ANNOUNCER: The following program is produced in cooperation with Mary Washington College of Fredericksburg Virginia, continuing a tradition of academic excellence in a changing world. James Farmer's reflections, a personal perspective of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. [background talking] In the past, James Farmer was one of the most eloquent and outspoken voices of the struggle for racial equality. From the Freedom Rides, to the sit-ins, to the March on Washington, he motivated both blacks and whites and articulated for the nation the demands and the dream for racial equality across the country.

1960s FARMER: You have started a revolution in the past ten years since those historic words were uttered by the nine men of the Supreme Court. You have been in the streets marching, the staccato march of your feet punctuated by the clanging of jail cell doors have set the stage for this revolution.

ANNOUNCER: James Farmer is currently Commonwealth Professor in History at Mary Washington College. Tonight he continues his thirteen part series of lectures on the Civil Rights Movement from his personal recollections.

FARMER: This will be the first lecture. Now we are going to start dealing with uh, what was, I think, one of the greatest periods in the nation's history. The nation's finest hour certainly in my memory; a time when people became larger than themselves and maybe, to coin a phrase, larger than life because hundreds of thousands, no doubt millions, white and black, found something to believe in that was outside of themselves and bigger than they. And thus, they uh forgot about the pettinesses and selfishness which governs lives most of the time. They were willing to die for the things they believed in and they were willing to die for the things that they worked for. Ahh, It was America's great day and it galvanized the world because the world saw this nation's finest

nature struggling against its worst nature. And they witnessed that drama, they saw it on tv, they saw the federal government serving as more than just a referee but as an advocate for the Constitution, an advocate for justice, coming to the rescue of those persons who were fighting for a better nation and that was the difference between this nation then 1960s and what we are witnessing in South Africa today because the government in South Africa is the oppressor; that's one of the differences. There are many other differences and a great many distinctions. [pause] Ten years ago when America was celebrating its bicentennial I had the opportunity to speak in Asia and Africa quite extensively, and visiting some 30 or 35 countries. And I found, the people were fascinated by the drama which they witnessed in the 60s. They were fairly knowledgeable because it had been covered widely by their media. They of course had some false impressions of what had taken place uh probably the greatest knowledgeability was in Japan, where they had followed it very closely indeed. Two questions were asked most frequently in both Asia and Africa. The first was in a democracy such as the United States where decisions are made by counting noses how can a minority improve its life and make progress while avoiding what de Tocqueville called the tyranny of the majority. In other words, if an issue is raised and uh, people have to stand up and be counted then doesn't the minority lose always in an, a democracy. That was the first question and it came up again and again in all different languages. The interpreters interpreted it was translated over and over again. And the second question was why then in the 60s, why not in the 40s, the 30s, the 20s; why not at the turn of the century, why not in the last century after emancipation; why did the civil rights explosion in the United States occur when it did. What were the unique elements? What were the ingredients in the situation? Well I think both questions were fairly simple and I will not dwell on the first one I'll just give, uh the obvious answers and we'll dwell a bit on the second, which is also simple. Of the, the first

question of course we were a minority, blacks were a minority, we were perhaps 12 percent of the population. Being a minority we had to gain allies, we had to win friends, we had to gain sympathizers. Thus we made full use of the media and uh, as Martin Luther King put it he wanted to appeal to the conscience of the nation and he did it admirably so did SNCC and CORE. We similarly appealed to the conscience sometimes a different part of the national conscience but we appealed to that conscience. We had to whittle down the majority which was opposed to us, bring them over to our side and we did that quite successfully. So that by the fall of 1963, shortly after the great March on Washington, which was held in August 1963, public opinion polls showed that more than 75 percent of the American people were in favor of strong, new Civil Rights legislation and they wanted it to have teeth in it and to be enforceable and wanted to see it enforced. In other words, they were on our side. That is white and black, north and south. We had won the battle to win sympathizers. We were no longer a minority. We then, were the majority, and thus, we avoided tyranny of the majority because we had become the majority. Well, why then, why in the 60s and why not in some earlier decade. There are many, many reasons and you no doubt before this uh, series of class sessions is over will come up with your own reason, such as the existence of uh, television in the 60s. In prior decades we did not have television, television was a post World War II development in this country and what was happening in the 40s; the early 40s was not covered by televisions, there was no television, we had sit-ins then but nobody knew about it because it was not on the tube. And uh, thus, uh persons who could have gone out to do the same thing didn't do the same thing because they didn't know what the same thing was. They didn't know what others were doing in other parts of the country. Nothing could take the place of television, that was one of the reasons of course but not the major reason. A major reason was, one major reason was the Supreme Court decision in

