

LeRoy or LeRoy Carter

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TTT

Interviewee: James Robinson

Session #5

Interviewer: Sheila Michaels

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

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Q: Interview with Jim Robinson on--this is the 12th of February, 1999. We're in Pittsburgh.

Robinson: In 1955, I was already doing fundraising for CORE, and we had ~~Ray~~ Roy Carter on staff then -- I think it was about then -- and we sent him to Montgomery to talk with King, and he did that. He was not someone who knew a lot about nonviolent direct action. He had worked in the past with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and I don't think he was very influential with King. It was Bayard Rustin and Glen Smiley, from the Fellowship of Reconciliation, who had a lot to do with deepening King's understanding of the techniques of nonviolence. King already knew a lot about Gandhi and so on, but he had not started out to have the bus boycott in the first place. The bus boycott started and then he became a leader of it, and there was no conscious use of nonviolent direct action at the beginning of it. It was just that they were nonviolent.

Q: Well, can I ask if Highlander Folk School had had anything to do with it? My understanding was that Rosa Parks had just come from some type of workshop at Highlander.

Robinson: I think that may be true. Highlander was--

Le Roy (LeRoy)

Q: That was what the southern newspapers were saying.

Robinson: Right. Highlander was something that CORE had very little to do with, because many of us in CORE had come from the thirties' battles with Communists, and Highlander was run by someone who did not believe in excluding anybody. So that if you had meetings at Highlander, there was a suspicion that maybe you were pro-Communist.

Now, King, the people who were later, had not come from that thirties background and didn't feel the same way. So the SNCC[Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] had meetings at Highlander. I think there's no evidence whatever that the man who was running it was pro-Communist; he just was not keeping clear of it so that Communists did sometimes go there.

She may have had something like that in her background, but as I understood it, the first big meeting they had after she took her position and wouldn't move in the bus was organized by someone from the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Trainmen, and he had talked to several people about what they had to get to come out of this meeting, and they had decided among them that they needed this young minister to lead them, and they knew he wasn't going to volunteer very easily.

So, anyhow, he did attend the meeting, and they made some choice remarks about how the clergy would talk all these good items, but didn't really do anything about it. [Laughs] They kind of tricked him into his position with the bus boycott. King, you know, he'd gone to divinity school. He never intended to be a radical. [Laughs] His father ran the most

upscale black church in Atlanta, and that was his background, and when he was in the North, his girlfriend was white.

Q: King?

Robinson: King.

Q: Okay. I'm trying to--Okay.

Robinson: Apparently, he was going to go back, and I think he first went back to his father's church and worked there.

Q: Oh, you mean when he was a student?

Robinson: When he was a student, right. When he was a student. You couldn't have an interracial marriage and be in a prominent black church in Atlanta. Well, that's all kind of a digression, that point.

But I was doing the fundraising, and Jim Peck was doing the Correlator, which was reporting on what was going on in the various groups, and he always accentuated the positive. The things that were not happening didn't get mentioned very much in that, so it worked very well with fundraising. It was not all what the Correlator had been when George Houser and Cathy Raymond were originally doing it, which was kind of a detailed report from various groups about what they were doing and what the problems were. It was an internal house organ. We used it for all the groups, but we also used it for the

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Robinson -- 5 -- 150

mailing list of the contributors that I got, that I received for Correlator. And it was a pretty small thing. Very often it was four pages and about this size [gestures]. So it could go out often, if you had--

Q: Breaking news?

Robinson: Breaking news. It didn't have to go out on a regular schedule, and it did not go out on a regular schedule.

But Peck had a great flair for condensing a story and emphasizing whatever was most dramatic about it. So that worked very, very well with my fundraising letters, which were often based on something specific.

So when Anna Holden organized Nashville CORE and they worked in an interracial group to get some black parents to use the freedom of choice to enter their children in formerly white schools--

Q: What was freedom of choice? I'm sorry to stop you mid-sentence.

Robinson: Well, the first attempts to comply with the 1954 school desegregation decision didn't abolish the black schools, but they did permit black students to register to white schools. That happened in Nashville, but there was such pressure against it, that very few black parents had done it, and the CORE group worked with a handful who did do it. And on those first few school days they had whites and blacks walk the children through the picket lines, and people were screaming and spitting at them and everything else. She

wrote a report on it, which we put out as a pamphlet. That was one of the things that went with the fundraising letter.

We were at a period in civil rights where it was not yet very high on the general liberal agenda. It was something that was down here somewhere. There were a lot of other things that were more important than civil rights in 1955.

Q: I remember I had my confirmation the year of *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, and it was almost universal that the kids who were not necessarily from liberal homes chose a motto that had to do with the integration of the schools. Now I'm trying to remember what it was, but it was everyone, certainly, in St. Louis, was very conscious that this was important, that this was [unclear].

Robinson: Oh yeah. Well, I think people thought it was important, but it was not an ADA type of importance yet; it wasn't at the top of a political liberal agenda. They weren't opposed to it, but it was not--there were so many people who were opposed it in Nashville that they had these screaming mobs outside the schools. But Nashville was far enough north that there were quite a few people, white people, who were in favor of complying with the law, too, so it was not at all what it was in the Deep South. But it was nice; it was something for us to publicize in the fundraising letters.

Then I think it was that letter that we asked Martin Luther King to sign, and the book on CORE says that Bayard Rustin urged him to do that. I don't remember that that was the case, but we did ask him to sign it, and he signed the letter. So that you had the bus

boycott leader signing something about a CORE project in Nashville, and we were mailing it to our mailing lists, and we were doing very well with these things.

We felt that the purpose of the fundraising letters, when we were using other people's mailing lists, was primarily to raise money, but it was also to get across the attitude that we had on the necessity for integration. Many people had grown up -- they weren't people who were anti-black or anything else, but they'd grown up in a society where things were separate and it was accepted, and so there was a strong educational purpose to the fundraising stuff at that beginning, and that continued until sometime into the sixties when it became pretty much on the top of the agenda for all the people.

If you go back -- one thing I thought I ought to go back to was when I first came back to New York City and became involved with the New York CORE group, there was a particular atmosphere from that time, I think. Most of the people that I knew best were pacifists and they'd been conscientious objectors and so on, but the people who'd been in the armed services were released, too, and there were lots and lots of young people coming into New York City, and there was little or no, at least in the strata of people that I knew, discrimination between people who had been in the armed services and people who'd been in jail or conscientious objectors. We got along very well together.

I wanted to be a part of my generation, certainly, so I read *The Naked and the Dead* by [Norman] Mailer, and *From Here to Eternity* by James Jones, and *The Young Lions* by Irwin Shaw. The first two, I think, and still think, they're extraordinary books, really extraordinary books, particularly *The Naked and the Dead*. Then of course, ~~Cy Pritchett~~

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^{now}
~~[phonetic]~~ lived there on the top floor at Mott Street, had been a bombardier in England. So we had all of that going on.

