

SNCC 40th Anniversary Conference  
April 2000  
Transcript Video Recording #2

Speaker 1 (00:00:00):

Underground world of anti segregation forces in the south programming and human relations involved creating illegal meetings of black and white students to engage in intellectual programming programs, deconstructing race, and racial myths, and to share from the heart forging bonds that transcended racial barriers. Our project was designed specifically to create small integrated race relations workshops for students across the Southeast, I was called a campus traveler. I flew around in little one prop puddle jumpers to black and white campuses. Often in remote locations on white campus, the student Christian association, our white staff person would secretly organize a small meeting of students on black campuses. I was often asked to speak publicly to the student body and publicly welcomed as a white visitor, a very embarrassing deference in both instances, our recruited students to our integrated workshops S NS work overlapped with these workshops as many local campus leaders who attended were also local movement leaders, human relations projects continued parallel to the movement or as an integral part of it, depending on your perspective, right on through this work was undermining and defeating segregation on the personal level as bringing down the legal barriers would defeat it politically.

Speaker 1 (00:01:44):

I remember Ella beginning our meetings when I got back from a trip by saying, let's see now, what are we doing here? She really meant it in all the areas in which I saw Ella operate. She always said just what she meant. It was as though she'd thought of everything and she'd show her thoughts polished and smooth from all her years of mulling them over. She never pulled punches. And after accurately nailing someone's fours should chuckle. Although capable of righteous indignation Ella usually found humanity humorous, and her approach to people was always fresh. She was interested in everyone and she always asked where they were from. They were from, and about their family. She was deeply and consciously rooted in her family. Ella was politically above all pragmatic. She seemed to know that however much we think and talk. And however important that is it is action that makes social change happen.

Speaker 1 (00:02:51):

She was always directed to our action, thoughtful action. Her notion of the need to raise up new leaders to rotate leaders, for example, was pragmatic based on years of experience of seeing folks join the leaders club. When they became leaders, leaving their constituents behind her broad vision, saves Nick from numerous potential, splits her both and replacing the tendency toward either or personally. Ella was perhaps the most secure, rooted and self knowledgeable woman I've known. She was an elegant woman, elegant and homey and warm. Her diction was elegant and her mind, I never saw her flustered or without complete plum and self-possession and think of Ella. Now, when I comb my hair high above my face as sheeted hers, a flattering style for an older woman, this is when it gets hard to talk loud. Um, I think of her when I hold my chin high she's in me this way, a role model for the age I have achieved until I reached this age. I didn't know how deeply I had incorporated her into my myself when things were rough for me later after the movement,

Speaker 1 (00:04:22):

It was Ella to whom I turned with late night phone calls. And she was always right there for me. I really loved her. It was a great privilege to have worked with her so closely Ella's presence defines SNCC in many ways. One was the value assigned to women in SNCC. She was a woman and invaluable in many ways. So that sense of the value of women translated into latitude for all

of us. Another was the value given to hard work at all levels. Ella was a behind the scenes supportive person and she was invaluable. So even though I was white and chose to work in supportive capacities, I considered race appropriate. I was valued for my hard work and third Ella's views on leadership and the need for mass organizing empowered us all, as well as those, we organized by shining the light on ordinary people, both in communities and in the ranks of the organization.

Speaker 1 (00:05:21):

This enabled us to give our best. Martha Norman asked me in asking me to speak here, acknowledged all this about Ella's role and suggested I talk about what I was able to do in SNCC as exemplary of these points. So I'll do that briefly. In closing, I worked in SNCC in many areas at many levels, always doing both the head work and the hands on work in cooperation with others. I was able to see what was needed, initiate and move on training others to take over what I started. That was what I could do. That was what I had to offer. And by doing that, doing what I could do best both I and the organization profited SNCC was smart. That way. I came to SNCC as an activist at the university of Texas, a participant in sit-ins picketing theater. Stand-ins there in the spring of 1960.

Speaker 1 (00:06:17):

I worked as a campus affiliate over that year before moving to Atlanta in 1961 to work for Ella while in Atlanta, went on the Albany freedom ride and took minutes at SN staff meetings, as well as speaking about SN work nationally, I was in Northern contact and fundraiser and publicist for far to the next year, and then came on staff in early 63 in Atlanta as the first Northern coordinator, working for Jim foreman, who led the way I set up that program, concentrating on campuses and UN establishing networks of information and support in the fall of 63, I went to Mississippi to help establish a literacy project and became part of the freedom votes in the building of the MF DP. I was part of the organizing for freedom summer, specifically charged with researching training and coordinating statewide, char the challenge of the seating of the Mississippi Lilly whites at the 64 democratic national convention. After the summer, I was part of the paper of the writing of a paper instinct. I was part of SNS discussions about structure and future direction

Speaker 1 (00:07:27):

And initiated a photo project designed to train young black Mississippis, to be photographers that should be writing of paper, a paper in SNCC about women and the women winner of 64 65. I began to shift back to our white organizing, moving to Chicago in the spring, still a SNCC staff now on loan to SDS to organize white Appalachian welfare mothers, a memorandum I wrote largely out of that experience in Chicago and mailed with Mary King to young women on the left, formed the basis for much of the early organizing of the women's movement in the broader white world. So in this way, the women's movement traces back to Ella baker. She is behind it as she was always behind the scenes. Ella provided us with that example. She was always back there willing to give with no expectation of reward or praise that willingness in the SNCC. As I knew it was the primary quality we shared our very core. I have always loved us for that.

