

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: When my plane landed in New Orleans after taxiing to the gate, the pilot spoke over the public address system and asked that all deplaning passengers for New Orleans would please de-plane at that time except for James Farmer and he asked that uh, James Farmer remain seated. Um, I obeyed; the other passengers left the plane. Um, a very large gentleman and very round, fat came aboard the plane and as he approached me he showed me his credentials, his identification. He was a representative of the uh, State Police of Louisiana, a captain. This you will recall from a previous class session was the same state police organization which a year earlier had been involved in an incident in which I was almost lynched. On that occasion, the

members of the state police organization had their name plates and badge numbers taped over but this time their mission was different. He showed me his credentials and identification, a Captain in the Louisiana State Police. Said, Mr. Farmer? Yes. And he gave me his name and said our governor has received a call from Washington, informing him that your life would be in danger while you're in our state. Our governor called my boss, his boss, a Colonel Burbank, head of the State Police and ordered him to provide protection for me. Colonel Burbank, ordered this, uh, Captain to protect my life. The captain then made a gesture out the window of the plane and four plainclothes Lieutenants entered the plane. He introduced them as Lieutenants of the State Police and told me that he was assigning them as my personal bodyguards while I was in the state. They were to remain with me at all times, not letting me out of their sight except while I was sleeping and then they were to cover every means of uh, ingress and egress for my room, for my bedroom. He said, you can trust them, they are experienced and well trained pros and pistol marksmen and well armed with uh, service revolvers and hip holsters and small firearms, .22s strapped to their ankles. And uh, they have two cars and you will ride with uh, two of them and one of those cars going from New Orleans to Bogalusa and there will be a helicopter overhead as you proceed to Bogalusa. The helicopter will be manned by State Police, armed with high powered rifles. The helicopter will search the roads ahead and the woods on the sides of the highway for possible attempts at ambush. Uh, the automobiles in which the uh, lieutenants and you will be riding will be well armed with rifles and shotguns. He said, uh, shall we now proceed into the terminal. We did and as we walked from the jet plane to the, it was a jet prop I think, to the terminal, the five of them surrounded me and their eyes were ever on the alert, uh, looking for possible snipers. We walked into the terminal. Uh, seated on a bench nearby were three or four black men, whom I recognized as uh, being citizens of uh Bogalusa. They caught my eye

and said, Jim, come here. I excused myself from the State Police and uh, walked over to them. They said Jim, we don't, don't trust those guys; we don't know which way they would point their guns. So we'd feel much safer if you rode to Bogalusa in our car with us. I asked him to let me, um, try to clear that with the State Police. So I went back to the State Police and um, told them that uh my friends from Bogalusa would like very much for me to ride in their car, uh, to Bogalusa. The uh, Captain said uh, fine, that's perfectly alright, so long as uh your friend's car with uh, you in it will be in the middle and we will have the lead car and the end car and that way we will be able to keep you covered and that's the way we proceeded from New Orleans to Bogalusa. The lead car with two of the state police lieutenants in it was traveling at a good rate of speed and whenever it would pass by a, a road side inn where men gathered to drink and to talk and to swap jokes and tales, that car, the driver of that car would floor his accelerator; the car would take off at high speed, probably fearing uh an attempt at an ambush and we had difficulty keeping up with them. It was flying and the helicopter was chopping around overhead. When we got to Bogalusa, the um, state police, my bodyguards, would not allow me to go into the home where I was going to be staying overnight though it was uh, the home of um, uh, one of my black friends there, the President of the Deacons for Defense in Justice, the organization which these three men who had met me at the airport, three black men, were members. It, that was a black self-defense organization which had been organized in Bogalusa by blacks to um, protect their homes from Klan attacks. The Klan made it a practice periodically to drive through the black community in that town uh, shooting willy nilly into the homes of black families, for intimidation purposes obviously. Well the black men, all of whom were Deacons in their churches, hence the name of the organization, Deacons for Defense in Justice, decided they would not put up with that any longer, so they formed this organization, the purpose of which

