

SNCC 50th Anniversary Conference  
Shaw University, Raleigh NC, April 2010  
Transcript Video Recording #6  
(Raw, unedited, no annotation)

Speaker 1 (00:20):

We'll do it with the rest of you all. Please sit down so we can finish this part. The program. Yeah. Gimme your, Yeah.

Speaker 2 (00:42):

Yeah. Want me to get this out

Speaker 1 (00:43):

For you? No, I Okay. I wanna first, uh, introduce to you representing the governor's office, Mrs. Angela Dan Dunhan. Angela.

Speaker 3 (01:10):

Good afternoon. Thank you for that round of applause. I wanna begin by recognizing Mr. Julian bond, Mr. Harry Belafonte,

Speaker 2 (01:28):

Robin

Speaker 3 (01:28):

James Lawson, all the distinguished members of the head table and all the song and unsung hero of the civil rights movement. I bring you, I bring you greetings on behalf of governor Beverly Perue the 73rd governor and first female governor of the state of North Carolina. The governor desperately wanted to be here, especially since she knew Mr. Belafonte was gonna be here, but I told her I could handle it. I wanna welcome you all to Raleigh, North Carolina, to the state of North Carolina. And to say that I counted an honor and a privilege to be here as a baby of the civil rights movement born on April 3rd, 1968. I consider myself a bitter factor of all the blood, sweat, and tears that was pour into the civil rights movement. I stand here as one of the rewards of everything that you did in the past 50 years. And I say, thank you to each of you During your stay here in North Carolina. I want you to celebrate and commemorate this event, but I also ask you to remember the challenges that we still face challenges, not only in the civil rights movement, but also in the over rights movement. I encourage you to take up that challenge to continue the fight of justice that you have endured for many years. And to the younger folks I say, join in, in the cause in the justice movement that we are enduring at this moment.

Speaker 3 (03:39):

Again, I say welcome to North Carolina. Welcome to Raleigh, and thank you for everything that you have done and will continue to do. Thank you.

Speaker 1 (03:56):

Thank you. Um, that we gonna have remarks from, uh, Dorothy Crowder. Ya, miss ya, you

Speaker 2 (04:08):

Give two, the mic here

Speaker 1 (04:10):

Is miss Y with us,

Speaker 2 (04:12):

Dr.

Speaker 1 (04:19):

Ya, Thank you. Uh, Mrs. Ya, Dr. Ya, uh, won't be with us informed. She has gone to, uh, Reverend Forbes wife's, uh, funeral. Uh, and now we're going to have a speaker, um, Dr. James Lawson. Uh, I'd like,

Speaker 1 (04:58):

I'd like, I'd like to introduce, uh, my friend Jim Lawson, who has been in the struggle for many years, along with miss Al baker. He helped to inspire and create the student nonviolent coordinating committee and, and, and to bring the lessons and the teaching of nonviolence struggle to the student nonviolent coordinating committee, happy to introduce, uh, James Lawson, cause of I've known him all my life. We're both from the same hometown of mass, Ohio, and Jim's father was the minister at the St. James AME, gen Zion church and Lin that my mother was a member of for many, many years In the early fifties and late sixties, Dr. Lawson joined the fellowship of reconciliation and the Congress of racial equality and declared himself a conscientious objector. And as a result served 14 months in prison after refusing to take a student on ministerial, um, Deferment, Could you all in the back, please continue your discussion some outside or sit down and join us here. Thank you. Um, in 1955, he ended the graduate school of theology at Oland college in Ohio. While there he began a life form fellowship of friendship with Dr. Martin Luther king. He enrolled in the divinity school at Vanderbilt in Nashville, Tennessee, where he served as a Southern director of core. Uh,

Speaker 1 (07:21):

Jim Lawson was the first black student to be enrolled at Vanderbilt and the first black student to be kicked out of Vanderbilt. It, uh, And when the nonviolence struggle began, it was just one of the accidents of faith that started In Greensboro rather than in Nashville, because Jim had been training students to Wade. Sit-ins many people who became very prominent in the student non-violent coordinating committee, uh, came a out of Jim's teaching, uh, Diane Nash James be, uh, Beville Mary and Barry,

Speaker 2 (08:18):

John Lewis,

Speaker 1 (08:19):

John Lewis, And several others. I'm damn When, uh, recently in the past several years, uh, Nashville or Vanderbilt finally recognized, uh, the problem. They had been teaching morality in the divinity school and not allowing black people to stand up for the rights. Uh, so I've been a fan and a follower of, of Jim Lawson and teaching and guidance for most of my adult life and, uh, have gained a great deal from his influence ladies and gentlemen, Dr. James Lawson.

