Ignatow, A. R. Ammons, and again by Miss Levertov for a second stint.

For some time the editorials which opened the magazine were written by various staff members, but we determined that if one man composed the bulk of them, there would be a consistency of style and tone which was unobtainable with wider authorship. Carl Dreher, almost miraculously from my viewpoint, has, during the last eight years, expressed each week the consensus of the magazine's editors, arrived at by the conference method. He has also advised the editors on scientific subjects.

When all due recognition has been given to the staff and to the contributors, the fact remains that it is a magazine's editor who is the key figure. In the ten years we have been working together, Mr. McWilliams and I have never had an argument over matters of basic policy nor have we yet exchanged an angry word. That is not to say we have always agreed on all matters of mutual interest; it is simply to say we have continuously found a common ground on which we could both stand without violating our individual strongly held convictions. I have never ceased my wonderment at Mr. McWilliams' insatiable curiosity which drives him to read almost every publication printed anywhere in English. His memory of authors and their favorite subject matter is encyclopedic. His powers of persuasion have been demonstrated a thousand times when he has persuaded still another busy writer to undertake an assignment for the relatively modest compensation to which The Nation's balance sheet constrains it. If I had any criticism of the conduct of his office I would accuse him (and have done so) of being too patient, too tolerant of authors with too little to say who don't even say that very well. However, the number of articles that have been published after having been rewritten, reworked, restyled and helpfully edited, attests to the fact that even this fault, if it is one, has been of benefit to the publication. If The Nation's century-long contribution to journalistic history remained undimmed in this last decade, the credit must go to Mr. McWilliams.

The rewards of being The Nation's proprietor have been great. I have met and been associated with poets, writers, journalists and critics of talent and of conviction. I have worked with editors who knew that their rewards would not be in high compensation, popular acclaim or general agreement. Rather their success could only be measured in terms of angry letters, cancelled subscriptions and editorial attacks in the mass press. In addition, I have repeatedly seen ideas that were first set forth in The Nation, picked up weeks and even months later by the popular press, sometimes with generous acknowledgment, more often with none. This important role as purveyor of new and unpopular ideas has long been and remains the firm base of that most tenuous of all the adjectives used to describe The Nation—"influential."

About a year after I came to The Nation, I visited Justice Hugo Black in his office in the new Supreme Court building. I expected five minutes, at most, of this busy man's time, but the discussion turned to courage, particularly political courage, and this is a topic on which Justice Black is expert.

Several times I rose to leave, but I was motioned back to my chair. After about three quarters of an hour, a secretary came in with papers to be signed and I walked toward the door. On the threshold, Justice Black stopped me. "You know, Kirstein, what you are doing is important." I replied somewhat skeptically, "Justice Black, of the 180 million people in America, I doubt very much if one million of them have ever heard of The Nation." "Oh," he said with a smile, "I would think your estimate is high. But there are very few voices of dissent in America today and if the time ever comes when there are none, it won't be America." His words have been my compensation.

CAREY McWILLIAMS
Editor Since 1951

Not until I was a freshman in college did I become acquainted with The Nation. The favorite reading matter of the cowhands and cattle ranchers of northwestern Colorado where I spent my pre-college years consisted of penny-dreadfuls and "cowboy" romances. As a freshman, I made four delightful discoveries (none was assigned reading): H. L. Mencken's The Smart Set, the plays and prefaces of George Bernard Shaw, The Nation and The New Republic, and the massive unread Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce. I was a devoted reader of The Smart Set and later of The American Mercury as long as Mencken edited it and I have been a reader of both The Nation and The New Republic since I discovered them. My first articles appeared in The American Mercury, The Nation, and The New Republic.

As with many other persons, I liked The Nation and The New Republic for somewhat different reasons. In general, I read The New Republic primarily for its "books and arts" section, The Nation for its political and social criticism. In college I greatly admired—and still do—Edmund Wilson. Not only did I read with avidity everything that he wrote but I corresponded with him and had the pleasure of chauf-
feuring him about southern California in a Model-T Ford when he was gathering material for *The American Jitters*. Later, when I began to contribute to *The New Republic*, I would always have lunch with the staff on visits to New York and in this way got to know Bruce Bliven, Malcolm Cowley, George Soule, Betty Huling, Otis Ferguson and the others. A visit to New York that did not include the ritual of some quick stout drinks with Betty and Otis at the New Weston Hotel (Bruce was rumored to disapprove of midday cocktails) was unthinkable.

