

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: There were some people, young people, people your age, college students, white and black, and largely white, who wanted to change this with nonviolent methods. I was one of those, I was a pacifist then, uh, refusing to participate in war. First I believed that 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. The second reason for not wanting to participate in war, or for refusing to participate in war was that 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 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. Well this search, this quest for nonviolent alternatives to violence led me, quite naturally to a study of Gandhi, the little brown man of India with his loincloth. I read all that I could find about Gandhi and by Gandhi. I became acquainted with a disciple of the Mahatmas named Krishnalal Shridharani, a man who had been with Gandhi on his famous march to the sea and the salt strike in India as Gandhi was leading the millions of Indians in uh, the battle for independence from the British Empire. Shridharani was then at Columbia University in New York, working on his PhD in sociology and his dissertation was shortly published uh, in a book entitled War Without Violence and it was an analysis and outline of Gandhi's program in India. Well this book became our Bible, almost. We read it and reread it. How did Gandhi do it in India? We knew of course there were many many differences between the Indian scene and the American scene, just as there are today many differences between the scene in South Africa and the scene that we confronted here in the United States in the 60s. In India, the Indians were a huge majority and the British were a tiny minority and nonviolence was a rather basic part of the Hindu culture and here nonviolence is not a basic part of the national culture, rather the violence is much more basic, uhm there were many other differences too. But we felt that the, the tactics, the techniques used by Gandhi could somehow be adapted and applied to the American scene and that's what we set out to do. I wrote, uh, two memos and they were circulated and debated, discussed and finally a pilot project was set up in one city, Chicago. This pilot project, an interracial organization made up chiefly of students, students at the University of Chicago, undergraduate and graduate students, largely

white, some blacks, using techniques, Gandhian techniques of nonviolence including civil disobedience where necessary, noncooperation with injustice, willingness to go to jail and conscience dictated, following also some of the writings of Henry David Thoreau, the American writer who said in one of his famous essays 'most of all, I must see to it that I do not lend myself to the evil which I condemn'. And that we read over and over again and absorbed. So the first group was set up in Chicago and we had our first sit-in in April I think it was of 1942, in the city of Chicago. Sit-in, why a sit-in? and how did we come upon the idea of a sit-in. Gandhi didn't have sit-ins, they, as far as I know they were not necessary in his situation. Well we took the idea of a sit-in, first we called it a sit down, taking it from the history of labor, the labor movement in this country in the 30s when um, uh, workers in the Ford River Rouge plant, when the CIO, I started to say CIA [laugh], the CIO was being organized, Congress of Industrial Organizations, uh, during one strike the workers had a sit-down and took over the factory, a sit down strike. I knew I was going to spill the water, and I did. So we borrowed that technique partly from labor and the nonviolent aspects of it came from Gandhi. Um, we discovered, uh the policy of discrimination in a small restaurant in Chicago in the vicinity of the University of Chicago. If anyone is familiar with the terrain there, it was located at 47th street and Kimbark Avenues, in what is now called uh, um, what was then called and is now called the Hyde Park Kenwood um, section of Chicago. It was a small place, called the Jack Spratt Coffee Shop. We discovered the policy there accidentally, a young white fellow who was a graduate student in English at the University and was a friend of mine, and I went walking along the street chatting. His name was Jimmy Robinson. Uh, Robinson said well, to me uh Jim, uh let's stop in here at Jack Spratt and get a cup of coffee and I said fine. It hadn't occurred to us that there might be a problem because uh, very few of the places in the vicinity of the University of Chicago discriminated. Though,

downtown in the loop there were quite a few that did and on the west side Chicago there were many that did. As I said earlier, in the northern cities you just didn't know where you could go. In Washington, D.C. you generally did know, for example, in those years the only two places in Washington outside of the ghetto, which was comparatively small then, the black ghetto, the only two places were the Senate Office Building uh, dining room, and Union Station, the railroad station restaurant. Those were the only places blacks would be served. But um, uh, we went into Jack Spratt. We weren't looking for trouble we were looking for coffee and walked in, sat down at the counter; it was a place seating about 40 and continued chatting, kept up the conversation. The manager walked over to me and said 'we can't serve you, you have to get out of here', and I looked up with genuine surprise and said 'why not?' He said 'we just can't serve you, get out of here'. I said uh, 'I suppose you realize you are violating the state law'. Illinois, like uh many of the northern states, had a state civil rights law, a law that was seldom used and most people weren't aware of its existence. It uh, was on the shelves gathering dust, one of those laws, uh, adopted during Reconstruction days, but it existed nonetheless. The manager pondered that one. Did he have a suit against him, or what did it mean? And he said, 'well what do you want?' Robinson ordered coffee; I ordered coffee and donuts. The ba, man said well the donuts'll be a dollar a piece. I said that's rather steep for donuts dontcha think. Well that's my price to you he said. Robinson said I know better, I've gotten donuts here two for a nickel, if you can believe it, two for a nickel, you could get something then. Well, we were served the donuts and the coffee, and I ate my coffee, drank uh drank my coffee [laughs] and ate my donuts. Jimmy ate his, drank his coffee and uh, I paid the bill with a five dollar bill and the man gave us the correct change, charging a nickel for the donuts instead of a dollar a piece. Uh, Jimmy and I discussed it and decided we owed it to this gentleman's religion to return to his place of business sometime. A