Speaker 4 (09:18):

Chuck, Thank you. Thank you very much. I am Extremely pleased to be here, as you can guess, Whoever would've thought that 50 years later, we would be gathering again at Shaw university in Raleigh, And all of us were in the first meeting in 1960 Of course, had little or no sense of what we were trying to do, except that we did have a passion for reversing the wrong that we saw in our country. And we were willing to break the barriers and go ahead and try to do it. Now I'm doing something this afternoon that I don't know normally do that is I've carried a book up here with me and I've done so deliberately because I decided I wanted to read it, uh, read your section from it. We have much to celebrate, But we also have much perhaps as much more, uh, not to celebrate, but to lives and assess where we are and how we're gonna get this country of ours, to where we want it to be, because it has not yet arrived. And we must understand that. I hope that this time together Will allow each of us and each of you to,

Speaker 2 (11:00):

Uh,

Speaker 4 (11:01):

To,

Speaker 2 (11:02):

Uh,

Speaker 4 (11:03):

Not only assess where your life is, but at the same moment, I hope that it will strengthen you in the result that no matter what the circumstances are today, one day Raleigh and Nashville and Los Angeles, and every other place in our country will represent the best of the human family and the best of justice and equality and Liberty for all. I hope that those of you who were operative in the sixties In the fifties, That if you have scars and most of us have some, if you have Things of the past that need to be corrected or healed, that this 50th year will enable you to do that hard homework on yourself, that will enable you to then move into the next level of your life. After all in the final analysis, No nation Will rise or fall greater than the people of that nation In the final word,

Speaker 5 (12:23):

Who

Speaker 4 (12:23):

You are And the way in which you accept and use the precious gift of life that has been given to you is one of the ways by which we can measure whether or not the earth has a chance to become a PLA better place for all of us. So I hope the event will help your healing.

Speaker 5 (12:44):

It

Speaker 4 (12:45):

Is of course, a wonder that we're here.

Speaker 5 (12:49):

Let

Speaker 4 (12:50):

Me applaud the fact At the movement of the fifties and sixties and seventies was one of the most magnificent times that this nation has ever experienced, Even though many people in the nation are now willing to acknowledge that I put the moment of, of intensive years of activity between 1953 and 1973. Uh, it was the finest moment. Yeah. In the process of the American revolution

Speaker 4 (13:34):

For a equality, Liberty and justice, for all many people do not understand that the tea party people and the parties that they represent and the eco economics that they represent and the political leaders that they represent do not understand the Marvel of our country, or do they understand the extraordinary vision that this country can offer to one to us and to all the church has never really understood this period because those 20 years, those two decades that I lift up represent also the finest moment of religion in United States, though, many people in Christianity, abor the very thought of that movement representing religion. It was religion's finest hour. Let me say next that indeed the movement of which we were a part was the most comprehensive movement that the people of the United States ever had ever engendered. Let me see if I can say this in a way that's important because it's important for SNCC to understand as one segment of that movement, that we were empowered to create SNCC because a movement had already begun.

Speaker 4 (15:02):

And because if there was a larger vision and a larger hope and a larger expectation among millions of people, not only in United States, but in Latin America and Africa and Asia alike, that what we were beginning here and doing here would indeed spread across the very earth itself. So I'm saying to you in the simple way as I can, that we were a part of an intergenerational movement, and I've read to the books thus far about that period. And I know the effort and the part of some intellectuals, some academics, and some people who think that they're on the left to pretend that stick somehow was Something out, outside this comprehensive struggle that none of us really fully understood then, or now I'm saying this deliberately, because we must have a 21st century movement that will cause the movement between nine and 53 in 1973 to fade in comparison to its power in the 21st century and such a movement must be intergenerational, Such a movement, must combine the wisdom of the past of the human family, with the energies and the vitalities of the present moment. If that movement is a reshape our land as our land needs reshaping,

Speaker 4 (16:44):

It was a comprehensive movement. I found no book that seems to understand illustration 1 19 60, the sit-in movement that began. It went to every single state of the union.