Now, back when I was at Columbia, some of us as pacifists were really very politically aware, but we were also quite strongly religiously committed. I went to Mass not only on Sundays, but I very often went on weekdays before going to classes. Most of the people I knew there who were pacifists, were not Catholic, but a number of them were quite religious. And the early people in Chicago were certainly generally religious and most of them were neo-orthodox Protestants, the theological students, which meant that they were followers of [Reinhold] Niebuhr's theology pretty much, a theology which accepted the idea of original sin and that human beings were bent to do evil rather than to do good. It was quite a contrast with the early Protestant liberalism of the first pacifists, I think, that people who were rather--they rather thought that human nature was good and that you had to remove a few things and people would be ~~unclouded~~.

kind to each other!

Q: It was the SNCC philosophy, by and large.

Robinson: Yes. So I think the people who started CORE in Chicago, with certain exceptions--I remember Jack was a Unitarian and he certainly wasn't--had no truck with original sin, but most of us were much closer to traditional Christianity. Most of them were Protestant. I was Catholic, but it was the same kind of general outlook, and that was important, because religion continued to be important in conscientious objector camps and so on and so forth.

When I first came back to New York and lived down at Mott Street, I was still definitely religious, but I was also interested in the bohemian atmosphere down around Mott Street, and the Catholicism of the Italians in the area where we lived was a lot less puritanical than the Catholicism that I'd grown up with. And also I had always realized that family is the basis for continuing solid advancement, the way that people become anchored and are able to respect themselves and give something to someone else, so that I knew I wanted eventually to be in a family. But I was a late developer in many ways and I thought--well, I remember conflicting— [feeling]

The American Friends Service Committee was still helping people who had been conscientious objectors, and some way or another I found out that they did referrals for psychotherapy. So I was in touch with them and they sent me to Viola Bernard, who was a famous Freudian psychiatrist, for an interview, and she was a very impressive lady, because she said if you want psychotherapy and you're religious, you have to recognize that the therapist isn't dealing with religion. She said some people go to a therapist and they're worse off than they were to begin with, because they don't know what they're doing.

But anyway, I decided that I wanted to go to a therapist, and she sent me to Dr. Lionel ^{Ovesey} [unclear]. He was quite a young man and was at the Psychoanalytic Clinic at Columbia Presbyterian. I went to him for a while, and that was a good way to talk things out, and he was very useful. When I was finished going to him, and I was thanking him--and I'd heard him say this to other people, too--he said, "You know, all a therapist does is to help you sort things out. The therapist can't do anything really to cure you; you have to make your own decisions." But anyway, that was getting me over the hump a little bit with sex.

The other thing that happened was that in the CORE group there was a couple from Brooklyn and he, when he went off to--he'd been in the war, but he went off, said, "I just told my wife that I didn't intend to be faithful. I didn't see any reason she should be either." [Laughs] And, you know, that doesn't work. So she'd gotten kind of used to experimenting, I think. And one of the people who was in that group was a very tall black policeman, a very good-looking fellow. She had a big affair with him. Anyway, she decided to initiate me. She said I didn't appeal to her the way Frank did, but anyhow, it didn't matter to me.

And then from there on it was easier for me to relate to people. I think when I was first growing up, I kept from getting hurt by not getting very close to people, and at some point I decided up here that is not good because that just isolates you, and it's perfectly true. If you get close to people, you're going to get hurt, and you do, but it's better than being isolated.

So there was this whole business of trying to grow up and associate, at the same time that I was going to church, going to CORE meetings and being involved in projects, and working as a proofreader, which I had--before I left New York the first time, I was working in a publishing house, but now I was working as a proofreader in print shops, and I was in the Typographical Union. It was much less demanding in a way and it paid very much better because it was unionized. And it didn't absorb too much of my--I didn't have to think a lot about it, so I was able to think a lot more about the CORE projects and other things.

Q: You weren't editing, as well as proofreading, whereas when you were with a publisher you did quite a bit of editing.

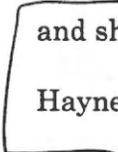
Robinson: Right. It was different. So it was a very--a time when I was not as intensely involved with social action as I had been just before the war, opposing the war, and then in Chicago, first opposing the war and then the first year or two of CORE. So things were more diffuse. I was involved here and I was involved there, and certainly I'd had no idea of ever working for a nonprofit organization. I knew that George did, but it was not something that had occurred to me.

Of course, it was during that period that I met Dorothy and we got married. I've told you all that before. At one point she was involved with CORE, too. She was less involved than I was, but she was involved, and she gave a fundraising concert for CORE at Circle in the Square, which was still an old nightclub down on Sheridan Square. It wasn't the newer place. It was the place where I saw *The Iceman Cometh* the first time it was done by Circle in the Square, it was down there, and we sat around in various places. It had been a dance floor. They acted out here and you were around it.

Q: That explains the name, too.

Robinson: Yes, right. So she did that and Margaret Davison [~~phonetic~~], who was a pacifist and lived around the corner, was the accompanist. Margaret's husband, Bob, was a conscientious objector and they were, at that point, ~~Quakers~~. He had grown up a Methodist and she had gone to some sort of community church, not *the* Community Church, not John Haynes Holmes, but a community church of some kind.

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No community church. I know now that Margaret's mother was vaguely Episcopalian, and Margaret was skeptical about Faith.

vaguely Quaker

Q: Didn't the Quakers have an enormous sort of broadening right after the war, for some reason?

Robinson: Well, yes. The American Friends Service Committee, it's still very big, I think, and many, many people who were not Quakers were involved with the Service Committee. But a lot of people who were on the fringes, the pacifist fringes, joined the Quakers. Some of them, most of them that I know, didn't stay very active after a while, but they were certainly impressed with the Quakers.

I was impressed with the way that the Quakers, their Friends Service Committee, stuck with the conscientious objectors, because we gave them a lot of trouble when they were running camps. We thought it was wrong for them to be doing it after things got going, and they were running the--they were providing the food, and the camp director and the work staff was all being bossed by people from the government. The government would issue rules and regulations, and then the Friends' camp director was supposed to comply with those things, and it was a very confusing picture. Some of these people were putting up the money and so on, and they were very genuine people, and they had it thrown back in their faces. Nevertheless, when the war came to an end, they did things for the ex-objectors regardless of what camp they'd been in, whether they'd been in the Friends camps or not, like the referrals to psychotherapy.