few days later we went back in in a party of six, three white and three black and uh, sat down, ordered. We were belatedly served, we uh, paid the bill leaving the money on the counter near the cash register with the checks, the individual checks. When we walked out, the manager raked the money off the counter and rushed to the door behind us, hurled the money out into the street screaming 'Take your money and get out, we don't want it!'. This was Chicago, not Chattanooga, 1942, spring.[quality gets really bad 11:20] We left the money there, lying on the streets and sidewalk, coins were rolling and wobbling and plopping and dollar bills were fluttering. Then we went into a meeting to discuss what we were gonna do about Jack Spratt; obviously we were gonna do something. After all, we had this fledgling CORE group and it was not our nature to leave the problem unsolved without an attempt to solve it. So what are we going to do. One of the black members of the group said 'I got a great idea. Let's pass out leaflets in the Black Belt of Chicago saying Jack Spratt serves blacks free of charge!' [laughs]. The humor uh caused us to laugh and then we got back to business. Uh, we read Gandhi, we read Shridharani, that is because he spoke more about violence. The next step was investi was negotiation; we had investigated, negotiation. Try to negotiate. I called the manager, tried to set up uh, negotiation session, immediately [slams hand on desk]. I called him again he say naw. I wrote him a letter, asking for a reply in a week, to set up a date for a negotiation, he never replied. We held another meeting and decided we would have the sit-in and it was organized well; we had about 26 people, place seats about 40, we figured that would just about fill up the place, shortly after the dinner hour started and uh, every member of the group pledged himself or herself to the discipline, the core discipline of nonviolence; to be peaceful, quiet, orderly, not to talk loud, not to use profanity, try not to become angry if any of the participants found himself or herself uh losing control of temper. Such person or persons were then obliged to check with the

individual in charge of the project and then withdraw from the project. But otherwise, people were to maintain the discipline. We entered in groups of two, or three, or four, or individually. And occupied available seats at the counter and booths and sat for service. There was a waiter in charge who obviously had been briefed by the general manager. And she looked the situation over for a while then she had one white person who was in the group but she entirely was not sure this person was part of our group, had this person served and that uh, second white person sitting at the counter served. The first white person was served and passed his dinner to the black person seated next to him. The black person proceeded to eat, only person I knew who was eating, a person or who. The other white person had been served, a woman, merely sat with her food in front of her. The manager said well, why don't you eat and leave, you've gotten your food. She said, why, madam I really don't think it would be polite for me to begin eating my food before my friend also has been served. Uh, other patrons interest was attracted they knew something was going on, were not sure what it was. So people in other booths began asking uh, neighbors in the booth, who were members of our group, uh, what is this, what's happening, what's going on. It was explained to them, said let us talk it over for a while among ourselves and we'll get back to you. We talked it over and said, look we agreed with you, we're not going to eat anymore of our food until every member of your group has been served. So they sat with us. You see, in the University of Chicago area most of their patrons were uh, folk, middle class folk, deans, professors, faculty members, staff at the university or some students. But still, they had a policy of not serving blacks. Nobody was leaving now, the only person eating was this one black, who had been there slowly eating his food. Uh, would be patrons had come into the restaurant, no seats available, wait for a couple of minutes, no one leaving and apparently, no one eating, or not very fast, so up and leave. The lady in charge then announced for everyone to hear,