Speaker 2 (00:08:57):

Okay, good morning. Good morning. Hello. Thank you. Okay. Let me ask you something. How many people had ever heard now this doesn't go for the scholars and the adults and all this stuff. How many young people here had ever heard of SNCC or Ms. Baker before this conference happened? Aha. This is a knowledgeable group. You felt well, you don't count. That's right. <laugh> he's a scholar. He's a scholar. No, besides the scholars. Okay. Okay. Um, what, first of all, for those who have not seen now, this is Ms. Baker, right? The way we remember her, but there's another Ms. Baker who was a little younger than this, which is this Ms. Baker. Okay. Now this is the way a lot of us remembered her. Mostly now. What's interesting is that Ms.

Baker at that point was the age that I am now. And she really seemed rather old. Okay. But, um, what's, what's important about Ms.

Speaker 2 (00:09:52):

Baker, let me, let me start from the beginning. First of all, um, I'm gonna do, just do a quick intro, um, which is that I came down to work for SNCC, um, in 1963. Um, and then when I left SNCC, I worked for a number of African American organizations. Um, a bookstore that was started by a lot of old SNCC people in Washington, DC that became the largest black bookstore in the country, worked for the United church of Christ commission for racial justice, all of these, by the way, because of the skills that I had learned in SNCC. Um, then I went up to Boston and worked on the 14 hour series called eyes on the prize, which was, um, an academy award, no, uh, nominated, we didn't get it. Um, and lots of awards and, you know, historic 14 hour documentary PBS system series.

Speaker 2 (00:10:37):

Okay. But when I come into SNCC, I should say that SNCC SNCC formed me. It changed the way I saw myself. It changed the way I saw my world. It changed my entire worldview and it changed the direction of my life and the way that Casey and, and, uh, Connie and Brenda will and Muriel will, are you gonna talk? I don't know. Oh, no, you gotta talk. So this woman was the project director in Greenville, Mississippi, one of three project directors of women, project directors in, um, four cuz Selma, um, four in SNCC, but any event, hopefully she will talk. Um, but when I come in, it changes the whole way. I see everything. So who I am at that point is I'm coming out of Terrytown New York, which is, um, only 25 miles north of the city. I should take my Washington, excuse me.

Speaker 2 (00:11:24):

Um, 25 miles north of New York city. However new Yorkers consider us upstate because for new Yorkers, anything north of the Bronx is upstate, right, but we're only 25 miles north had a wonderful childhood. It was, it was um, Washington Irving, the author, Washington Irving's territory. So I went to Washington, Irving junior high school. I went to sleepy hollow high school. I went the, the, uh, football team was the headless horseman go horseman go. Okay. But where I grew up happy childhood that it was, there were no black people I saw with any economic or political power. And that is very important in terms of what draws me to SNCC. So I'm not coming out of communities like Brenda, where she sees African American leadership. I'm not seeing that entire town, but when I, so I go to Swarthmore college, esteemed Quaker college in Pennsylvania, right?

Speaker 2 (00:12:17):

Full scholarship, one of eight students, one of eight African American students in that freshman class, there had been one black senior, one female, one black sophomore, female, and then eight of us coming in the big push into Swarthmore, uh, four boys and four girls so that we would not have to date outside the community. Right. <laugh> so, so while I'm there though, there's an SDS camp, a chapter on campus and they're doing forays into Cambridge, Maryland on the Eastern shore of Maryland. And this is the first time I'm away from home. I figure, you know, who's gonna know I'll get on the bus, we'll see what's up. I get there. And I get, I find, first of all, that it is a, um, local organization run by among the community people. The main leader is a woman named Gloria Richardson who was a strong, I mean, I always remembered Gloria with these brogans.

Speaker 2 (00:13:08):

She always had jeans and a work shirt and could ju it was Ram rod straight, just an amazing woman. I had never seen anybody like that in my life before. Um, pop herb, who was the funeral director and her uncle, he was really supportive of the movement, the local, um, SNCC person in that though was Reggie Robinson. And so this is my first real connection with SN at that point.

And what I come into when I see SNCC is a primarily African American organization, um, with white staff members who have the politics that allows them to want to contribute to an organization that is black led. Basically I see young people who, um, are the age of many of you here, who at that point in their lives decided that they would lead what a friend of mine calls a purposeful life. They made that decision and it was a decision.

Speaker 2 (00:14:00):

Now what I come into though is not just a political organization. I come into a culture and others have talked about this culture. Um, it is very much a family. And so I didn't realize until reading, um, Joanne's book on Ms. Baker called Ella Baker, freedom bound, how much that culture was influenced by Ms. Baker. Now let me just say, Ms. Baker would not have known me from Eve truly. First of all, I was scared to death, everybody. I mean, everybody I met in SNCC knew more than I did. They were coming from local communities where there had been some historic continuity of resistance. Um, they're coming from Northern communities. I mean, Stokely's talking about cotton haggles, you know, I mean, there were people who, um, had come out of New York organizations where they had worked with BD Rustin, where there was a political consciousness north and south that I knew nothing about.

Speaker 2 (00:14:58):

I did not say a word in SNCC staff meetings the entire four years I was there. Okay. <laugh> now, however, what was wonderful about SNCC was that with Ms. Baker, <affirmative> with Ms. Baker, with foreman, you got a sense that they somehow knew the kind of things that you would contribute to. So when I come down, supposedly I'm with Reggie and we were coming back from, oh, for SN people. It was the marriage of Bill Hanson and Ruthie mm-hmm <affirmative>. Now I didn't know either of these people. Okay. But I get to Cincinnati where they're being, um, married. And for some reason, her bridesmaid didn't show up and I get poured into this skin type skin type little, and I become her bridesmaid. I had never seen her before in my life. Okay. On the way back. However, we come through Atlanta and foreman finds out that a I can type 90 words a minute.