Viola Bernard, for example, she did all that as a volunteer. Now, she was a highly paid psychiatrist, but this stuff she did for free, and she remained that kind of person forever. She was one of the larger contributors of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund when I worked

there. I went to one of the fundraising dinners and had the good fortune to sit next to her, and I reminded her about this referral. She said, "I had forgotten I did that." [Laughs]

Q: She had forgotten that she worked with the Friends doing referrals?

Robinson: That she volunteered for it. She said, "As soon as you reminded me, I remembered it, but I had forgotten I did that." [Laughs]

But a lot of the spirit of the time, I think, was the kind of release that people felt because the war was over and lots of things were germinating. It was really kind of amazing that the G.I. Bill of Rights, for example, was getting people into college, people from all kinds of backgrounds. When I went to college, we were treated like gentlemen at Columbia because it was not something that ordinary people did. But there was that kind of ferment, and then we knew the kind of ferment that was going on in the musical fare, things were different, and the economy fairly soon began to pick up, and it was a time when as the economy picked up, the distribution of the spoils was closer to egalitarian than it is now. There was a lot less hoggishness.

Q: The upper-income people were paying 90 percent income tax. I mean, they weren't, but they were supposedly paying 90 percent.

Robinson: It was a different--it certainly was a different period.

Q: Incredible. And they were still rich.

Robinson: Yes. Oh, sure. So that whole period was not especially conducive to the growth of CORE on a national basis, I think. Too many things were going well and people were terribly busy. People who were on the G.I. Bill, for example, studying, they didn't have a lot of time to spend. Some of them got married and went right into school, living in trailers. So it was an extraordinarily busy time.

CORE had had a big upsurge under George Houser and ~~prior to~~ Cathy Raymond, after the Journey of Reconciliation in 1947, and by the time I was going to conventions in '48, '49, along in there, going again, they were quite busy, quite big. Then we had the fracas over Wally Nelson and that had made it smaller.

Q: What was the--

Robinson: That was over--Wally was a field secretary, and he was a Peacemaker, and the Peacemakers' group were people who avoided paying income taxes because it went to the war. He was basically an anarchist. While he worked for CORE, he never really accepted the idea of excluding people from membership if their connections were with the Communists, and also rather wanted people, everybody in a group to agree on something before you took action.

Q: I'm sorry. Did that mean that they could not be believing in nonviolent action as a--

Robinson: Well, they were supposed to commit themselves to nonviolent action, but if it worked, if you weren't careful about people's prior connections, you might take in people who would be perfectly willing to pledge nonviolence but not mean it. I mean, the

Houser and Catharine worked together. She was his secretary, but she really was an executive assistant

Catharine

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Communists in the thirties joined liberal organizations and pledged to follow the agendas, and if the party line changed, they tried to change the organizations. And if they didn't change the organizations and take them over, they'd let them wither on the vine.

They were still very powerful in 1948 with the [George] Wallace campaign, for example. Wallace wanted to oppose the cold war, and I agreed with him, but a lot of the people who were behind him wanted to neutralize the sting of the U.S. government, too. I know that Jim Peck and I were among the few pacifists who supported Wallace, and I can remember saying I thought that that was the way to indicate that you were opposed to the kind of military preparation that this country was going into, that if Wallace had really had a chance of being elected, with all those people behind him, I wouldn't have voted for him, because I thought that they and not he would control what was going to happen. But I wanted to register a vote against the war.

So that whole period of--and [Joseph R.] McCarthy was coming to the fore in that period, too, and we had had this position in CORE of screening out leftists that were like-- screening out particularly the Communists that had gone from--we had that from the beginning. But people like Wally said that we were siding with the McCarthyites. Well, we weren't. The McCarthyites were calling all kinds of people Communists who weren't Communists. We were not out to expose people or to witch hunt; we were out to protect a small disciplined organization from being used for any other purpose.

Q: Weren't a lot of people leaving the Communist Party then for personal reasons, I mean either because they didn't approve of what the party was doing to them, or because they weren't ready to live a life that was that kind of discipline that it demanded?

Robinson: But a lot of people, of course, going back to the thirties, a number of people left when the Communists supported [Joseph] Stalin's pact with [Adolph] Hitler. Some people did not, but some people did leave at that point.

Q: I'm sorry, but years ago a woman I knew, who had been a Communist Youth at that time, said that what happened was that the Communist Party then turned upon itself and started witch hunting within its own ranks and tossing people out right and left, people who--

Robinson: Yes, they did that, too.

Q: Yes.

Robinson: They certainly did that. And as always happens in situations like that, not all of it was ideological. Some of it was just a matter of "If I can get him put out, I'll be that much more important," you know. That was going on, too.

And some people held on, in spite of a lot of doubts, simply because the party had demonstrated how effective a fairly relatively small number of people can be if they are tightly disciplined and they're all doing exactly the same thing. There were people who felt that the U.S. capitalist democracy was just about the greatest ~~which~~ ^{evil} it could be, and they put up with these other things instead. From my point of view, it didn't make very much sense, but I agreed with them about a lot of the things that were wrong with this country.

Well, anyhow, in this McCarthy period and with this internal stuff in CORE in the early fifties, things began to fall apart.

Q: So the whole left was falling apart under McCarthyism, I mean, because everyone was a "pinko."

Robinson: Yes.

Q: As I remember as a kid.

Robinson: There was a lot of that, a lot of that. Right.

Q: I mean, that was something you didn't want to be called in the schoolyard, as I remember, and [unclear].

Robinson: George had been running CORE nationally from 1943 right on into this period in the 1950s, and he'd built it up and then had it sort of decline, and he was connected with the FOR. The FOR had been very enthusiastic about experimentation with nonviolent direct action. Well, they were less so after [Abraham Johannes] Muste left.

Q: After who?

Robinson: After A.J. Muste. It was after he was no longer executive secretary. George was also very much interested in the South African struggle, so he was spending time on that. There was some time spent on that while he was at the FOR, and during his part-time stuff

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 for CORE, which CORE didn't pay for, and he was really ready to get out. Finally, he decided he was going to resign as executive secretary, and it was at that point that Billie ~~Carlene~~ Ames from St. Louis took over as coordinator, but I was already doing this part-time fundraising. Then she had her divorce and decided she couldn't do the work, and someone else there--and I've forgotten her name now--took it over temporarily and decided she couldn't do it either. So Lula Farmer became the coordinator for a brief, fairly brief period of time.

Q: Had she married Jim by then?