that uh, the colored people in the group were gonna go into the basement and she would have them served there on the grounds that we reserve the right to seat our patrons. I then told her that we were quite comfortable where we were. A minute later she said, well now the colored people will have to occupy the two rear booths, pray they will be hidden from view, and I reckon certain. I repeated we were quite comfortable where we were. She said, I'll call the police. I agreed that that was probably the thing for her to do under the circumstances, so she did. Well now, uh, here's another difference between this uh northern city, Chicago and these southern cities. I had called the police in advance and had told them I was following Gandhi again. You notify the authorities what you're gonna do and how you're gonna do it and when you're gonna do it. You open an above board and everything. And we were trying to be strict Gandhians at this point in the movement, in the attempt to develop a movement 1942. In fact I, when I spoke to the sergeant or lieutenant, I even read him a copy of the statement of the state's civil rights law and it seems he was not familiar with it. Uh, he assured me that if, uh, we did what we said we were gonna do in the way we said we were gonna do it, he didn't see any way that they could think of any reason that they could, they would throw us out. So uh, she called the police and two of Chicago's finest came walking in two minutes later, looked around, said to her, uh why'd you call us for lady, um I don't see anybody disturbing the peace here, what do you want us to do?' [she] said we want you to throw these people out of course! Said 'throw them out? On what grounds?! We got no authority to throw them out of here'. She said well now 'we want you to throw them out on the grounds that we reserve the right to seat our patrons and to serve some of them in the basement. The police man didn't know, he went to the phone booth and I presume he called headquarters for instructions. He came out smiling, said no lady, there's nothing in the law that allows us to do that, you must either serve them or solve the problem yourself. Now under

the law, the police were supposed to see that we were served or arrest the lady but they did not choose to do that, they would not go that far. The cops left and on the way out one of the cops winked at me. We had to sit there until closing time and then leave, go back the next day and pay our respects and the following day and so on. Counting up business. After we had been there two hours and forty five minutes, she the woman in charge, gave the order to serve everyone who was there and of course I tasted my food rather cautiously, and it seemed alright, ate it, paid the bill the bills were not, the money was not thrown out this time being part of something remarkable of course. Uh, I then wrote a letter to the management of Jack Spratt thanking them for their service and congratulating them on their change in policy. Uh, a week later we sent, uh four people in as a test group two white and black, they were served no difficulty. A week later, four blacks went in alone, they were served, no difficulty. Many other test groups went in and there was no problem. Well that was one of the completely successful sit-ins. There were other CORE groups which we set up in the next year in cities throughout the north, uh New York, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Detroit, Los Angeles, San Francisco, you name it. There, in Philadelphia there was a CORE chapter and they were sitting in restaurants, standing in in hotel desks, uh waiting in in public beaches and public swimming pools and uh, winning wars from the lost, in fact it never lost all because they were persistent and kept at it until they won. Some of the files were remained opened for months but they eventually won. We had some great uh, difficulty in downtown restaurants in Chicago, one in particular, Soltner's in the loop, a place, a huge place that seated about 500 people and one occasion it had uh, tray full of hot food served over our heads. Uh, another occasion there we were served garbage sandwiches and the black bus boys informed us of it and the black bus boys all quit their jobs and then they hired black bus girls. And uh, Mr. Soltner, the owner, himself kicked one of the members of our group in the



shin, a white fellow he kicked, not a black one. And uh, we got served every time we went in and had a sit in but only after great difficulty every time we went in we knew we were going to have to go through the same rigmarole before we got served. Well soon it finally ran out of business. Now the hard way really was how the patent warrant was issued. Probably pretty much like the man up in Marshall, Virginia, I'm sure you read about that last year, who had been arrested and found guilty and fined for losing service to blacks and paid the fine, went back and did the same thing, again and again. So there are such individuals but how the large group was successful. Now we were winning these victories nobody knew about because no one knew anything about non violence. No one heard of us. We were not on the tube, there was no tube then. There was no television. If we were lucky, there would be a small paragraph on the back page of a local paper let us say in the Chicago Tribune saying that yesterday, a half dozen nuts or crackpots sat in at this restaurant for two hours or three hours or til they were served or thrown out whichever came first. And if I those years talked to a media why don't I talk about nonviolence, we were developing a non violent movement. They'd look at me strangely and say 'you know, nonviolent, you mean somebody hit you?' You're not gonna hit him back, what are you type of a nut or something. Well nonviolence was not yet a household phrase, it did not become a household phrase until much later. Until those factors of which we spoke earlier converged, World War II, the Supreme Court's decision, the emergence of the new nations of Africa, and uh, and Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on the city bus at Montgomery and a brilliant, eloquent young black Baptist preacher named Martin Luther King, Jr. was leader of a boycott of the city buses and then a movement was formed and spread its wings and took to the skies. [music, static]