Speaker 2 (00:15:49):

And B I knew shorthand. I never made it back to Cambridge. <laugh> I become his secretary in the Atlanta office now, um, I'm gonna do something cuz what's interesting is that when the way I came out of SNCC is so different from the way I went in. Again, I'm this little mousey lady never spoke. I grew and became more than I ever imagined. I could be because of the culture of SNCC. And it was a culture which continues so that all of us, whatever we're doing, we bring that culture into whatever the work environment is. And you all know this people say, oh, isn't that interesting that you, well, it's a SN way of doing that. You know? And Ms. Baker absolutely influenced that environment. Now I'm gonna, when, um, when Joanne, I don't know when I started when, um, Joanne Baker, Joanne Grant, who did, uh, Freedom Bad, um, was doing starting the book.

Speaker 2 (00:16:46):

She, she found in the, um, King archives, which is where a lot of the SNCC papers are. She found some notes that I had done of SNCC committee meetings. Now they're in shorthand. And so what she did is asked me if I would decipher this shorthand. And what's amazing to me is I had not realized how involved Ms. Baker could become, if she realized that there were some problems occurring otherwise. Absolutely. She would sit on the sideline. She would wait for you to get an answer. But if she thought that there was a problem, like what happens, you know, in 1960, in 1960 at the founding between, um, you know, are we gonna be direct action or are we gonna do voter registration? She would insert herself. So I'm looking at these, you know, I, I just Xerox these these minutes. Um, and I'm looking at what is an, uh, a staff meeting.

Speaker 2 (00:17:36):

And I see, she says something about, first of all, um, there's some problem with one of, with a local leader. And she says, Ms. Baker says what machinery was set up summer to help. So and so to prepare knowing she says that some people just don't have leadership ability, Ruby Darris, Robinson, who was larger than life. I mean, when I went into SNCC, Ruby Darris who had done 30 days, jail, no bail in a South Carolina prison, when, you know, South Carolina was not the best place to be at that point. And so she did it 30 days, jail do bail, which is one of the reasons that people say that she died so young and that she got the, um, the cancer that she got. But when I first thought about coming into SNCC people, penny patch, as a matter of fact, who was, um, at Swarthmore then said, um, look, if you wanna get into snake, you got to go by Ruby, Doris.

Speaker 2 (00:18:30):

And so I had to, you know, prepare an application and stuff. Okay. So Ruby says in response to Ms. Baker's query about, um, you know, what kind of machinery was set up to prepare this guy? Ruby says no attempt to develop him. And in fact we antagonized him instead, we threw lots of college graduates into this project and made decisions without him. She says, and then later on, um, they're talking about, uh, we're talking about some action within this local project. And Ms. Baker says sometimes because she's asking what kind of preparation have you done to prepare for what you're about to do? And, and, um, she says, sometimes we must, I'm going through the brief forms in <inaudible> must delay action one day in order to plan for it. Unless we have organization, we're simply going to dissipate the energy with little result comparative to the time and the trouble involved.

Speaker 2 (00:19:24):

She says, we also have to consider that working in this particular community is different from working in the rural south. Now what's interesting is that, of course, for those, you know, who know Ms. Baker is in 1940s, she is the field secretary for the NAACP, a lone woman, traveling Mississippi, rural Mississippi, Alabama, Southwest Georgia, um, Louisiana at a time organizing chapters in the 1940s at a time when you could be killed for having an NAACP card on you. So a lot of folks would hide it in their shoes, in the back of their closets. This is a woman who in S in 1957, um, is, is the organizer, um, helps the black ministers along with Dr. King to organize SCLC the Southern Christian leadership conference in 1957 and becomes its first temporary executive secretary temporary Y because a she's a woman and B she's not a minister and they don't play that.

Speaker 2 (00:20:21):

So, and then it's in this capacity though that in 1960, when the sit-ins jump off, she realizes there's all this energy going on. That the kind of stuff that she had thought would happen, maybe in the NAACP, maybe ans SCLC, but didn't because they were a little too rigid and they were adults. Maybe it would work with, with these young people. Snicks. So she calls all these folks together here to show a university in 1960, April 1st. Right? So when Connie talks about this organizing meetings, it was full of energy. It was all these people coming out as local leaders. Julian bond says he gets into a VW and, and with four other people and this little VW bug travels up from Atlanta, from the Atlanta student movement, um, how many folks were at cuz I know, um, Marshalls here too. And Matthew, how many folks were at that original 1960 staff meeting. Okay. Debbie Connie. Oh, tell me your name. Hey St. Thomas. Oh my God. <laugh> yes. Hello. <laugh> okay. And back then

Speaker 3 (00:21:18):

Virginia is stole

Speaker 2 (00:21:19):

Virginia's thorn. Okay. So these folks were at that meeting. I'm missing somebody. Oh no. Okay. Um, and so there's all this energy going on. And so, and what she says to these young people is don't associate with these, with these adults, not don't associate don't link yourself, do not

become a wing of these adult organizations, cuz she sees this hope, this new burgeoning hope, okay. This is the woman who is helping to guide us as we're going through. Um, so when she, when she's talking about this, she knows where she speaks and what was amazing to me now being the age that she was then is that she didn't talk more often cuz I get tired. You know, you get impatient when you get this age, just like, listen to me, I know what I'm talking about. She never did that. Um, she says that another point in the same meeting, she said, we must break through the pseudo sophistication of college students.

Speaker 2 (00:22:09):

Hello? Yes, indeed. And we can't do it over. Um oh and we can't do it with overall. She says, okay now, um, now and she said we the um, oh, okay. I won't go through that. Um, at one point she's also talking about the mailings because it's the minutia that's, that's what amazed me going through these minutes that there was a level at which miss, uh, Ms. Baker. And this comes out in the book too. She is paying attention to the teeniest tiniest little details. So at one point somebody says something about we're having a problem in the print shop in Atlanta, you know, we're not getting coverage full time. She says, well, is there any record of the mailings that you've done? And then she says, no, well, why not? And then she says, okay, we need a shipping clerk. And somebody else says, well, there are certain people who want to do the menial work, but we don't also, we're not clear about who can do what and what Ms.