was to uh, return the fire when the Klan went on its night riding episodes. And uh the Klan did uh, night ride once after the Deacons were organized; rode down the street uh, firing into the homes of blacks and the Deacons got their guns and returned the fire. The Klan sped away and did not return to night ride anymore. Well I was to stay in the home of the President of the Deacons in Bogalusa, Deacons for Defense in Justice but uh the uh state police would not let me enter that home until two of them went in there with drawn revolvers and searched every place that a possible gunman could hide and I said, but these are my friends. They said yes, but you don't know who might have been bought off. We cannot take any chances; said the governor is holding us strictly responsible for your safety. Well they went in the home and searched uh, under the beds, in the closets, in the bathroom, under the couches, behind the couches, behind the drapes, every place. Then allowed me to enter, and I went to my bedroom. Two of the state police lieutenants sat all night in the living room, in one corner with their guns, while the other two sat outside in an automobile so positioned that they could watch the window to my bedroom as well as the door to the uh house. Incidentally, two of the Deacons for Defense in Justice also sat in that living room, with their guns. They didn't trust the uh, state police. So here were two police and two deacons eyeing each other. Before morning, they were fraternizing however and uh, uh, comparing uh, guns and admiring each other's hardware. But um, in the morning, um, we uh rode to the church and the ride was uh, virtually uneventful; a pickup truck tried to intercept uh, the vehicle in which I was riding and one of the uh state police cars unmarked of course intercepted the pickup truck and forced it into a ditch, arrested the driver who turned out to be a local leader of the Ku Klux Klan. He was taken to jail and the rest of that trip was uneventful. The next trip a week later to Bogalusa uh was almost the same in its beginning. The captain met me in the plane, introduced me to four lieutenants, two of whom were the same as before. The

other two were different. They were somewhat smaller in stature but had huge ham like hands and he introduced them as being black belt holders in karate. Why karate I inquired, and he said uh, when you announced that you were going to lead a march in Bogalusa, the Klan when on the air and announced they were going to have a march, same time, same day also in Bogalusa so it appears possible that the train might meet and if there is physical contact, I think you will agree that uh, karate experts would be handy. So we uh, proceeded the same way to Bogalusa with uh, the Deacons car in the middle and the state police car in front and behind speeding up as we passed by roadside inns, helicopter overhead. The next morning I got a call from uh Colonel Burbank himself who was the head of the state police of Louisiana, informing me that he had come into town to take personal charge of that operation because it appeared that it might be touch and go. He said and it was his considered professional judgment that it would be very dangerous for me to be in that march and possibly suicide. Well I told him that I had promised the local people that I would be in the march, so I would be there in the front row. That's your final decision, he asked. I said yes. Alright, we'll take all the precautions we possibly can and he hung up. I then received a call from one of the Deacons, informing me that one of their members had overheard two whites talking down town and one of them had said to the other, "this is D-Day today. Today that nigger Farmer dies. We got a trap set for him downtown when his march gets down there, we spring it and there is just no way he can escape and by sundown today that nigger's gonna be dead and in hell." Well the Deacon said, Jim if you decide not to be in that march, we will understand. I assured him I would be in the march as I had planned and had promised. Alright uh, we'll get some of our guys as close to every intersection as the troopers will allow us to get, he said, and he hung up. A short while later, Colonel Burbank, head of the state police, came by the house where I was staying, said uh, you still gonna be in the march. The

answer was affirmative. Well I just want to report on the steps that we've taken; that I have ordered seventy five additional troopers into this town and um, I have been informed, I have learned that segregationists were planning to come into the town from Mississippi across the state border and others up from New Orleans. So we have set up roadblocks and nobody will get into this town today who cannot prove that he or she lives here. Said we have uh, cleared out downtown as much as we can and we're stationing state police on rooftops and in key positions in windows downtown armed with high powered rifles. During your march there will be two helicopters overhead manned by state police similarly armed, high powered rifles and powerful sound systems. If they observe any unauthorized personnel proceeding toward your line of march, said persons will be ordered to retreat, to halt or to disperse, whichever seems appropriate and if they disobey, the state police in the helicopters will be prepared to shoot. Immediately in front of your line of march will be an automobile, in the front seat of which will be two of your personal bodyguards, two of the lieutenants. If any shooting begins, I urge you to drop to the ground and try to crawl to the back seat of that car. When you get there the back door will swing open and you get in and that car will take off at high speed. Then immediately behind you in your line of march will be your other two bodyguards, the two karate men, flanking your line of march, that is, on both sides will be state police, no more than eight feet apart armed with rifles, shotguns and submachine guns. He said, I can't think of anything that we've overlooked. Good day and good luck; have a good march. We shook hands and he left. Well normally we sang during our marches, 'We Shall Overcome' or 'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around' or some other movement song. But this time, frankly, we were all too scared to sing. We decided to have a silent march and [laughs] it was like a military operation. We got to the downtown area and I glanced up; I could hear the helicopters chopping around overhead. Glanced up and saw