Robinson: Oh, she'd married him a few years before that. Right. She was active in New York CORE. Jim was not really very active in New York CORE. He had been, I gathered, before I came to New York, but he'd been active some of the time, but he was not here all the time at that time either. But she was quite active with it. I think she was also working. ~~I think~~ she had a full-time job with the Institute for International Education. She had a good job and was probably the chief breadwinner. Farmer was on a lecture circuit for a while and he worked for the Upholster^{er}s Union and one or two other unions, but it was kind of--there were periods when he wasn't working, and certainly when he was doing the lecturing. He wasn't lecturing all the time, and I think that she was probably the main support.

Anyway, she took that over and she eventually took over the bookkeeping from Catherine Raymond, too. And then in 1957 she--

[END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE; BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO]

Robinson: She was in favor of having an office and someone running the office, and so the convention wanted me to do that. The convention was in June or July in '57, and my wife had died in '55, in September. So in September of '57, I took the job as executive secretary and felt that I had no other responsibilities, and if the fundraising was insufficient to pay my salary and the salary of a field secretary, you know, I could then give it up; the kind of chance I would not have taken if I'd still been married. I mean, I'm a depression kid, I want to know where the next meal is coming from, which, you see, is quite different from someone like Wally [Wallace] Nelson, who was really very dedicated. If he had to go without knowing where the next meal was coming from, he would do it for the sake of his ideas. I was not that committed.

I told you then about the Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs demonstration that we had as soon as I was in the office, right? With Naomi Levine and the American Jewish Congress.

Q: Fill me in just a little bit.

Robinson: Okay. Well, as soon as I was in the office--

Q: That may be in the part that I skipped on the last tape.

Robinson: I think it's there. There was a bill in city council to prohibit discrimination in housing because of race or religion, and it was going to get passed in city council, but the theory was that ~~unclear~~ was going to veto it. I did tell you that whole thing.

(Mayor) Wagner

Q: Yes.

Robinson: And Jackie Robinson was there for the demonstration and went in to talk to the mayor. Anyway, eventually he signed the bill.

In the meantime, Roy Carter, before the 1957 convention, he had resigned as a field secretary for health reasons, actually. He had a bypass, I think it was.

Q: A bypass then?

Robinson: I think it was a bypass or something, and he had not--I think also he was discouraged. He had not been very successful in stimulating new groups or revivifying groups that they already had.

reviving

Q: What did a field secretary do? I mean, I know what they were doing by the time there was a plethora of field secretaries, and Mary Hamilton said that there was one woman, at least, before her, as field secretary, who left just about the time that she came. She didn't remember her name.

Robinson: Oh, what was her name? I've got her name.

Q: Okay. Shall I hold this a second?

Robinson: Yes, hold it a minute.

[Tape recorder turned off.]

Q: Yes, it was Genevieve Hughes. Thank you.

Robinson: Yes. Genevieve Hughes was a field secretary, but that was later.

The work of a field secretary was to take the names of the people that we had on our mailing lists, most of whom were contributors or people who had written in with some interest in something that they knew about CORE. We would then write a letter, where we had eight or ten or twelve people in a locality, and suggest that we wanted to send a field secretary through or would like to have them meet. So they would meet and talk about CORE, and sometimes you would get a new group out of that.

The other thing that the field secretaries did was to travel to existing groups and try to convey anything that had been successfully used in one area to another CORE group. They did a little bit of public speaking, but early on there was not very much opportunity for that until the student sit-ins, certainly. All of this was more or less hidden. We got cover; we had some coverage in the Chicago papers with the early CORE group. We got coverage here in New York only in the black press, by and large, for the Palisades Project. Very little interest in the general press. At the time of the Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs Bill, the *New York Times* ran an editorial opposing the bill. So the field secretaries--

Q: What about *PM* and *New York Post*? Were they--

Robinson: I don't remember about them. There was something--the *Amsterdam News*, though, was quite helpful on that, things like Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs. There was one Harlem minister who was close in with the Democrat Party, who was fudging on this thing, and a man from the Sleeping Car Porters, Ben McLaurin, asked me to come up to his office where he said, "We'll go over and talk--." I think it was Mr. Hicks, Jimmy Hicks, at the *Amsterdam News*, about this minister who wasn't really being very helpful. So Hicks ran the editorial. He didn't mention any names, but talking about people who were double-talking on this issue of the Fair Housing Bill, which effectively shut up the minister.

[Laughs]

Q: Who owned the *Amsterdam News* then?

Robinson: Oh, who owned it? The people who owned it, they owned it for a long time, and then when he finally died, he left money to the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, but I can't remember his name.

So that Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs was a very big thing for us, and it was an introduction for James T. McCain, who was up here during it. As I think I said before, I went down to South Carolina, to Sumter, and traveled around a little bit with McCain, that was showing me what the situation was around there, and I saw some of those segregated schools out in the country. They were unbelievable.

I met a couple of black businessmen who were influential in the NAACP and in civil rights in general in South Carolina, because they ran funeral parlors or they did something that didn't depend on having to kowtow to anybody white.

Q: But they were usually quite conservative.

Robinson: They what?

Q: When we were in the South, they were usually quite conservative.

Robinson: Oh, yes, they were, and the difficulty was that McCain had come to us through the Southern Regional Council, and he'd grown up in the South under a segregated system, and he had generally tried to get along with people without any kind of confrontation. He must have stepped a little too far over the line, because he got fired as principal of the high school there, but he was not at all a radical. As time went on and things developed in CORE, he did ^{things} ~~things~~ like ^{training} ~~he served to have incoming Freedom Riders~~ ~~went through some checkpoints~~. I think he was in New Orleans for a while. So he could brief people, etc., but he never was at all confrontational.

If you had a number of people on a project, and we had had McCain and we had had Jim Peck on the project, Peck would have been the one who got beaten up, not McCain. But McCain, in hindsight, he was probably one of the most important people the national CORE ever had because he was steady. He was absolutely committed to integration, and he was soft-spoken, which as time went on, I think became probably more and more important, because there were too many people who were too uptight.

NOTE: By the time of the Freedom Riders, he understood nonviolent direct action and was excellent on briefing volunteers who were going on Freedom Rides

Q: Mary said that he removed her from jail in Parchment because they had gotten complaints that she was not cooperating enough with the jailers. You know, in view of CORE's beginning, that's--and only a week before her--

Robinson: Term was up?

Q: Yes. Yes.

Robinson: Well, I can believe that. Yes, yes. Certainly when he was first here with the Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs thing, he was astonished at how confrontational people could be in New York and still not be really angry at each other. It was just a revelation.

Anyhow, the reason that New York CORE agenda worked at this point was that we had McCain, we had Jim Peck doing the ~~correction~~, we had groups like St. Louis, and for a while we had that Nashville group. They were very important at different things. We had Lula Farmer, who was doing the bookkeeping. So we had a number of things to make everything that worked get pushed ahead, and we were no longer having a conflict over theories, as we did with Wallace Nelson.