Speaker 2 (00:22:59):

Baker says, well, perhaps a high school student could be the shipping clerk, a part-time job, but there must be an orderly fashion for planning, mailing orders. It is always about how do you, um, organize administratively. And, and so she's operating at all these different levels. At one point she says, um, pamphlets can be written at home. We don't plan enough. She says before acting, we must plan the pamphlets according to emphasis and the line that we're taking. And then she says, busyness, busyness doesn't necessarily mean productivity now. Yes. There's another point where she's where, and not that I'm gonna move on. Um, she's saying, um, this is another meeting and oh this is dark. How am I gonna read this? Um, oh, because the staff, the office was not, um, being opened as quickly as it should be in the national office at that point.

Speaker 2 (00:23:49):

And she said, um, in relationship to a rally that was being held, she said, someone needs to answer general, general information questions. We can no longer function on a free reeling basis. She says. And that at another point she says, um, give detail, give detailed thought to even the smallest things. Now let me just say, I didn't know that I was learning from her. I did not know that I was watching her. I don't remember these meetings, even though I took the notes from them. Um, but what happened was that it was almost like osmosis, that there was the kind of leadership training that she always emphasized throughout her entire career. And what it meant was that I'm sitting at one point in, um, I'm sitting at an eyes on the prize production meeting, right. And I'm saying stuff that I didn't even know. I knew about how we operated.

Speaker 2 (00:24:43):

So at one point I say, well, you know, she would never, um, she would never direct us. She would always ask us questions and she would say, okay, if you do this action, now what's gonna happen in that community six months from now, what's gonna happen a year from now because it was always about the sense that we were just the organizers. We were not the leaders. The reason we were in those communities is to build local leadership that would survive even our deaths. And that was important. So we weren't just coming in doing rallies and moving back out again, we were building organizers and leadership. And what's interesting is that we were the age of some of you are NA that some of you are now. So to get somebody 17, 18, 19 to think not just about next week. Yes. But next year, three years from now was an amazing feat.

Speaker 2 (00:25:35):

And part of it was because she always reminded us of our responsibility to the local community. You know, that in a lot of ways they were greater risk than we were. All that could happen to us is we could die. You know, which at young age you don't think will ever happen to you anyway, that what they were putting on their lives on, on the lives were the lives and the lives. Um, and the livelihoods of not just themselves, but their entire community. So she was always talking about that. And, um, and I'm gonna, I think I'm gonna stop now cuz I've gone her too long, but the main point is that she made us you're okay. Oh, okay. Okay. Oh if I'm okay. Do I have one more? You have about another three of, oh, if I have another few minutes, I'm gonna say one more story and then I'm gonna answer.

Speaker 2 (00:26:17):

Okay. Um, time, take your time. Thank you. Hello story. Okay. Um, so, and this has to do with the environment that existed within SNCC, which made you feel that you could do just about most, anything, which is very heady for somebody who's 17, 18 years old at the point at that time now there was, um, there were a lot of people in the Atlanta SNCC office at that point. And so I was, you know, foreman secretary. Okay. So I got this bird's eye view of the organization when I first came in. So I knew LCD, um, LCD lawyers, constitutional LCDC. What was LCDC Laura's constitutional defended

Speaker 4 (00:26:55):

Committee,

Speaker 2 (00:26:56):

Defense committee. Thank you. Which was this group of progressive lawyers out of New York rabbi been Woodson BD, Mike standard. So I would have these conversations with them and then I would know the folks in the field, you know, so MacArthur is over here and um, uh, uh, everybody's over there. Well, all these people are over here. Okay. So, um,

Speaker 2 (00:27:15):

I got the sense of what was going on in the support groups. I got a sense of the Southern, uh, Southern organizers, but I wanted to go to the field cause that's, you know, romantically, that's where the action is. Right. So I kept saying for him, and I wanna go to the field, I wanna go to the field. And he said, course, you know, he needed somebody who was gonna type the 90 words a minute and okay. So he never let me do this. Well, at one point he comes back from a fundraising trip and I, and other, other people in the, um, in the office, Mary King, um, Nancy Sterns, I remember anyway, he comes in from this trip probably rather tired. And we are sitting in front of his office with placards saying no more minutes, we shall not be moved. And we're sitting down in front of his office.

Speaker 2 (00:28:01):

You know, now what was interesting about that is that even within, you know, I mean, certainly there was sexism within the organization. It was, you know, hello, it's 19 62 63. Um, I mean 1999, 2000, but you know, has anything much shape, but still at that point within SNCC, because we were the cutting edge, you could, as we used to say, call the question. So when we said, we're not gonna do the minutes anymore, we didn't do the minutes anymore. The men started taking the minutes. Um, there were a lot of places like that where you could, you could make folks realize the dissonance between what we said and what was supposed to really happen. And they would do the right thing. And I never, I have got to say that I was as nurtured by the men as much by the men as I was by the women. And the fortunate part of that was that when I get out into the, into the world, um, I expect that same kind of nurturing and don't always find it, but that gave me the sense that it could happen. So thank you very much. Okay. Thank you.

Speaker 4 (00:29:05):

Oh wow. Judy is going to be a tough act to follow <laugh>, but she has all the history behind her with her, with her notes and stuff. And I have to rely on my memory and you know, once you reach a certain age, you memory has a tendency to fail you. As a matter of fact, I'm at that age where sometimes in the middle of saying something, I said, ah, yes, <laugh> gotcha. Anyway, name is Brenda Travis, and I was going to, uh, try and remember, um, up <laugh> yeah, no, <laugh> now I was going to try and remember the character in, uh, freedom songs, the 16 year old girl. What was her name?

Speaker 5 (00:30:02):

I can't remember her name.

