

IX. At the 125<sup>th</sup> St. train station, Harlem, New York, waiting to return to college (age 18, 1960).

The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was founded that summer, and the first sit-ins were organized (Greensboro, North Carolina).

Outside now, peering down the tracks  
in fidget: not a long wait, given luck.  
I sneak looks at the others: am still the only white.

I wait for the train to take me back  
northeast to college. Where is the bright  
headlamp of the engine to sheen the tracks?

At thirteen, at 97th Street, standing  
and waiting for that thrusting out of force  
from the musk of subterranean air,  
I wanted, almost, to nudge my mind  
north to this station (my wit, a snail).  
These twenty-odd blocks more I balked,  
and took some five long years to make the walk,

yet I couldn't imagine strolling  
calmly through Harlem,  
another country, taking time to notice  
this and that, or that--hardly  
striding down a block in swagger  
or dawdling long enough (a tourist  
with nothing at stake) to eat a meal.

I have tried to pass  
through the color line.  
But even above ground  
    *the very airs seem sorted into shades*  
and still I have not had,  
anywhere, a conversation  
with a Negro.