IN MUCH THE SAME WAY, I began to contribute articles to *The Nation* from southern California, where my family had moved after the catastrophic collapse of the cattle market following World War I. After *Brothers Under the Skin* was published in 1943, I came east at least twice a year, on lecture-trips, and lunch with *The Nation*’s staff also became a ritual. Actually my first tie with *The Nation* was through Joseph Wood Krutch with whom I had corresponded; I remember that he took me to a party at Hart Crane’s apartment when I was in New York for the publication of my first book—a biography of Ambrose Bierce—in 1929. On these semi-annual visits to 20 Vesey Street, I got to know *The Nation*’s staff—Freda Kirchwey, Robert Bendiner, J. King Gordon, Margaret Marshall, Lillie Shultz, Del Vayo, I. F. Stone, Keith Hutchison, Willard Shelton, Maxwell Stewart, Harold Field and the others. I never met Villard but I corresponded with him. It was Villard, incidentally, who first proposed the appointment of a national commission on civil rights. In a letter to me (dated May 4, 1943), he told of how he had presented the idea of a commission to President Wilson, who had replied that he could not appoint such a commission because he was a Democratic President from the South and the South might get the impression that he felt there was something to criticize in the attitude of the South on the Negro problem! On one of my visits to New York, J. King Gordon, who was then managing editor of *The Nation*, asked me to become a contributing editor, which I did effective January 20, 1945. For a nominal stipend, I was to contribute one or two articles a month and submit editorial paragraphs, mostly about civil rights, race relations, and issues of particular interest to West Coast readers.

As a result of this relationship—and a growing friendship with Freda Kirchwey—I became familiar with some aspects of *The Nation*’s finances and the problems it faced. The magazine had done quite well during the years 1938-1944—these were the only years it showed a profit—but in the postwar period some of the old problems returned in aggravated form. The more I was exposed to these problems, the more I sympathized with Freda, and with Evans Clark, her husband, a gallant, generous and nerveless man. I had occasion then and later to admire Freda’s extraordinary courage, her unshakable faith in *The Nation*, her derring-do spirit, her kindness and consideration, her good-humored forbearance under extreme provocation, and her general unfiappability. From Freda I acquired, by contagion, something of her enthusiasm for *The Nation* and her confidence that it could survive—as indeed it has—all manner of adversities. As I became aware, by slow stages, of some of the severe financial problems the magazine faced, it was only natural that I should offer to lend a hand. In this period—and for some time before—*The Nation* had raised a substantial part of its budget through fund-raising dinners and functions, built around public issues, under the skilful direction of Lillie Shultz. But as the cold war came on and wartime good feeling toward the USSR abated, it became increasingly difficult to raise money in this manner. So, in a careless moment, I suggested that it might be a good idea to hold a fund-raising function in Los Angeles. Out of this suggestion came a conference, held under the auspices of *The Nation*, at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, September 21-22, 1946. In retrospect this conference has—for me at least—a certain historic interest. (For this conference, I edited a special 46-page Western Supplement which dealt with certain postwar Western problems. In the editorial introduction I ventured the suggestion that, for all the serious problems it faced, California stood on the “threshold of a great expansion.” I never made an easier or a safer prediction. California has a way of making its boosters look like prophets.)
A few words about the conference, which was devoted to the theme “The Challenge of the Postwar World to the Liberal Movement,” will point up the special interest it has for me in retrospect. The first session on “The 1946 Elections and America’s Future” was chaired by John B. Hughes, then one of the West Coast’s best-known radio commentators. The speakers were Oscar Chapman, then Undersecretary of the Department of the Interior; Irwin de Shetler, Regional Director of the C.I.O., Susan D. Adams of the ILGWU; Loren Miller, the distinguished Negro lawyer—since appointed to the Los Angeles bench by Governor Brown; and Richard Ibanez, outstanding representative of the Mexican-American minority. The second session, which Chet Huntley chaired, on “America’s Foreign Policy and Its Relation to Peace,” included as speakers Dr. Harold Fisher, Director of the Hoover Library, Stanford University; Freda Kirchwey, and J. Alvarex Del Vayo. The third session, “Economic Security as a Factor for Peace,” included as speakers Dr. Arthur Ross, Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California; Richard Boke, Regional Director, Bureau of Reclamation; Paul Raver, Director, Bonneville Power Administration; Dr. William Fowler, California Institute of Technology, and—ironically enough—Ronald Reagan, today a leading Goldwaterite Republican and likely candidate for the Republican gubernatorial nomination in 1966. The fourth session, “Organization for Democracy,” was chaired by Maury Maverick; the participants were Dr. Lloyd Fisher, University of California; Dr. Harry Girvetz, University of California; Mary McCall of the Screen Writers Guild; Dr. Robert E. H. Harris, then chief editorial writer for the Los Angeles Daily News; True Broadman, a Hollywood radio writer; and Dr. Curtis Warren, Superintendent of Schools, San Francisco. The dinner meeting was chaired by Bartley C. Crum; the speakers were Thurman W. Arnold, Freda Kirchwey, Senator Wayne L. Morse, Dore Schary, and Will Rogers, Jr., Democratic nominee for the U.S. Senate that year.