Speaker 4 (00:30:04):

See, they may not know freedom song either the movie. Yeah. Movie. Yeah. The movie freedom songs anyway, my that

Speaker 6 (00:30:11):

They may not know.

Speaker 4 (00:30:12):

Okay. So then I could, this won't go off too successful. <laugh> oh, okay. Anyway, um, first I, you know, would like to really thank and, and show my appreciation to Ella baker for being the founder of the, the student nonviolent coordinating committee from which I got my start. I was born, um, in Mississippi, in McComb, Mississippi, and I became involved, um, in the, uh, civil rights movement at the age of, uh, 16. Um, I, um, was arrested for testing the interstate commerce law in Mississippi. Uh, and I spent a month in, in jail and then later, um, I spent, um, six and a half months in reformatory school as a result of my, uh, civil rights activities. And there was a guy from, uh, Talladega college who came along and he, um, liberated me from the reformatory school, but that, uh, union didn't work out.

Speaker 4 (00:31:19):

And that was when I met, um, Ella baker. She became my legal guardian and having never, uh, ventured from my hometown of, um, Macomb. Um, I didn't know how well during that time I was, I belonged to the brown paper bag era, you know, where you didn't have enough clothes to own a luggage. So you put your clothes in the brown paper bag. Uh, but after, um, Ella became my legal guardian, she bought me a few things and she decided, uh, that I should go to, uh, Palm Memorial Institute here in North Carolina, uh, Sedalia, North Carolina, just out of Greensboro. I don't know if you're familiar with that, but, um, I attended, uh, there for one semester and I called Ella and I told her, I said, you know, I said, this is so difficult for me. I said, because it's almost like being, um, incarcerated again.

Speaker 4 (00:32:21):

And so it was at that time we decided, um, whether I had other friends that I had met and, um, she said, well, what do you want to do? I said, well, I don't know. I have no idea what I want to do. I have no idea what I'm going to do, but I know that I can stay here. <laugh> so, um, there were friends that, um, decided or agreed to, um, have me live with them in Illinois. But, um, you know, I did, you know, keep in contact with her over the years. Um, and then finally we did, we lost contact and I was so hurt when I didn't realize that she was dead until, you know, I think a year or two after her death. Um, but I, um, you know, it's, it was just difficult to, to, it's difficult to express, um, you know, what I felt and how I felt, because I felt that, you know, she, she actually taught me things that a young woman should know and things that I had not been taught even from, you know, with my, um, own parents. Um, and it was kind of cute because of EV, as I said, after her, her, uh, purchasing me clothes in, in a suitcase, she's told me, she said, well, the way you get a lot of things into a suitcase is you fold them like this. And then you take, and you roll it real tight.

Speaker 4 (00:33:54):

You're taking, you're only real tight. And that way you can get a lot of things into the suitcase. But after, you know, um, conferring with her after leaving, uh, PMA, uh, you know, she always had, um, words of wisdom. Uh, she would always encourage me to stay strong. And she told me the road to freedom was a long, tough, tedious, and hard road. And she always told me to just, you know, stay focused and, you know, those are things that I never forgot. And, you know, I just, um, wanted to say that I appreciate her and I appreciate this university and this state, I guess, for recognizing such a great lady. And that's thank you.

Speaker 7 (00:34:49):

We're at the Q and a section. If anybody wants, I've have to say something. I've gotta

Speaker 4 (00:34:53):

Say something. Yes. You do your piece. Cause you were gonna say something before. Yes.

Speaker 7 (00:34:57):

Well this is really extemporaneous that's okay. <laugh> okay. Um, well I met Ms. Baker in one of those interminable meetings. Uh, I remember meeting her in Waveland and somewhere along the line saying to my friend, Cynthia Washington, I'm gonna go out and get some crayfish and beer. I'll be back six hours later, I came back and he was still talking <laugh> and Ms. Baker and, uh, uh, William Porter, I have this picture. That's why I'm remembering this. And, uh, several other people and I sort of walked away and we had our own huddle outside, um, in the, that first Waveland meeting. Um, so we could develop a position because we always talked about the profound things. I mean, we really saw ourselves as moving the earth, you know, and that we were the catalytic agents for that. And if it cost our lives, we, and I don't say this lightly, we were prepared to put it out there, you know, and in that regard, people made decisions about how they were going to go.

Speaker 7 (00:35:56):

And some of us went unexpectedly. We paid a very high price, a very high price for our work. Um, I can't say that I met her on the road, uh, in, uh, when I was doing PD work project director work. Um, I was pretty tough and, um, I ran a very tight ship, had to didn't lose any people. That's how you counted your successes. And we were able to deal with, I mean, because Greenville was, um, the liberal area of Mississippi, although I ran two counties that were not too liberal, uh, so that when we had to do, uh, the mark collection campaign, et cetera, to show that blacks could vote, they would vote. Greenville had to carry the weight for other parts of the state where even participating in the mark collection would get you killed. Um, when, even when we were there in 1960, I can tell you that in the fall was the NAACP, uh, recruitment drive for their membership.

Speaker 7 (00:36:57):

And that was a very dangerous time. It also happened to be at the same time hunting season. And so on the back of all the pickup trucks, you saw the rifles. And of course there were lots of accidents, um, during that period. So you can imagine what miss Baker's life must have been back must have been like in 1940, traveling the back roads of, um, the south as the field secretary, had they known that in this woman dressed in a suit with her hat on the epitome of lady hood carried the baggage of the movement. I mean, it was really quite, uh, what is it, uh, ingenuous mm-hmm <affirmative>, I don't know if any of you have seen, uh, the movie, uh, the battle of Algiers, but, uh, that's a movie you should try to see in your lifetime. And one of the scenes I'll never forget in that movie is the usage of women and children actually, to carry the message of the movement, where the French were looking for men.