state police on uh rooftops with their rifles and at windows in buildings. Beside us were state police, armed as previously indicated, the car moving slowly in front of us, the two karate men behind me, in the line of march and we marched silently. Uh, any second I expected to hear the crack of a rifle; it was that tense. But then it occurred to me that if I heard the crack of a rifle, it meant that they had missed, [laughs] because I would have been the target and a bullet travels faster than sound. Several times in the downtown area we would see a small band of young men, young white men, leather jacket, ducktail haircut; fellows standing around, but they looked scared too, for all this military show. The uh, troopers seemed rather tense. Um, we passed through town and started through residential areas and as we um, walked along, there were some young fellas leaning against a car, or half sitting on the fender or hood of the car and as I came parallel to them, one of the troopers yelled 'Hey look out! Get him!' and one of the troopers close to one of these fellas pounced on one of the young men and took out of his hands a, a large uh, metal pipe with a big boat on the end of it which he had just drawn out of his jacket. I don't know how they identified him or or the fact that he had this thing in his hand, or saw it coming out of his jacket maybe it was the motion of his hand or possibly they had studied photographs of people to look for as troublemakers or potential troublemakers. But at any rate, they pounced on him, took this weapon away from him and arrested him. He was a leader of the Klan. Block later, another tr, trooper shouted, 'hey, get him!' and they jumped on another fellow and took out of his hand a revolver, a pearl handled revolver as he pulled it from his jacket. They took that away from him and arrested him and then some fool set off a firecracker. I thought it was a shot and I guess everybody else did. The uh, troopers who were flanking the line of march all whirled, crouched and pointed their guns in the direction of the sound and froze. I was quickly debating with myself trying to decide whether to drop to the ground and try to get to the back seat of that

car. I decided against it because I thought that uh, some persons in my line, some of the marchers might panic and run. Then the Deacons who were somewhere nearby, not being professionals but amateurs might open fire and then all hell would break loose. So I just stood there in the line, just stood there as if frozen. I don't know how long, seconds or minutes until one of the officers of the uh, state police said over um, bullhorn, apparently it was a firecracker; proceed with the march and we went on with the march and arrived back at the church and then to our houses. Shwwoo, and breathed a sigh of relief that we had gotten back. Um, the ride back to New Orleans was a little scary. The trooper lead car was going particularly fast and as we proceeded across the causeway, that's that long bridge 23 miles, 26 miles something like that across Lake Pontchartrain uh, which you have to go across before you get to New Orleans. It was uh, wet, rainy but we were going fast and as we rounded a curve there was a roadblock and the lead car, troopers car uh slammed on its brakes and when into a little skid but they maneuvered it deftly. I looked behind and the other car had similarly uh, locked its brakes and maneuvered so that it had a clear view of what was ahead. Both cars, the front doors were open before their cars stopped moving and the troopers were out in the road, .38s in hand, using the doors as a shield. Um, turned out that the roadblock was a state police roadblock [laughs] but there'd been a breakdown in communication and they uh, had not informed my state police that there was going to be the roadblock there. Well at New Orleans we got on the plane and the plane taxied down the runway, the pilot then announced that we were going back to the gate and all passengers would have to leave the plane immediately and luggage would be taken off and we must identify our luggage and it'd be searched in the presence of airline employees because he had gotten a call that there was a bomb aboard the plane. Our luggage was searched and the plane was searched and no bomb was found. Several hours later, we reboarded that is most of us reboarded, some chose not



to reboard and flew to New York. Well I um, do think that had the FBI not infiltrated the Ku Klux Klan in uh, Bogalusa that I would have died on one of those two visits so I must give them credit for that um, and perhaps that uh, shows that they were not all bad; that they served um, some useful purpose indeed and I am sure that my life was not the only one that was saved by security forces in this country and intelligence forces in this country. Yet, I went on criticizing of course. I felt that is our duty to uh, criticize when we thought um, criticism was due, to call the shots as we saw and uh, let the chips fall where they may. We were critical of the President, even good Presidents, like Kennedy, that was the way we hoped to make them better and sometimes it succeeded. We were able to pull them to, to prod them into more positive action on behalf of justice and truth, as we saw the truth. That was the role that uh we played, particularly CORE and SNCC in those years of the Civil Rights Movement. Now in retrospect looking back I think it was a good and a valid role, uh, during those years I got the reputation of being a militant. Can you look at me now and think that I was once considered a militant? [music, static]