THIS WAS THE last time, perhaps for a decade, that such a broad spectrum of “the liberal movement” assembled on the West Coast for a discussion of important public issues. Most of the important independent civic and political groups cooperated and sent delegations. The sessions were crowded, several to overflowing, and the dinner meeting netted a large sum for The Nation. It is interesting to remember that the conference coincided with Henry Wallace’s famous Madison Square Garden speech and his subsequent dismissal from the Cabinet. After the 1948 campaign it would have been impossible to have held such a meeting. The high hopes for the postwar period which had been generated during the war years seemed to crest at this conference. In the East, the wave had already broken. As Freda Kirchwey commented in an editorial (October 5, 1946): “California is a state where political interest is lively, discussion free, lines loosely drawn, personalities important. People like to say: ‘In California, politics are fluid.’ No words could express the situation better. Until recently the Left groupings, from Communists and their sympathizers to the liberal elements in the old parties, have supported a loose coalition or at least maintained a truce. The factional fight has been less bitter, open breaks less sharp and final, than in the East.” But with the case of the Hollywood Ten, the breaks came thick and fast, and some of them have remained irreparable. For California liberals, the unforgettable event of the period was the Democratic Senatorial primary fight between Will Rogers, Jr., and Ellis Patterson. I was active in the Rogers campaign and still retain vivid impressions of the bitterness of that election and the splits it precipitated. The social life of Hollywood, Bel-Air and Beverly Hills was never quite the same after that disastrous campaign.

THE LOS ANGELES CONFERENCE was a reflection of the fact that the West Coast had begun to impinge on the national political consciousness in a new way. The increase in The Nation’s circulation in California no doubt had something to do with my appointment as contributing editor in 1945, which in turn precipitated the conference. That The Nation had decided, for the first time in its history, to hold such a conference in Los Angeles—that it had begun to look to the West Coast for new sources of support—was itself an indication of a new awareness of the West Coast. Also the circumstance that liberal expectations for the postwar period glowed a little brighter and a little longer there than in the East seemed to imply that California enjoyed a degree of immunity from the virus of “anti-communism.” And to a degree it did. But in point of fact red-baiting had been more virulent in California than elsewhere; it was merely that the liberal movement being somewhat stronger than in the East had been able to cope with it more effectively—that is, until the 1948 election California has an old freewheeling “libertarian” tradition, associated with such names as Fremont Older, Lincoln Steffens, Col. Charles Erskine Scott Wood, Francis J. Heney, John R. Haynes, Rudolph Spreckles and Simon J. Lubin, that proved helpful in surmounting the first onslaughts of “anti-Communist” demagoguery. It is the kind of state in which, from the days of Dennis Kearney and the “sand lot riots” of the 1870s to the present time, controversies have tended to degenerate into shouting con-
tests. The state’s politics have always been of the catch-as-catch-can variety. The extremes are highly developed and articulate. California has probably had more witch hunts and more free-speech fights than any state in the union. But with the onset of the cold war, the political atmosphere became envenomed to a degree that only those who experienced it will believe. There seemed to be no bottom to the quagmire of malice, gossip, name-calling, finger-pointing, and recrimination. The experience left me with an abiding contempt for professional “anti-Communists,” including the academic variety, and a conviction that “anti-communism” was, on the domestic scene, a far more dangerous force than communism had ever been. To be sure, the Left was not free of blame for the debacle that ensued, which paved the way for McCarthyism, but the major responsibility rests on those who should have known better but who, for a variety of motives, succumbed to the hateful pressures of the period. Two dear friends of mind, Louis Adamic and F. O. Matthiessen, committed suicide during these years, in part (but only in part, of course) because of their despair over the course events had taken and the brutal way in which they had been treated by former friends and colleagues.