Speaker 7 (00:37:54):

And, and as you know, the French battled for Algiers, uh, vociferously, I mean, they lost, they took no prisoners. And I might say the south took no prisoners as well. Um, I had the experience and maybe at some point during the conference, I will tell you, I ran the statewide COFO office. And it's part of my work. I had the POS the responsibility of doing a, uh, statewide, uh, call twice a day in the state of Mississippi. We used the, what was called the wide area telephone system, which allowed us to rather cheaply call out various projects. And sometimes we had as many as, you know, 15 or 16, or excuse me, as few as 15 or 16. Sometimes we had as many as 50, uh, depending on the proliferation projects from a center we used, uh, we, uh, annexed on part of, uh, core Southern core, which was a little different and a little bit more radical than Northern core, uh, function with us. And we, uh, actually the core people fed us when we were in the COFO office, we had no money. <laugh> none we ate when somebody came by to feed us, somebody came by the guy from the Southern core office promised to come by at least once a week. So we could eat once a week. We worked 18 hours a day, you know, and at some point I closed that office because I said, we can't, we can't run this, this can't run it. Uh, we had the FBI, we had the state sovereignty commission

Speaker 8 (00:39:24):

Time,

Speaker 7 (00:39:26):

Very difficult time.

Speaker 7 (00:39:28):

This is a real, this is a real sign that you're getting old because I used to be able to tell this story <laugh> without tears <laugh>, um, Ms. Baker, we joined my life when I got married and had my first child. In fact, she's the godmother of my daughter, bio. And I have to tell you, we had this African, um, naming ceremony and Bob Olatunji, uh, came and beat the drums and cold on the ancestors and Ms. Baker was there. And, you know, she still had the suit and the hack <laugh>, she was real cute. She said, I don't know what's going on, but it's okay. And, uh, from that point on, we remained very close friends. And in fact, we became confidants and I spent most of her last years, we spent together sitting on the couch, sharing a beer, eating, boiled egg, and talking about the movement. And she was a wonderful, wonderful woman. So with having said all that, uh, extemporaneously I'll go into questions or comments anybody might like to, uh, yes. Go right ahead.

Speaker 9 (00:40:32):

Um, I, I just wanna say, I think that a lot of you all, haven't seen the freedom song, the movie that was made for television, and I, it's gonna be shown here at the conference and I really wanna recommend it. And I want you all to look at that and know that that, who you recognize immediately to that 16 year old is Brenda Travis. And, uh, I, I wanted to, uh, say that I remember back in Atlanta, Ella, uh, saying to me, uh, do you know, they put that child in reform school. And I'm just really glad because I don't know if we ever even met, but I'm just glad that Brenda Travis is here because I remember feeling the pain for that 16 year old in reform school for sitting in. And I want you to see her in that movie.

Speaker 7 (00:41:27):

Any questions? Any comments? Any thoughts? Any ramblings? Yes. This

Speaker 10 (00:41:32):

Is not <laugh>.

Speaker 11 (00:41:36):

You said, and then you pointed to one of you would speak years. What we have accomplished in the state of African, the African American community made 40 years later be shy.

Speaker 7 (00:42:04):

I never were, was shy. So I'll, uh, try to at least start the ball going and then maybe somebody else can pick up <affirmative> I have to say in the context of what we tried to do that SNCC became SNCC was a very small organization, but it had dedicated membership. And when you have a dedicated membership, you can move all kinds of mountains. What we didn't realize as that when you call across one mountain, there's another mountain and it's even bigger, you know, and nor did we think that all of the forces would finally gather to our detriment. And in many ways we did, let's talk about what we did do. And then we can talk about the rollback in many ways, SNCC brought the denims to the fashion world.

Speaker 10 (00:42:53):

<laugh>,

Speaker 7 (00:42:56):

You know, you know, before SNCC only farmers were denims

Speaker 10 (00:43:01):

<laugh>

Speaker 7 (00:43:02):

Okay. Um, we opened up Mississippi. I mean, Mississippi was like a big prison, as far as I'm concerned. Uh, it was a state that had, uh, even in slavery had said, if you can't deal with your slaves up there where you are send them to Mississippi, we know how to take care of them. So we showed that Mississippi was not, um, an insurmountable, but I will tell you from that those calls around, I ha my calls to the SNCC officers daily became from that COFA office became a death count. That was what I was getting. I was getting the names of young, particularly young black men who had disappeared, who had been found. Uh, you may remember that when Chainey Schwan and Goodman were located, finally, when the government finally decided that \$10,000 was not gonna buy any information, that they had to go at least a hundred thousand to pull, pull that kind of, uh, information.

Speaker 7 (00:43:59):

And they started dredging the rivers, the state of Mississippi, uh, they found so many headless people. They stopped dredging. It was even phenomenal for them. And the army Corps of engineers does not move easily. Um, we were able to raise the issue. As Casey mentioned, the beginnings of the feminist movement actually had very clearly their tentacles in, um, SNCC. We, um, worked very hard. In fact, I remember sending two organizers to work with Caesar Chavez in California at the time. I don't remember if, you know, there still is a strike against grapes <laugh>, uh, and that, that was an effort at that point. Um, um, Chicanos were laying down before the trucks coming out of, um, the awful little town. I can't think of against, with the beef. It'll come to my Bakersfield baker, Bob Bakersfield. Right. And they were losing their lives. Chicanos don't count.

Speaker 7 (00:45:01):

So we don't report that information. In any case, we send two field workers to work on that behalf. So we began to forge alliances and which was one of the interesting things about SNCC. We were not territorial. We were quite prepared to help anybody going down the same road. We were going, uh, we developed local leadership. Um, unfortunately what happens in this country is, uh, well, we got to the development of leadership. We had both the democratic or the Republican party to look at, and neither one of them was looking at us. So we were in many ways back to what do you do with a national and an impeccable local leadership that just won't yield any of the real substantive gains? Um, what else do you think we did before we started talking about what they did to us? We changed us. We changed us. Yes. We certainly did. All of

us are quite different from just about everybody else. I know. <laugh> oh, yes. Go ahead. Calling on you, your sister, go ahead.