In effect, the two groups that won that battle were St. Louis and New York. People from New York CORE were running the national organization, except for Charles Oldham was ~~always important~~ in St. Louis. He got to all the national meetings and he was constantly in touch about various things. He was a somewhat different kettle of fish from most of the rest of us, I think, whereas he'd say, "Well, you can do this," and we'd just do it. [Laughs] He was fairly cold-blooded. And his wife was very attractive, very warm.

CORE later

for national CORE

National Chairman

from

(who was Black)

Of course, Billie Ames had been remarkable, and she'd been remarkable all the way through the dissent in CORE, because she always managed to get along with everybody. That's one of the reasons she would have been a good coordinator if she'd stayed with it. But I think also it would have been very difficult to have the coordination in St. Louis and the fundraising and bookkeeping in New York, which was what we were trying to do.

So now where do we go from here?

Q: Well, at that point you had some turnover, it sounds like, in the office, Billie Jo Ames and--was that her name?

Coil

Coyle

[of Coordinator]

Robinson: Billie ~~Garlene~~ Ames. She'd left the office and she left CORE.

Q: Did her husband stay with CORE, was that it?

Robinson: Joe Ames was--no, I don't think he really stayed with CORE.

Q: Hold on.

[Tape recorder turned off.]

Q: Okay. I had asked what was working in some groups, so that in that terrible period where anything was suspect, that you said that the field secretary would go from one group to another to tell them what was working and how they had been working at it.

Robinson: Yes. There was a group emphasizing that in the North. Employment and housing were important projects. By and large, there were few things done on housing. There were more things done on employment. But in California they had several efforts at getting people hired. Usually what happened was that a supermarket chain, if it had an outlet in a predominantly black neighborhood, you could organize a boycott with a picket line and get a couple of black cashiers hired. And the atmosphere was such that if we got a couple of black cashiers hired, everybody felt we had a victory.

Q: Absolutely.

Robinson: Yes. It was tokenism, but it was a victory.

Q: They weren't worried about butchers and things like that? It didn't show.

Robinson: It usually didn't get ~~far~~ very far very fast. There was some work in St. Louis, I think on bread companies and so on, but most of their work was on lunch counters, and predominantly, in the beginning, on lunch counters in the department stores. They insisted that people on the picket lines at the department stores should look middle-class. They said, "We're appealing to basically white middle-class, and we'll have an interracial line, and we should look like them, except that we're mixed, and that way we will get people to be sympathetic." And they did get people who were sympathetic.

The other thing that they did was to get the managers to serve test groups, and it was prearranged. They did that sometimes once or twice a week in certain places for months on

end. It became perfectly evident after a while that they weren't losing customers, but it still was a push to get from there to being completely open, but they did get a number of places open.

Anything that happened in St. Louis or Baltimore, any movement, was always reported in the ~~Correlator~~, and these were considered very important because they were borderline cities ^{of} states and places where CORE was operating without a civil rights law. Now, St. Louis spent a lot of time trying to get an ordinance passed requiring service. They did not get it passed, and that probably, in retrospect, was a waste of time. They probably were doing better to just work one thing after another.

But those things were going on, and then the school integration thing was going on in Nashville. We weren't doing a lot about school integration anywhere else that I can think of. It was one of the things that we talked about. Certainly in the South Carolina stuff with Jim McCain, we talked about a number of things, but what they were really working on was just voter registration, and many of the people who worked on it were the same people that worked on it in the NAACP, and the two things were almost indistinguishable. I found that not satisfactory, but it was not satisfactory because I wanted something that was for definite and direct action.

At the same time, no one could say, really, that voter registration in South Carolina was conservative, because it was very difficult to get anybody registered, and people who tried to register could suffer reprisals and so on and so forth.

CORE later

On the other hand, direct action in a restaurant or in a housing project, you had the people who were trying to change the policy, the people who were setting the policy, that it's like this and you can work out a solution directly. If you're going in for voter registration, then you're going to have to get into the electoral stuff and the whole business of trying to change the patterns of racial segregation through voting channels. It's extremely complex, and you don't really affect anything directly. You go through a whole--and you make compromises. I think you have to make compromises politically, but it makes everything much--it makes things muddy. They're not clear-cut the way they are with simple direct action.

Q: Housing projects were white at that time, mostly, and not integrated at all?

Robinson: What?

Q: You said when you worked on housing projects, trying to get people into housing projects, they were mostly white? Most housing projects were for white people?

Robinson: Oh, yes, they were. The New York CORE--

Q: Oh, this is a New York action, not a South Carolina action.

Robinson: Yes. In New York CORE, Clarence Finet [phonetic].

Q: Yes. [unclear]. Okay.

Funnye
pronounced
FUN NAY!

Robinson: Well, he was the one who was willing to move his family into Clinton Hill.

Q: Was that a project?

Robinson: What?

Q: That wasn't a project. That was middle-class housing, wasn't it?

Robinson: Middle-class housing, yes. We tested Clinton Hill, and the black testers found that there were no apartments available. The white testers--and I think I was one of the white testers--were shown apartments. And we tried to negotiate, and we didn't get anywhere with negotiation, and we had weekend picket lines out there all one summer.

Q: I'll bet they were fun.

Robinson: Yes.

Q: It was a warm lovely summer.

Robinson: I think I told you on one of the other tapes that there was some woman in the building who came down one day and she said, "We're all going to the beach, but here's a key to the apartment lock."

Q: Okay. That was how he got into an apartment.

the group

Robinson: Right. And she said, "Here's the key to the apartment, and there are cold drinks in the refrigerator. We'll be gone most of the afternoon, but this will give you a place to have a break." She lived in that building. I was really impressed. She didn't know any of us from Adam. [Laughs] But the line looked respectable and middle-class, and it was, and nobody abused anything. Ultimately the ~~Pirates~~ got an apartment.

Funnies

The Oreo cookies remind me of Clarence, too, because he was very concerned about image, and said that advertising and everything else on TV was always white, and that there ought to be black people shown in various ads, etc. He wrote a number of places.

Anyway, the people at Nabisco got in touch with us, and we went over to see them. And I can remember a big discussion. They said the problems that they were having with Oreo, because Oreo was their biggest seller and still is, I think, and they said, "It's been priced at thirty-nine cents, but for a long time, and the price has to go up or the box size has to go down. We can't afford it any longer." There was a big marketing discussion, apparently, about how they were going to--because they said, "As soon as it goes to forty-one cents, it's going to seem very expensive to a lot of housewives."

And you can see how different that day was from now, when so many people go in and they pay no attention to the prices. In this neighborhood, you'll get one supermarket will charge you twenty-five or thirty-five cents more for a box of cereal than another one, and the prices are like that. In order to shop the cheapest way, you need to shop all the stores and do comparisons, because some are up and some are down.