Brown versus the Topeka Board of Education, that historic, landmark decision. The Warren Supreme Court said and this was the first time the high court had ever said that racial segregation is per se discrimination and unconstitutional. It's true it said it is, uh that was the case in public education. But if it was true in public education, then blacks were quick to point out that if it was true in public education then why not in transportation, public transportation. Why not in public accommodations, in restaurants, theaters, hotels, amusement centers, why not in jobs? If it's true in public eh um education why isn't it true in every area of the nation's life. Well the courts hadn't reached its decision easily. There'd been a long evolution; it had decided in the old Plessy versus Ferguson case that facilities had to be separate but must be equal. They were separate but were not equal. As the NAACP, the National Association for Advancement of Colored People, uh that uh oldest and uh uh largest of the civil rights organizations, pointed out in case after case taken before the Supreme Court they were never equal. In fact could not be equal. As the organization argued in several of the cases, especially um, law schools, NAACP argued that it uh, that uh equal education could not possibly be provided to a black law student studying in a segregated law school in the state. Even if the professors had more degrees than the white professors in the white law school. Even if the buildings were better, the library larger, could not possibly get an equal education. Why? Because he or she would be denied the privilege of uh, being an alumnus of the same institution from which leaders in that profession, other leaders of that profession, had graduated. Couldn't talk to the judge about the old days and the campus of the alma mater and thus would be handicapped in the wheeling and dealing in the judge's chambers and thus had not received an equal education, preparing him or her to compete equally before the courts of law. So finally, the Supreme Court decided segregation itself provided unequal education and must come to an end. Well there was a shout of hurrah throughout the

black community then. Some overestimated the impact of it. Some of the leaders even said well it's almost over now, we're over the hump, erroneously thinking that uh, once this is implemented, that uh, freedom will be here and everything else will fall into place; that all of the other inequities would come down like the proverbial dominos when you push one. But at least it was a landmark decision and uh, it was motivation for many blacks to begin agitating for an end to segregation. A second reason for the timing of the Civil Rights explosion was World War II. When this nation was fighting against the master race theory of Adolf Hitler and Nazism and Fascism and there were black boys over there too; many of them in work battalions and not fighting, and those who were fighting were fighting in segregated units but still they were dying in the battle against, uh, Nazism and Hitler's racism. It was inevitable that they should turn around and say "hey, wait a minute, what about racism back home? If racism is wrong in Europe, then how in God's name can it be right in America?" and uh, various incidents served further to encourage them in their struggle. For instance, when uh black troops back from the front were riding on trains in the South and had to ride in that uh, Jim Crow Coach, but you won't remember and it may be difficult for some of you who are so young to believe that it existed but there were separate coaches on trains. They were the front coaches on trains, um, you see the idiocy of the whole thing, back seats on the buses, but front coaches on trains. So it's not the back or the front that matters [laughs], it was just the separation. Well, they had to sit in the, um, front coach on the train and the same time they saw Nazi prisoners of war, riding first class on the same train. Well, that was a bit more than they could stomach, and uh, they came out determined to do battle against racism here and their relatives and friends back home had, uh, equal determination. A third major reason, closely related to that, was uh the emergence of new nations in Africa; closely related because the new nations of Africa began to emerge partly

because of World War II. They said, hey you're fighting against uh the racial theory of Hitler, what about the racial theory that undergirds uh, the colonial policies in Africa of those nations, uh which are the colonial powers in Africa. And then they stepped up their campaign to gain political independence. But uh, black Americans then looked over and saw a new image of Africa. Up to that point, black Americans had the same image of Africa that white Americans had; and that was the Hollywood image, you know, Tarzan. I'm sure you're familiar with that image. When we thought of Africa we thought of a few half naked black savages dancing around a boiling pot with a missionary in it. [laughs] I remember when I was uh, a small boy uh growing up in Texas; I would go to the movie and every Saturday afternoon, the matinee and there was a half hour serial on Tarzan and we would sit there, front row center, balcony of course, uh, chewing peanuts and uh, watching Tarzan as he would swing through the trees by the vines you know [Farmer makes the Tarzan call] and uh, then [laughs] we'd see the missionary in the pot as the heat built up underneath and the sweat was dripping from his brow and he was scanning the forest as we were too, looking for Tarzan's inevitable and timely arrival and coming through the trees, they would show the Africans, uh, dancing around the pot to the tom-tom beat [Farmer imitates the tom-tom beat] and uh, uh, would flash a close up of the face of one of the Africans on the screen all painted and fierce. Then I'd elbow my buddy and say 'Irving, that's you' [laughter]. I don't have to tell you what Irving's reaction was 'no man, that's not me, uhm I'm no African. Don't call me an African. I'm an American'. Well Irving was rejecting Africa and uh, in a sense, rejecting self, and that was true of then 10, 13 million black Irvings, um, a around the country. So that was the image that we had of Africa. We knew nothing of an African past; that is recent knowledge; in fact it was only around the turn of the century of this century, that uh, um, archaeologists began uncovering the ruins of ancient cities in uh, central and eastern Africa.