Speaker 12 (00:45:57):

Third.

Speaker 7 (00:45:58):

Yes.

Speaker 12 (00:45:59):

Can you stand up when third

Speaker 11 (00:46:06):

Organiz

Speaker 12 (00:46:09):

<laugh> gave rise to, I think Mississippi gave rise to a very strong and viable and fiercely independent Alabama movement.

Speaker 7 (00:46:18):

Okay.

Speaker 12 (00:46:20):

Uh, I think we did something about culture and our hair and who we are as a people. And, um, and that sense of equality, whether it was, you know, through the legal system, but within ourselves or when our interaction was, um,

Speaker 7 (00:46:38):

On the, on the business about, um, African awareness, SN oh, foreman, sorry, go ahead. Foreman.

Speaker 12 (00:46:45):

I just wanna reinforce something that you said about opening up Mississippi. A lot of did a lot of other things. Cause I was at a meeting. The project in 1960 Senator has a permission, uh, and Roy Wilkins was there discussing the project in Mississippi. And as you recall that he was, uh, the NAACP was one of the cosponsors of the Mississippi civil project, as well as counseling federal organization. So right now we discussing Mississippi and he said that very foolish to be in Mississippi. Now this director, a NAAC national director, not just a local chapter. So cause I said, well, he felt that we were wasting our time. Cause Mississippi should be changed from the outside and my discussion. I said, well, we've been working there. That change is not necessarily come from the outside. We had a long discussion. And I said, well, look after your, your organization is a part of the four, one of the four organizations sponsoring Mississippi civil project. And I said, well, how is it to take this position? And yet you still want sponsor. Well, that's the way its, I mean, I just think the change should come from the outside. You shouldn't be inside Mississippi. And then I said, but I'm not gonna withdraw from sponsorship civil project that help you in reinforcement that and opening up Mississippi helped to open up, uh, end of segregation in the United States had another little point, but I don't wanna make later on. Um, Judy and I have some disagreements about that city

Speaker 10 (00:48:22):

And that was typical. Yes.

Speaker 13 (00:48:24):

Yeah. Another point since you're on this point about the political parties, one of the things that started, um, sharpening the politics, but also breaking down the movement in Alabama was, um,

in the summer of 65 SCLC got a grant, uh, I think from the Ford foundation to do organizing in Alabama. And they were, uh, the, the whole training staff was trained to go down and register black people into the Alabama democratic party, uh, which had a slogan said white supremacy for the right. And SNCC was trying in five or six counties, Wilco green, uh, lounge Sumter. Yeah, several two, two bill freedom organizations. Some of 'em survived. Some of 'em didn't lows county became a national assembled cause of such a wonderful success. Um, that summer I was trying to, uh, to build some consciousness within this, this, uh, scope group, uh, summer community organizing political education project.

Speaker 13 (00:49:28):

And I couldn't get any hearing, actually, one of the few people in SCLC who would listen and talk, uh, about this was Martin Luther king himself mm-hmm <affirmative>. And I got stranded by their people leading a recruiting project up north and had to walk my way back down to Washington and Walter Fort Roy called Martin and Martin, uh, came, told me to meet him at the airport, gave him me, uh, \$25 in a plane ticket to Atlanta said, give him hell Arkansas, go back there and try to deal with it. And I tried to reopen communications with SNCC mm-hmm <affirmative> and to, to kinda shake up some of this scope thing, to be aware and, and supportive of S N's independent work, but I couldn't communicate with SNCC cause things were breaking down. And then I got thrown in jail for the rest of the year.

Speaker 13 (00:50:14):

And when I came back, uh, in the beginning of 66, almost everything was, was, was totally, it was a different chaotic in 66 than it was in 65. And it was hard to, it was hard to start over again, but the, uh, Lowes county, which I, I guess people will be speaking about this week was an absolute symbol of what it was all about. It was like, it was like COFO and spade, but concentrated in one area to where the people really developed and, and it still survives. I mean the, the, the name of the organization changed, uh, but the same people still run the county. Now that began that organization back in, in 65.

Speaker 7 (00:50:55):

Okay. Thank you. I just want, okay. Yes, go ahead. Important.

Speaker 12 (00:50:59):

You know, that we broke down

Speaker 7 (00:51:03):

QAC, how's an American Q a house on American activities committee

Speaker 12 (00:51:06):

And what was Q a house on unAmerican activities, but what was it was, it was a McCarthy type committee that called everybody communist, if you did anything that was for the, you know, for the good of the world for the good of the order, if you will, for, you know, and, um, and we just refused. I remember I can see foreman right now and we're 18 years old, Judy, right. We're young. And you know, and this is a carryover from McCarthy. We know about the fifties and the cold war and all of that. And we have consciousness. I mean, I could never, ever finish talking about what SNCC did for us and for this nation as young people. And so we are grappling and understanding profoundly, you know, what anti communism is and how people being red faded. And we had some understanding of those who were blackness. We went to prison in the fifties and so forth, and we made alliances with those kinds of folks. In other words, we probably, as young people, the first of the anti communist, uh, for, to go and fight this. And so that was tremendous Huan. Um, the Antina, um, movement.

Speaker 7 (00:52:14):

Yeah. SNCC had the first, um, demonstration against the war in Vietnam. A busload of people from Mississippi came to the justice department and put it on the map that there was this war going on and we didn't like it. And didn't want any parts of it's like a SNCC meeting.