In general I approved of what Henry Wallace said in his Madison Square Garden speech, but once it became apparent that the forces most actively supporting him had adopted a rule-or-ruin attitude and were determined to set up a new party, I found it impossible to go along and said so publicly. What I was principally opposed to was the split with the Democratic Party. The Nation took essentially the same position, of course, and what Freda Kirchwey had to say on the subject editorially in the issue of February 21, 1948—months before the returns were in—makes good reading today: “It (the Wallace movement) has been rejected by the C.I.O. and the A.F. of L., and the four Railway Brotherhoods, by the Socialists, by organized farm groups, and by the overwhelming majority of New Deal leaders who served under President Roosevelt. Even so staunch an admirer of Henry Wallace as Sen. Claude Pepper has repudiated the third party crusade, ... Entirely apart from the ideological dangers of making a progressive party dependent on organized Communist strength, the fact is that to do so is to build on quicksand. Let the fine change, for reasons beyond the control of Mr. Wallace, and the foundations of his movement will collapse overnight.”

With the Smith Act prosecutions, the loyalty program, the miserable shaming of the Wallace-Taylor ticket, and the general deterioration of USSR-U.S.A. relations, the Great Witch Hunt got under way with a rush and a roar. Even before McCarthy emerged as a national figure, the course of events was clearly indicated. The consolidation of power by the Chinese Communist Party, the emergence of McCarthyism, and the outbreak of the Korean War merely fanned the flames of the domestic cold war.

The Nation, of course, found itself directly in the line of fire. While the paper had refused to support Henry Wallace, it continued to insist that peace with Russia was possible and desirable (see the special issue: “Peace with Russia: Can It Be Negotiated?” of December 16, 1950, with such contributors as H. Stuart Hughes, James P. Warren, Hans J. Morgenthau, Isaac Deutscher, R. H. S. Crossman, Claude Bourdet, Sir Benchal N. Rau, Harrison S. Brown, Abba Eban, Grenville Clark and others). Today such a stand meets with general approval; so distinguished a spokesman for the liberal movement as John Kenneth Galbraith recently pointed out that an understanding between Russia and the United States was the “fulcrum” of American policy. But this was a most unpopular position to take in 1950. Nothing in its history does The Nation more credit than its resolute refusal, under Freda Kirchwey’s editorship, to join the cold war or to chorus in on the domestic witch hunt.

But largely because of its stand on these issues, the magazine’s financial problems became more acute. Costs began to soar at precisely the time that fundraising through public functions became impossible. In the spring of 1951, Freda asked me to come to New York to help plan a special civil liberties issue. To this day I do not know whether she intended then to invite me to join the staff or whether that idea occurred to her during our discussions. But before I left to return to the Coast, she asked me to join the staff on a full-time basis and put it to me pretty much on the basis that despite my reluctance to leave California, I should accept, as the position of the magazine could hardly be more critical. Frankly, the thought of leaving California even for six months or a year did not appeal to me. I had lived in southern

My congratulations to The Nation on its centennial year. I have always admired the clarity and vigor of The Nation and have appreciated the fairness that it has granted in the expression of its editorial view.