Q: Well, one person's job was watching the money. I mean, one person had--you know, that was okay.

Robinson: Yes. Anyway, we went there, and most of the people in that marketing department were young and college-educated, and they didn't have, as far as I could see, any racial prejudice at all. It was just a matter of--and they were certainly impressed with Clarence, because he was impressive anyway. I remember that at the end of the discussion they took us all out to dinner.

Q: Oh, good.

Robinson: It was just really a remarkable thing.

And Clarence had so many good ideas. Later on, of course, he was interested in city planning and all of that, and he was chairman of New York CORE at a time when things were beginning to fall apart, and so his ideas got nowhere.

Q: And his sister married Roy Innis, too.

Robinson: She married Roy Innis, yes.

Q: Yes, [unclear]. I liked her.

Robinson: What?

Q: I liked her.

Robinson: Yes. Well, I think she's still a nice person, and she certainly must have had a rough ride with Roy Innis.

[Tape recorder turned off.]

[Roy Innis]

Robinson: He was funny. He got worse. When I first met him, he--

Q: Roy Innis did. I want to correct this tape.

Robinson: He was kind of an eager beaver. But I think he was never deeply committed to anything except Roy Innis, and I didn't know about that in the beginning. I didn't really sense that.

Q: Well, he had an enormous vitality, but he was a thug.

Robinson: Yes.

Q: I'll say that on tape. I won't say the other, because--

Robinson: Yes. But that housing we did here in New York, and then later on at the end, and I was no longer in national CORE, I can remember going somewhere, and I think it was in Brooklyn or Queens, and an apartment house that discriminated, and the woman who took me around to look at apartments, something had been mentioned about the

apartment number. Anyway, I said I wanted to look at it some more, and she went back to the office and other people from the group came up and sat in. [Laughs] I think we did get somebody in there, although I can't remember now whether we had someone who wanted the apartment who then didn't take it. It may have happened that way.

Q: It was New York CORE, I remember.

Robinson: Yes, right. But those things were important.

Q: At one point in New York CORE I remember somebody got the apartment, but didn't have the down-payment, and CORE felt they were in an embarrassing position and loaned him the down-payment and then he welsed on returning the money.

Robinson: Oh my.

Q: Oh yes. This was like '63 or so. But those things happen. Okay. Not everybody is wonderful.

Robinson: Oh, no. No, that's true. And one of the great--

Q: '62 maybe.

Robinson: Right. One of the great things about my having gone from Columbia to Harlem, and living a couple of years in Harlem, was that while I was very much an integrationist, and I found that some of the best friends I ever had were from that period and later, I'd

lived in Harlem long enough to know that black people are like white people; some of them are dreadful. [Laughs] Because there were too many people in CORE, too many white people in CORE who were romantic about it, you know. You just had to realize that people are people, that they're not all good, and there were certainly a lot of people, as time went on, who could con people into accepting them when they weren't really genuine at all.

But from that period of 1957, it wasn't too long, in '58, we had our convention in Frogmore, South Carolina. That's a little island off—we had it down there partly because I wanted to get people from McCain's groups to come to it. That didn't work very well. He came.

Q: I'm sorry, but everybody had a nice vacation on a semi-tropical island. [Laughs]

Robinson: And the woman who was the head of the South Carolina Council on Human Relations came. I think she may have been the one who suggested Frogmore. There was a Penn Center there, which was Quaker-sponsored, and that was our housing.

Q: How many people were there in CORE about that time?

Robinson: I don't know how many people we were, but that convention was small. I doubt that we had more than fifteen people there. We did have--Gordon Carey came from Los Angeles, and he was a pacifist who was doing a lot of things with Los Angeles CORE at that point. He was always a little bit flaky, but a very hard worker and he wrote well ~~after~~. It wasn't long after that, that he came on staff as a field secretary.

[The Coast of South Carolina]

It was some time thereafter that Marvin Rich came on for publicity, and he did the press releases and a little bit initially, not very much, a little bit of outreach. He did a lot of work on trying to outreach to unions. We got a relatively poor response from unions for quite a period, but eventually it got better.

Q: Who were they supporting or were they supporting anybody?

*Ladies Home
union*

Robinson: They weren't supporting anybody that much. The ILG [~~Independent League~~
~~Group~~] gave us--we had one or two people from the ILG who were on the advisory committee. We got some minor support from the ILG. We got some money and support from [Local] 1199, which was--the workers in it were predominantly black and the--

Q: Then?

Robinson: I think--weren't they? No, not then maybe.

Q: No, they were mostly--actually, they were mostly left and they were mostly druggists. They were mostly pharmacists.

Robinson: I see.

Q: And there was one other very small division that eventually grew into the hospital workers, but I think that they may even have been pharmacists in hospitals.

Robinson: Yes. Well, we got a little support from them.

Q: There may have been some LPNs [Licensed Practical Nurse]. There weren't any RNs [Registered Nurse] at the time.

Robinson: We got some support from District Council 37, but that was fairly minor.

Marvin Rich was impressed with a man named Gibbons.

Q: Harold Gibbons?

Robinson: Harold Gibbons.

Q: From St. Louis.

Robinson: From St. Louis. He was in the Teamsters Union.

Q: I had such a crush on him as a girl. [Laughs]

[Marvin Rich]

Robinson: Anyhow, he did quite a lot of work like that, but one of the things that he did was to get press releases out regularly. We'd never done a good job with the press releases. I didn't write a good press release to begin with. He knew how to do that. The other thing that he knew how to do was to--what do you call those things they can print pictures? He made--

Q: They were mats.

Robinson: Mats. Right.

Q: You took something like papier-mâché and you pressed it into a mold and then you could print with that for some reason.

Robinson: Right. He said we should--

Q: And there were also half-tones and things like that that you did with acid.

[Marvin said]

Robinson: We should send these mats out with the press releases, to the black press

particularly. And these smaller black newspapers always needed fillers, and if you had a picture, even though the story was very minor, it would get in. And we did that to get a

and found

~~clipping service and~~ it was true. — after we hired a clipping service

Q: Absolutely.

Robinson: The one thing that did bother us with the clipping service was that every once in a while there was an article about a "core curriculum," and we'd get clippings on that, too.

[Laughs]

Q: So you knew what was going on in the schools around the country.

