for a bus, had been shot to death. Dr. De Horatius, on a house call, had been beaten to death. They walked through and beyond the year 1951, together a silent testimony to Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem." What happens to a dream deferred? The answer is as spontaneous as it is predictable, given flammable material and a source of ignition - *it explodes.*

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From 1943 to 1963, Mr. Kiska and Dr. De Horatius walked 20 years to the day, walked into downtown Detroit's Cobo Arena on June 23, 1963. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and some 125,000 of his friends took to their feet on Woodward Avenue in The Detroit Walk to Freedom, commemorating the riots of 1943 and pressing for civil rights. By 1963 the civil rights movement had already been mostly planned and directed; King and its other leaders were its deep-rooted oak trees. Inside Cobo, King, inspired and passionate, took the audience to church, honing his vision, his dream of freedom, faith and equality for all, truths self-evident but unrealized. Two months later, King took a bigger audience to church in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Kiska and Dr. De Horatius left 1963 and kept walking to the summer of 1964 at Motown Records on West Grand Boulevard. There, Martha and the Vandellas struck musical gold with "Dancing in the Street," a song co-written by Marvin Gaye. In 1965

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and 1966, other groups recorded it - the Kinks, the Mamas and the Papas, the Grateful Dead. Out of fear, some people conflated the lyrics of “Dancing in the Street” with the civil rights movement, claimed that the song was a call to riot. Street demonstrations were, so to speak, dancing to a certain music. The music of despair and outrage.

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Mr. Kiska, Dr. De Horatius and many more who had joined them kept treading through the years. From Hitsville U.S.A. on West Grand, they marched into July of 1967 and the 12th Street riots. Detroit Tigers star outfielder Willie Horton, in uniform, appealed for peace, an appeal out of sync with the Tigers’ owner, Walter Briggs, a flaming racist. For the ghosts of 1943, 1967 was *deja vu*: the riots escalated in a deadly dance of taunting, misinformation, hatred, violence, retaliation real and imagined, looting and destruction that overwhelmed Detroit police. On the third day, President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered 4,700 Army paratroopers and 8,000 National Guardsman into Detroit. The riots ended, their costs tallied in arrests, injuries, dollars, deaths and an exodus of people from Detroit that came to be known as the White Flight.

In that Detroit in that July of 1967, the self-named Dr. Blood was almost a teenager. He heard sirens shrieking through his neighborhood, not an unusual sound, as he made a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. The sirens intensified. His mother not being home, he took his sandwich outside so he might see what was going down.

Outside was a chaos he never imagined, never could’ve imagined. Columns of smoke rose from buildings on fire, strangers ran in all directions, some smashing store

windows and lugging televisions. Hypnotized, absently, he slowly eat his sandwich. He witnessed: turmoil meant destruction for some and opportunity for others, one neighborhood under God, totally divisible, with liberty and injustice for all.

It's easy, perhaps foolish, to stay calm when you're ignorant. Dr. Blood didn't flinch as airplane after airplane droned over and disgorged streams of tiny black figures under parachutes. He watched in wonder and awe. He had seen Chinese lanterns floating lazily, quietly up into the night, bright spots shrinking smaller and smaller as they drifted away. The paratroopers had that same noiseless dreamy feeling in reverse, like photographic negatives, dark spots silhouetted against the morning sky, drifting down to earth, larger and larger.

The dark figures under their parachutes fell closer and closer to Dr. Blood, still mesmerized. He could make out their helmets and guns. When one landed a couple of hundred feet from him, the speed and the rush and the clatter made him jump. A second one landed closer, faster and louder. The soldier's bulk and size dwarfed Dr. Blood. The soldier, disentangling from his parachute, looked without expression at Dr. Blood, who immediately ran for his life. When he got home, one of the columns of smoke was rising from his own house.

Two days after the military occupation of Detroit, the riot ended, but the contagions of unrest and violence spread to other cities. The spirits of a silenced army joined Dr. De Horatius and Mr. Kiska. Through the burgeoning desolation in Detroit, they kept walking, walking, walking to 1971.

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In 1971, the year before Motown Records left Detroit, Marvin Gaye released “What’s Going On,” his musical plea for understanding, peace, cooperation, and employment. “What’s the deal, what’s happening, my man?” Gaye asked. The ghosts of Detroit had no answers.

In “Inner City Blues,” Gaye lamented unfair distribution of wealth, inability to pay bills and taxes, inflation, young men dying in the Viet Nam war, bad breaks, setbacks, increasing crime and “trigger happy policing.” *This ain’t living, he sang, this ain’t living.* Again the ghosts of Detroit had no answers, for it was no question. They passed through time to Detroit’s Cass Corridor, 1980.

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Thirteen years after the ‘67 riots, the Cass Corridor was home to as much despair as ever, but the music was quieter, the dancing in the streets had all but stopped, and the rage had flickered out. If you’re down and out, afloat on a sea of futility, the only measure of victory is survival.

Victor the vagrant, Victor the bum, Victor the homeless, Victor and his three-legged dog Jesus, Victor clothed in the patina of poverty, Victor the hungry, Victor the friendless, Victor “a ragged coat upon a stick,” Victor found or lost in a shroud of alcohol. Victor the victim. Victor dead and raptured. Victor free from time. Hail Victor!

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On April Fool's Day 1984, the day before Marvin Gaye's birthday, his father, a retired minister, shot and killed him after an argument. Undeterred and resolute, he joined the spirits of Detroit trudging through the years. "Dancing in the Street" was resurrected, a hit by Van Halen in 1984 and by David Bowie and Mick Jagger in 1985. The music, sweet music, and the dance, swinging and swaying and more, carried forward through the decades to thousands and hundreds of thousands, filling cities, Chicago, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, PA, Baltimore and D.C., and can't forget the Motor City, where it started, the music and the dance everywhere and in every time.

Moses Kiska and Joseph De Horatius and Martin Luther King, Jr. and all of the fallen, counted and uncounted, and Victor the vagrant and Marvin Gaye, all of them marched, simultaneously betrayed and inspired by the ideals of justice and equality. They marched those ideals clear into the twenty-first century to millions and hundreds of millions of people, dancing in the streets, yes, and more, demonstrating the power of faith and the power of one, the liberating power of one person to cast one vote.

What happens to a dream deferred, to millions of dreams deferred? They fill ballot boxes.

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