—Sen. Margaret Chase Smith
California since 1922 and was about as deeply rooted in the region as any migrant is ever likely to be (see: *Southern California Country: An Island on the Land and California: The Great Exception*). I had contracts for books and other commitments. In 1951 we were living in our ramshackle old California redwood bungalow on a half-acre lot, complete with avocado, lemon and eucalyptus trees, high on a hilltop overlooking downtown and central Los Angeles. The hilltop view is superb—as the natives say, “On a clear day you can see Catalina Island.” I still prefer it to the New York skyline. All the same, I did agree to return to New York for a short time. I have stayed, to date, fourteen years.

**From Every Point of View**, I was a much less likely successor to Freda Kirchwey than she was to Villard or than he was to all the editors reaching back to Godkin. For one thing, I am the first West-of-the-Mississippi person to edit THE NATION, and one might expand that statement by saying “West of the Alleghenies” or, more specifically, “West of the Bronx.” I have suggested that one reason for this odd jump to the West Coast was the emergence of the region as a new center of political power and interest; another reason may be found in my special interests and their relation to the American social scene (in an editorial of January 20, 1945, announcing my appointment as a contributing editor, Freda Kirchwey cited these interests as the reason for my appointment). Somewhat in the order of their emergence, my special interests have been: organized labor and civil liberties, migratory farm labor, race relations, demagogic mass movement and, of course, all things relating to California, its history, sociology, folkways, cults, population dynamics and politics—not to mention its coast line, mountain ranges, desert areas and lush valleys.

An interest in organized labor whetted my interest in civil liberties. I was a member of the board of the American Civil Liberties Union in Los Angeles at a time when it had only a few hundred members; the local chapter now has seven or eight thousand members. The then-director Clinton J. Taft used to send me on various quixotic missions; in the late 1920s, he sent me off on a state-wide speaking tour urging repeal of the Criminal Syndicalism Act. I was lucky to get back alive. Through these missions and assignments I became interested in migratory farm labor. I was often asked, for example, to investigate the strikes, mass arrests, criminal syndicalism prosecutions, and other actions which infringed on the civil liberties of migratory farm workers.

Migratory farm labor, like trade union organization and many civil liberties issues, is really an aspect of majority-minority relations. California is an excellent laboratory in which to study relations of this sort. The social structure is not rigid. Continuous, heavy in-migration has kept the state in constant flux and turmoil. Its population includes every ethnic strain, every racial type, every social class. Sequences that take decades to unfold elsewhere are often enacted there in a few years—you can see the process taking place before your eyes, as though in slow motion. For example, in the years from 1935 to 1940, I saw how a minority can be created under certain circumstances. During these years, several hundred thousand dust-bowl migrants surged into the state. Circumstances forced them into the subordinate role of farm laborers, at least for a time, and they were, of course, promptly stereotyped as “Okies” and “Arkies.” The stereotype was precisely the same as that of Negroes and Mexican-Americans, despite the fact that the dust-bowl migrants were indubitably white, Protestant, and of Anglo-Saxon background. My interest in migratory farm labor (*Factories in the Field*, 1939; *Ill Fares the Land*, 1942) resulted in my appointment to head the Division of Immigration and Housing under Gov. Culbert L. Olson. Among its other functions, the division is charged with a general responsibility for the welfare of alien immigrants and enforcement of the labor-camp act. There were then about five or six thousand such camps—in which, at the peak of the season, the camp population would total 160,000 to 175,000 men, women and children. Naturally I was brought into close contact with most of the minority groups. Mexican-Americans, Negroes, Filipinos, Japanese-Americans, Indians, etc., not to mention “Okies” and “Arkies.” Out of this experience came my interest in racial and ethnic minorities (Brothers Under the Skin: Prejudice: A Mask for Privilege; North From Mexico)