Robinson: So that worked. And we had a little extra money. Of course, later on, after I was gone, he did a lot of the fundraising. While I was there, he wasn't going a lot of the

Doug

fundraising. But in addition to the direct mail fundraising letters and the ~~Correlator~~, the

[Marvin]

CORRELATOR

other big promotion thing that I instituted were the holiday cards, and the holiday cards were awfully late. I think I started it the very first year I was there, and I don't think I got with it until about October. I do know that there wasn't time to solicit a lot of designs, and we went to Jerry Goldman and he did a design on gray paper that was orange and red, I think. Anyhow, it was not really a very attractive thing, but we had something, and I did some list exchanges and promoted it. And the idea was to get names of people who would buy the cards, in addition to people who were contributing, so we had a separate list for people who bought cards and contributing, and ^{we hoped} ~~partly~~ that the name and address of CORE on the back of ^{each} a holiday card would spread our name.

Q: Very nice. Yes.

Robinson: It was promotional in several different ways, but it was so late that first year I was terribly worried that we were going to end up spending more money than we got back. We didn't.

The next year, Gilbert Harris [~~phonetic~~], who was an impecunious black artist down on the Lower East Side somewhere, agreed to do--he had a painting that was attractive, and we used that painting, and he added--I think he added a menorah and a Christmas tree or ^{to the painting} something ~~that~~ he'd already done, and we got permission to quote from the diary of Anne Frank. And that was a very successful card. That was used for a number of years. Eventually we had art done by a child and so on and so forth.

But the card, if I remember correctly, the last time I was connected with it, I think we grossed \$50,000, which was a lot of money in those days. I don't remember what the net was, but we did get a lot of additional names and a good deal of exposure.

[the Gilbert Harwin card]

By that time--I'm not quite sure of the timing. I think we used that card before the student sit-ins, and they were, of course, reusing it after, because it continued for several years.

But that card was particularly effective, and it was general; it was a Happy Holidays card.

We had more choices afterward. We had some things that were specifically Christmas and some things that were holidays.

Q: Black Madonna.

Robinson: And we offered imprinting, too, if people ordered it in time. I had one very funny experience with the imprinting.

Q: That's right; you had been proofreading imprinting in a previous life.

Robinson: Yes. But this time it was a woman on the West Coast and she said we imprinted her name on the wrong card, that she wasn't Christian and she couldn't send a Christmas card, etc. We kept a file of all the orders, so we looked her up and we had sent her the card that she had checked. There was a little picture of the card and a place where you checked it. So we made a copy of the order, and I wrote her and said we would refund her money, but we did think she should know that we had not made a mistake. We enclosed the original of her order; we kept a copy.

She wrote back, "Anybody who is stupid enough to mark the wrong thing on a form that's perfectly clear should lose her money. Keep it." [Laughs]

But there were things like that that were going on the same time we were trying to get more groups. And I remember more of the fundraising and the holiday card details than I do of the field details, because I wasn't brought up at the beginning with--I was handling everything. But eventually a lot of the field stuff was kind of running on its own.

Q: Well, it sounds like there was an enormous expansion at that time, because when you began, when you started working for CORE, there was just one person.

Robinson: Yes.

Q: I mean, in the office, and there was one field secretary.

Robinson: Right.

Q: And then suddenly you had more field secretaries and you had more--well, when did you--

[END TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO; BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE]

Q: Okay. With Jim Robinson on the--it's still the 12th of February.

Robinson: The expansion was really very rapid.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry, let me go back. I had said that when you took over from George Houser suddenly the staff expanded, everything expanded, the field work seems to have expanded, and you became quite a different organization. Okay.

Robinson: Yes, we did become a different organization, and we were less distinctly--we were no longer predominantly pacifist in our membership. We were still absolutely committed to integration and to nonviolent direct action and to avoiding anything outside of race. We weren't involved in anything else at all. There was no political activity of any kind.

But we did expand very rapidly. It was partly the times. We'd had the desegregation-of-schools decision in 1954, the bus boycott in Montgomery in 1955, and I think it was 1956 that we had the Nashville school business, or maybe it was '56 or '57, but things were happening, and things were happening in Baltimore. There were projects there, projects to open restaurants and [unclear] lunch counters, and this was all before the big push in the South. And something was going on in St. Louis and there was activity in New York, and the mailing list was growing and more and more people knew about CORE, although it was still not well known. It was not well known until the student sit-ins. It wasn't in the news media very much at all. But it was growing rapidly and it was partly that the fundraising worked extremely well. The field work did not work extremely well initially, but once it got going, after things began to happen more in the field, too.

Q: What was going on in the field? How many field secretaries did you have?

Robinson: Well, for a while we had just McCain and Gordon Carey, and I don't think we had any more until the student sit-ins occurred. But Carey was initially used in the West and the East, primarily, and McCain was primarily in the South. We had decided that Gordon should go into the South. We had made that decision just before that first sit-in in North Carolina, and so he was all set to go at the time that that happened.

Q: And he was white?

Robinson: And he was white, yes. He worked with the students and encouraged students from campus after campus to do sit-ins, and he got quite a lot of publicity because, I think, partly from the southern press. The people who were opposed to what was going on liked to play up the fact that here was a northerner, a white northerner, who was educating these students, so some of it came from that. But the response from the black population was to organize mass meetings and have him speak.

So, now, McCain also traveled around with the students. He got less publicity than Gordon and he was--well, Gordon was an agitator in the same way that a number of us were, and McCain really wasn't. But McCain did work with the students. He did go on sit-ins and so on and so forth. So all of a sudden we had a lot of stuff going on. And it was after that, that Gaither, Thomas Gaither, became a field secretary. This woman we mentioned before, what was her name?

Q: Genevieve Hughes.

Robinson: Genevieve Hughes. Genevieve Hughes worked at Dunham and Bradstreet. She joined New York CORE for the Woolworth boycotts in support of the student sit-ins in the South, and she became the person who coordinated the picket lines. On one Saturday we had, I think, thirty-six picket lines all over Manhattan, the Bronx, and so on and so forth. She did a lot of work with that. Eventually both she and Thomas Gaither became field secretaries and she was a field secretary for the better part of a year.

Q: And she was black?

Robinson: She was white.

Q: She was white.

Robinson: She was white. But I think she was the only woman field secretary we had until Mary, and she was very effective. I was not in the office, I think, when she quit, so I don't know the particulars.

Q: Overworked and no vacation. [Laughs]

Robinson: Yes. She did a lot in California, and she'd stimulate groups. But the trouble with the Woolworth boycott all over--wherever we had a CORE group, they tended to run picket lines, etc., and well that's fine, but it's week-in and week-out and week-in and week-out, and it goes on ten, fifteen weeks, then people get less interested in showing up. And then some of them put so much emphasis on that, that when that was kind of over, then they didn't do anything. And this was always a problem with CORE groups, even New

York CORE, and Chicago CORE, I think it was true, too, that you've got a project that absorbs people and drew in new members etc., and then if you won that project or it dribbled away, people dribbled away, too. So you had this kind of experience in local groups.