I've seen the ruins by the way, uh the ruins of cities of great beauty and they compare their magnificence with the ruins of Ancient Rome and Greece. When they first, uh, uncovered these ruins, the scholars had predictable reaction. They said 'why gosh, the Romans must have come further south then we thought' [laughter]. But, uh, anthropologists um began examining the ruins and looked in the tombs and examined the skeletal remains and, uh, determined that the peoples were black, they were Africans, that the rulers were Africans. The soldiers, there were scholars, libraries, universities, judicial systems and these cities uh, fell from warfare from the north, but they, there were highly developed cultures and civilizations. Uh, that is comparatively new knowledge and I would refer you to one book, uh by an Englishman, uh Lost Cities of Africa by Basil Davidson, which brings together some of that uh research that has been done. Well black Americans became more familiar with these developments, said 'hey, I have a past; it is not true, it is a lie that I don't have a past and therefore have no future. If I have a past, then I have a future'. And uh, greater pride began developing. And blacks looked to Africa after the war, as in the fifties, new nations began emerging, and the early 60s and so a prouder image they saw blacks leading the nations, speaking uh eloquently on television with um, polished, uh British accents or French and representatives speaking in the United Nations; said, 'hey, he's somebody, then I am somebody too'. So, it was a combination of these reasons that led blacks to struggle more to gain equality in this country at the time they did. Much had gone before, even the nonviolent movement, which uh, became a catch word in the 60s was not new to that decade. The sit-ins of which you are familiar from your readings did not begin February first 1960 with the Southern student sit-in movement. There had indeed been sit-ins for civil rights in this country in the early 1940s. There had been stand ins, wait-ins. You may not be aware that in those years, segregation in places of public accommodation was not a southern phenomenon but

it was a national phenomenon, existing throughout the country. Restaurants, theaters, hotels in northern cities, segregated, excluded blacks. Swimming pools and public beaches similarly excluded or segregated blacks. The difference between the north and the south in those years was uh, that the pattern was spotty in the north, while it was consistent in the south. In let us say Chicago, in 1941, when we began our efforts to develop a nonviolent movement, frequently one would see a black, walk by a restaurant on a street and slow his or her pace passing the restaurant and look in and continue walking and maybe at the end of the glass window turn around and walk back, looking again and maybe go on, looking obviously for another black person, to see if there were blacks eating there. If there were, then this black might go in and order a meal, and eat. It was the uncertainty, the indecision, the not knowing in the northern cities then where one could go and could not go. In the south, there was no question, no doubt. Couldn't go any place, except in a black owned restaurant, in the black part of the city, on the other side of the tracks. So that was the difference. Well, there were some people, young people, people your age, college students, white and black and largely white who wanted to change this with non-violent methods. I was one of those; I was a pacifist then, uh refusing to participate in war. First I believed war to be immoral because it was killing and I didn't want to kill. I'm no longer a pacifist by the way; I think that some wars are justified. But then I believed that uh no killing was justified. A second reason for not wanting to participate in war, for refusing to participate in war was that, uh, I didn't think that I could fight against Hitler's racial theory in a segregated army. And thus, I was a pacifist. My draft board chose to defer me on theological grounds since I had uh studied for the ministry. Well, it was not enough for me and for my conscience, just to refuse to fight in the armed forces. I wanted to find nonviolent alternatives to violence in the resolution of social conflict situations, especially racial conflict because that was my big interest; that had been my

life. Having grown up in the Deep South that was what motivated me more than anything else. [announcer voice: this lecture will continue in the next program]. [music, static]