Up to this point, I had been interested in majority-minority relations as an observer; now some of the issues came into sharp personal focus and out of this experience came my interest in demagogic mass movements. Long before McCarthy made his famous speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, on February 9, 1950, red-baiting had been more or less endemic in California. The San Francisco General Strike and Upton Sinclair’s EPIC Campaign of 1934 had touched off an orgy of red-baiting. But despite this—in fact probably because of it—Culbert L. Olson, who was himself a product of the EPIC Movement, was elected governor in 1938—the first Democrat to hold the office in nearly half a century. It was, of course, to be expected that Olson, whose first official act was to pardon Tom Mooney, would be given the full red-baiting treatment. Also elected under the sponsorship of the EPIC Movement were two young assemblymen: Sam Yorty, now Mayor of Los
Angels, and Jack Tenney. In the first year of the Olson administration, both Yorty and Tenney were flaming left-wing liberals, but as the political climate changed, so did their enthusiasms. An adroit politician, Yorty never let his new "anti-Communist" enthusiasms get the better of his cool political judgment, but Tenney went completely overboard and finally ended up, some years later, as Gerald L. K. Smith's Vice Presidential running mate. As part of their effort to discredit the Olson administration, Yorty and Tenney—egged on by conservative Democrats and Republicans—induced the legislature to set up the Tenney Committee (on Un-American Activities), which is still in existence. Over the years, and particularly as Chief of the Division of Immigration and Housing, I had been involved in numerous head-on collisions with such groups as the Associated Farmers, the American Legion and similar organizations. The fact that I had urged both the LaFollette and Toland Committees to hold public hearings in California, prepared Governor Olson's lead-off statements to both committees, held the first farm wage-rate hearings in the state, opposed the mass evacuation of Japanese-Americans, and prepared the draft report on the Los Angeles "zoot suit" race riot for the committee appointed by Governor Earl Warren (who succeeded Olson in 1942) had not endeared me to these interests. So I was given top billing by the Tenney Committee as some kind of "enemy of the people," but the real target was, at all times, the Olson administration. (Part of the story of those years is to be found in Robert E. Burke's book, Olson's New Deal for California, and in Dr. Edward Barrett's fine book on the Tenney Committee). By the mid-1940s, therefore, I considered myself an expert on witch-hunting techniques and the uses of "anti-communism." From 1946 on, it was increasingly apparent to me that a demagogic movement of great force and virulence was in the making. Witch Hunt: The Revival of Heresy embodies my forebodings; it was published, in 1950, just as the national spotlight began to focus on McCarthy.

These interrelated special interests, all of which began to assume increasing national importance after 1945, had prompted my appointment as contributing editor (see Freda Kirchwey's editorial of January 20, 1945, to which I have referred) and they are probably responsible for the fact that I was later asked to become editor. In the period from 1951 to date, the major editorial preoccupations of The Nation, I should say, have been with the cold war, the domestic cold war or witch hunt, and the revolution in race relations. Until she resigned in September, 1955, Freda concentrated on foreign policy, which is her special interest, and gave me pretty much a free hand with domestic issues. The carry-over of my special interests is reflected in such special issues of The Nation as "How Free Is Free?" our special civil liberties issue of June 8, 1952; "The Southern Negro," September 27, 1952; "The FBI," October 18, 1958; "The CIA," June 24, 1961; "Juggernaut, the Warfare State," October 28, 1961; and "The Ultras," June 30, 1962. Shortly before I came to New York in 1951, I prepared a new edition of Brothers Under the Skin with a new introduction in which I wrote that "a permanent revolution in race relations" had begun, and explained why. The Nation's special issue, "The Southern Negro," clearly foreshadowed the course this revolution has taken to date. Some of the other special issues have, of course, made Fred J. Cook a familiar name in American journalism.