Speaker 12 (00:52:38):

So

Speaker 11 (00:52:39):

For two seconds on Vietnam, what got it was the, in just a minute, it was the FDP office in McComb that got upset because a young, local guy who got sent to Vietnam, right, got killed there when he came back. And I tried to bury him in the official cemetery, the white cemetery, if you will, the people in Mo home wouldn't allow him to be buried. And at that point, people got revoked and said, you have with this war Vietnam incident, what's going on in Mississippi. That's how that happened.

Speaker 12 (00:53:13):

It all

Speaker 7 (00:53:14):

I wanted to, I just wanted to say that in terms of some of the other things that SNCC did, we began to make forays internationally, which may, may have been one of the things that put us on the map on Washington DC on a very long desk, by people with lots of uniforms who made some decisions about, oh, no, you won't. Um, the SNCC had a, um, had a, a tra a trip, um, that remember the name Oginga Odinga mm-hmm <affirmative> okay. African revolutionary, um, went into, uh, various, um, anti-colonial, um, head of visitation on the continent, uh, basically, um, hosted by anti-colonial, uh, personages. Um, in 1963, several of us got invited to other overseas operations, obviously dealing with student movements. I got invited to, uh, through, um, a mechanism that she'll go nameless, uh, to Southeast Asia, uh, where anti, uh, anti-colonial activities were occurring.

Speaker 7 (00:54:13):

And, you know, that anti-colonialism activities were equated with communism. And you do realize that that's how they, you know, so anyway, so I had an interesting debriefing at the state department, but we should talk about that at another time. And, um, there were people who went to Japan. Um, so we began to make those kinds of, uh, correspondences. I just give you this aside though, in terms of impact, I was driving down the street in a chauffeur car in the middle of Manila, Philippines with this man whom I did not like. And, uh, we were driving, uh, his driver was driving, I should say. And we were in the back. And, uh, he, uh, at, we had been together several times and I had seen his house, which was quite some house. And, um, he rolled the window up between the chauffeur and us, and he turned around and me rather, and he turned and he said something that was really very peculiar, but it always stuck with me.

Speaker 7 (00:55:05):

He says, we are watching you. He says, I represent a group of people who are trying to get the Dino language. No, excuse me, it's not tele log language back into our usage. And the Philippines, Philippines are not allowed to use their own native language. They had to speak Spanish. And that was one of the steps towards self-awareness self-determination. He says, we have been watching the student movement and you are a part of the student movement in the United States. He says, I'm really proud to have met you. And I want you to know that you are part of our combustion. And I really felt really good about that because boy, that the state department wanna know about that later <laugh> okay. Anybody else? Any other comments? The other, yes. Go ahead. Three more,

Speaker 12 (00:55:50):

Go ahead.

Speaker 7 (00:55:59):

Could you talk up

Speaker 12 (00:56:00):

When we, the study means, heard the word purposeful others, it was just a whole transition about, and, and all as, as you know, instead of these, um, yes, white. So I, I don't wanna belabor the point, but I'm the concept I'm saying in terms of what we saw as entertainment we transformed, what was the real meaning of education? You know, a rap brown has a wonderful speech on that, that you should hear, you know, training or education. What are we, you know, so, and making it relevant. These are choice words that SNCC introduced into the vocabulary. And I would sit down and close that even in the women's movement, the whole concept of choice came from the black sneak women, because it was really about the pill. I think the slogan was the pill and a lot of us and, and snake were kind of toying with the whole concept of abortion.

Speaker 12 (00:57:33):

And so we came up with that, that to tell people to take the pill was imperialistic, uh, autocratic, something that we had been taught and SN to fight against. And that the word choice, I never, I, I think I have minutes of, of, of notes of that, and that people ought have the right to choose. That was a whole concept that came from women, particularly women like Fran bill and some other women that I can name. So if I could put it in a nutshell and at all, the others what's most important is that SNCC kids with all of that risk black and white transform the whole thought process, as far as I am concerned of this country and of the alliances that we made with others, we transformed Dr. King around Vietnam. We transformed the NAACP in terms of what its agenda ought to be. So, uh, SNCC to me was truly the revolutionary of this modern period. I mean, on the same part as the 1776 revolution, give me Liberty or give me death. I would just like to build on the educational aspect that has just risen because, uh, basically our whole environment was educational and it was not just the reading of books. Uh, I remember many, many sessions in our apartment, uh, sitting on the floor with all the staff who was in Atlanta and we Poe and analyze every political, social and personal event of the day.

Speaker 2 (00:59:22):

And

Speaker 12 (00:59:23):

For as long as we could stay awake and it went, these discussions went on into the night, uh, and one little vignette, uh, in this fabulous, famous apartment that we shared was, um, we were all gathered there and we heard this wrap on the door, uh, and it was, it was the police. And here we had this integrated route and I remember Soly and a couple of old men, I think, went for the window, went out the window. I would hope. And we five o'clock in the morning. I don't remember the hour, but it was one of those evenings where we were talking about, I think that particular evening we were talking about colonialism and religion in Jamaica. Yes, Judy, um,

Speaker 2 (01:00:13):

Let me just mention too. Uh, we actually also had a research department yes. Headed by this old crusty, I think former communist party person, Jack named Jack min. Yeah. And, um, what would happen was that Jack Meis, first of all, you would walk in his room and it'd be totally smoke built. Um, but he would have all of these census features. I mean, I mean, there's a whole thing around the way you got things factually, correct? The way you interpreted the, the pieces. So when the student voice, for example, and, and Dotty and Julian will Julian bond, who's now the chair of the NAACP, but who is then our communications director. Um, they will have a session and you might wanna go to that. I think it's on Friday where they talk about how they,

um, where the media arm of that. But the main thing was that, um, we never, we never oversold. We never, in other words, you would say in a student voice report or a Watts sign report. Um, three people being church burned. So, and so it was never the, you know, the so and so, and the lump and Ary. And so, and.