The field secretaries were there, in part, to try to go in and suggest new things that they could do. With volunteers, most of whom were going to school or working full-time, it gets to be sticky after a while to keep doing that much.

Q: Mary said that somebody from Arizona came to Los Angeles to organize people to go on the Freedom Rides or screen them. Can you think of--

Robinson: I don't know who it was, no.

Q: Okay. So that was a volunteer, then?

Robinson: Right. Yes, there were all kinds of people doing so many different things. There were periods during the Woolworth boycott--Darwin Bolden [phonetic] joined the field staff, too, at that time.

Sp 120K

Q: Really?

Robinson: Yes. Darwin Bolden was on the field staff here in New York before Genevieve Hughes, and he worked with the boycott, the Woolworth boycotts, and with a number of

things. He was always somebody that I liked, because he said whatever popped into his head, and this affected people right, left, and center. [Laughs]

Q: I remember him as the three-piece suit businessman type.

Robinson: Yes.

Q: He wasn't West Indian, was he?

Robinson: No, he came from a huge family in western New York, in Buffalo, New York, very poor people, apparently, and he was terribly bright and he got a scholarship to Syracuse University and did very well. Then he had a scholarship at Yale Law School, so he became a lawyer. He was working in a law office when he first volunteered for some of the CORE things that we did.

Q: He was a lawyer in the law office or he was just working in the law office?

Robinson: He was a lawyer. He was not a partner; he was a junior partner. So he worked for a while for New York CORE, just a few months, I guess, before he went back to being a lawyer again. But he was a real character.

Later on in New York CORE he and several of us worked together anyhow. But Gladys Harrington ^{OK} [phonetic] was the chairman, and there was a big push to replace her with somebody when the election came up, with ^{OK} Lydon Jackson [phonetic].

Blyden

Q: Oh, that must have been quite a lot later.

Robinson: That was later, right. That was about 1963 or '64, was it?

Q: Oh, no. Jack's wife shot him in '62 or '63, and it was when he left New Haven.

Robinson: Oh.

Q: You didn't know this story?

Robinson: No. What happened?

Q: On tape or off? I'm actually willing to do it either way.

Robinson: Go ahead.

Q: Jack was having an affair with somebody that we know, who was in school at Yale at the time, and he was about to go out, and his wife met him at the door and said, "You're not going out tonight."

And he said, "Yes, I am."

And she grabbed his army service revolver that he still had and she said, "You're not going out tonight."

And he said, "Go ahead and shoot me," and she did.

Robinson: Oh, dear. [Laughs]

Q: And he left. He left New Haven not that long after. There it is. But he sort of went many places. It took him quite a while to recover from that; I mean to recover from the shock. He'd been in the marines and I think he'd seen action. But I think it was several years before he really got back on his feet and got to be a leader in another project again, and I thought that was Upper East Side or East River.

Robinson: East River CORE. Right.

Q: Yes. So that was like '65 or so.

Robinson: He was in New York CORE before East River CORE. He was a friend of Bayard Rustin's. There was this big fracas over ^{trying to elect Blyden} ~~Lyden got elected~~ instead of Gladys Harrington, and Darwin Bolden and one or two other people and myself decided that we didn't want ~~Lyden~~ Jackson, and we didn't think that Gladys would win, but we would support Gladys, and then if nobody had got the majority, we would talk to her about supporting Marshall England ~~[phonetic]~~ as chairman.

sp. O.K.

Q: I remember him, sort of. Was he white?

Robinson: He's black.

Q: Oh, he was black. Okay.

Robinson: So that's the way it worked. Nobody got a majority. Then I think we kept Gladys after the--there was a big hiatus for people who had discussions, and we got her to ask all the people who supported her to vote for Marshall England, so Marshall England won. I think, but there's no way we can prove it, but I think that the ^{Blyden}~~Lydon~~ Jackson thing was a ploy from the ~~Hills~~ to try to control New York CORE and get Bayard Rustin in in place of Farmer.

Velma Hill and Norman Hill

Q: What a confusing story.

Robinson: But anyhow, Farmer thought that was the plot, and certainly Bayard was looking for someplace to hang his hat, but I do know that it's--

Q: Norman Hill was doing what for CORE at the time, and what was Velma doing?

Robinson: Velma was in New York CORE. I don't know whether she was doing something national or not, but Hill was the field director or assistant field director at that point. Eventually he was forced out or resigned. He agreed with Bayard that Direct Action had had its day and they should be more involved with politics, etc. But the whole thing was, by that time, was very confused in there.

Q: That was Black Power time, too.

see attached note [Robinson - 5-193-A]

The reference to Velma and Norman Hill, Blyden Jackson, Bayard Rustin, and the contested election in New York CORE in which Marshall England defeated Blyden Jackson is probably too incomplete to be understood. I have therefore written the following comments --

There was already dissatisfaction with Jim Farmer in National CORE at the time of the election in New York CORE. While there is no proof of a conspiracy, Farmer and others thought one existed. Bayard Rustin had never had a permanent connection with a civil-rights group and may have been looking for a spot -- he was beginning to say demonstrations had had their day, and civil-rights groups should connect to labor unions and try to influence politics instead. He was shifting away from radical direct action and would eventually support the Teachers Union against blacks seeking community control of their public schools. The Hills and socialist-leaning whites in NYC CORE supported that view and thought they could use Blyden Jackson (a black activist from New Haven) as head of NYC CORE. He lost the election (Darwin Bolden, Gladys Harrington and I strategized his defeat) and, later on, broke with the Hills in a fracas in National CORE. Bayard Rustin found a permanent spot for himself as director of the "A. Philip Randolph Institute" financed by the AFL-CIO as its mouthpiece on civil rights.

Our concern (Bolden, Harrington and I) was to prevent a take-over by Velma Hill's faction. I do not think we knew then of a plot against Jim Farmer. I no longer liked him, but in any case would never have supported Velma Hill and her faction.

Almost

Robinson: Yes, and with all this Power business, and then we had the stall-in and people didn't--everybody was in favor of it, but nobody came.

Q: On the East River bridges?

Robinson: The road to the World's Fair. I think that that was the last thing that I ever did with New York CORE. I was in one of those cars, but nothing happened. There were very few cars, but the threat of it was such that there was almost no traffic that day. [Laughs]

And Marshall England, the cops had been trying to get him to arrest, I don't know, people concealed him, they couldn't find him anywhere, because he was the head of New York CORE.

I think I've said all I want to say for today. One hell of a lot, too.

Q: It's strange, names from the past. Darwin Bolden lived ~~with~~ up the street from me.

[END OF SESSION]