* * *

In the early summer of 1955, Freda Kirchwey, who about that time had been called upon to meet more than the normal ration of emergencies, said that she would be willing to relinquish the magazine to me if I could raise the funds necessary to liquidate the indebtedness the paper had accumulated and insure continuity of publication. Some of the individuals I had been able to interest in The Nation promised to continue their support, so I then set out to find a publisher who would contribute or help raise the balance that was needed. If The Nation was to be reorganized, I knew that I would need the help of someone who had executive talent and experience. At this critical juncture, a friend told me that George Kirstein had just severed his active connection with H. J. P. (Health Insurance Plan) and was about to set off on a cruise in his sailboat. I had met him once at a dinner party, and on another occasion had tried to get him to do an article for The Nation. What I knew about him suggested that he possessed ideal qualifications: he knew the magazine and what it stood for; he had served in World War II, he had important executive experience in government (War Labor Board) and in business; we had many mutual friends. So I got him on the phone—just shortly before he was about to set sail—and asked him how he would like to be publisher of The Nation. This out-of-the-blue query didn't seem to faze him. He came to the office, asked some very good questions, and then asked me to prepare a memorandum on what I conceived the functions and responsibilities of a publisher to be. It was almost as casual as that. If I had spent a year in hot pursuit of the ideal publisher, I could not have done better. If it had not been for his generous and timely intervention, I certainly would not have been able to carry out Freda Kirchwey's suggestion. In addition, the magazine has benefited enormously from George's supervision, his keen
judgment, and his eye for the relevant. Like Freda, he has steady nerves and doesn’t frighten easily. This, of course, is neither the place nor the time to tell how much The Nation owes to all its friends and supporters, to its contributors and its readers and to its fine staff. But I do want to say here that no editor ever had better or more considerate or helpful working colleagues than I have had in the persons of Victor Bernstein, Robert Hatch and Carl Dreher.

ON BALANCE, I am not at all sorry that I deserted that hilltop home in Los Angeles to come east to edit The Nation, much as I want some day to write the books I had on my agenda in 1951. Since then, The Nation has been my “home” in the sense that I have probably spent almost as many hours at the office as I have at home with my family; winter, spring, summer, fall—day and night—The Nation has been my constant preoccupation. Discovering what The Nation is—and what it is not—has been an instructive experience, for its survival for a century is one of the major miracles of American journalism. It is more than a publication; it is an incorporeal entity with a life of its own that exists quite independently of personalities, ownership transitions, or editorial successions. It has friends in all sections of the country, in all quarters of the globe, not one in ten of whom is a subscriber or ever has been. But they know about The Nation and find many ways of demonstrating their friendship. Communications reach it from all points of the compass; clippings descend upon it from Bombay and Boston, Cincinnati, from the executive mansions of state capitals as well as federal, state and county prisons. Many of these communications are simply addressed to “The Nation, New York.” No one has ever “owned” The Nation; it is impossible to own or possess it or bequeath it or sell it or mortgage it. If it ever ceased to be what it has always been, it would simply not exist—regardless of who “owned” it or how much money stood on deposit in its name. It is an idea, a spirit, a name without an address; it is fragile, without physical assets, but it is free and so it lives. It is of the past as well as the present; it belongs to all those who have read it, quoted it, written for it or helped it; to those who have reviled it no less than to those who have respected it. To have edited it for a day would have been a privilege; to have been responsible for it for more than a decade is an experience to be cherished.

An editorial writer needs stimulation as well as information, and I find both in The Nation.
—Herbert L. Matthews.
Editorial Board, N.Y. Times

Freda Kirchwey
Associated with The Nation for 37 years; Editor and Publisher, 1945-55

IT ALL BEGAN on a bright August afternoon when my husband and I slid alongside the landing at Bennett’s camp on Raquette Lake, pulled our duffle out of the canoe, and walked up the path to our tent. Two weeks of paddling through the lakes had left us with only three conscious desires—a hot bath, our mail, and supper that we hadn’t cooked ourselves.

The mail came first—even before unpacking. In among the pile of family letters was a typed envelope addressed to me. I opened it in its turn. Could I guess it concealed a suggestion that would fix the course of my life for the next 37 years?

It was from a young woman I had known slightly at college who was now a secretary in the office of The Nation. She had heard, she said, (how, I had no idea) that I was looking for a job. She thought there might be one with a project just getting under way—a section on international affairs to be issued every other week as a supplement to The Nation. If I was interested, I’d better act quickly.

The letter had been forwarded from New York and had rested for several days on the table in our tent. I passed it over to Evans. “Read this one next,” I said.

Evans read the letter and for perhaps three minutes we talked over the suggestion it brought. Then I sat down and wrote to Mr. Villard, The Nation’s editor and owner, and also to Henry R. Mussey, formerly my economics professor at Barnard and now managing editor of The Nation. A reply came from
Copyright of Nation is the property of Nation Company, L. P. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.