Speaker 4 (17:04):

It went to literally hundreds and hundreds of universities and colleges where we had support for that struggle from everywhere. Well think for just a moment that movement has really never yet been researched. Just that one year in 19 61, 19 63, there were over a thousand demonstration in the midst of the Birmingham campaign, the Washington March, the efforts to do voter registration in Mississippi and elsewhere, there were over a thousand major dis demonstrations across the nation. Again, that has not been researched. The point I'm making is, was a most comprehensive struggle of people for freedom that maybe the earth has ever known, or that certainly the United States has ever known. And it must be With many times of the Power and energy again, in the 21st century. The critical issue to for the United States today is whether the government and the economy will be of and for, and by the people or whether it will continue you to be for wall street and for the Pentagon and so forth and so on. So our country has not yet arrived. We have not yet arrived. Let's make certain, we understand that this is not to say that there have not been progress. Yes. I love the fact that I look at the white house and I see a black family, and I see a black president in the oval office, but that does not mean that justice has arrived. And we better be sure that we understand that

Speaker 4 (19:05):

On, on the, on the contrary, the, the prison office is so shackled with the powers that be to use a phrase from the first chapter of, from the 13th chapter of Romans, the powers that be So shackled by the powers that be that you and I, for the most part, the 300 million people of our country are not really represented in the white house or in Congress, or in most of the places of the governors of this country of ours. We are not there. Our wellbeing is not there. The issues that besiege us Are not there And only if there is a new movement in the 21st century, can we put our agenda there? Let me just describe this. So we have not arrived in three different ways. First of all, We still live in a country That is the most racist country that the human, that human history yet, uh, has recorded. And we are in a country that is going through the throws and the mysteries of 16th generational racism, No previous generation faced the problem boldly, nor did any previous generation map the goals and the strategies and the processes by which racism could be moved to be dismantled, no previous generation and our generation has not done yet that terrible for flexing, but yet energizing work.

Speaker 4 (21:11):

Racism is alive and well that's one of the models that we in Nashville have adopted. When on this coming Monday, we will reiterate the 50th anniversary of the silent March, which at that time became in 1960 was the largest such March that ever taken place in the south where nearly

5,000 of us marched in silence. And it was rather eerie, wonderful feeling marched in silence from Tennessee state university, down to city hall to confront the mayor, uh, and over the issues of racism and segregation. We're gonna repeat that. That's why I'm not here this week. And it's why I'm leaving again. This evening, we've said three things that the dynamite that blew up the, a home of Z Alexander Luby, our chief lawyer, That dynamite Is dynamite that is blowing up millions of people across our country and still devastating this country, uh, in ways that many of us still do not understand. The second thing we're saying is that racism is alive and well, Nashville Is still separate and still unequal. And the third thing we're saying in that demonstration is that we must wake up and begin the concrete grassroots organizing in our communities, in our cities

Speaker 4 (23:00):

To resist the racism in our nation and to resist in every way possible. And here may I simply say that I see this as an inclusive task. When I use the word racism, you may want to add other words, but I want to add the words that I think are essential without which we will not face the issue of racism. The United States is still largely shaped today by racism, sexism, violence, and plantation capitalism. These four elements that are interconnected and interrelated, and we cannot remove any one of these form or change any one of these forms or dismantle the structures of oppression in any one of these four elements, unless we are connected to all of them and see that they're all related The environmental movement, which is largely a white middle class movement in so many different ways has to come to understand that the environmental movement has no chance for says, unless it deeds with the economic exploitation of sexism of racism. And unless it deals with the issue of the violence of America against the porn, against the people of color and against women in our land, it will get nowhere. And I want to death suggest, suggest an anecdote on at this point, cuz Harrison Ford is an actor whose name is well known. Who's been very much engaged in the environmental war, uh, environmental movement across the earth.

Speaker 4 (24:42):

And he said recently in a printed piece, that what I see in the environmental movement is the failure of 20 years. And he said, what the environmental movement needs is a movement similar to what he called the civil rights movement of a few years ago. And I Understand him tome, this That only direct action in which millions of people put their bodies and their hearts and their minds around the common purpose of cleansing. Our SI society of plucking it down and raising it up again will do the work. This is in part what our heritage of the past represents. And then the third thing I want to say, we have not arrived is this. My country is still the number one enemy of peace and justice in the world. I discovered that in the 1960s And most of us Americans don't want to understand that Don't know what that means. We are the number one enemy of justice and peace in the world. Illustration We have The militarization of our nation has moved on systematically. It is a petty, it is a tyranny. We have 800 military bases in 130 countries in our land, including troops on the ground in five nation.

Speaker 4 (26:33):

Now I ask you the question. We have 800 military bases in 130 countries, including troops on the ground in five nations. Most of us are unaware of that. As we have systematically built military bases, we are building five more in Columbia Under the title of the drug war. That's really for the purpose of trying to prevent Any other Hugo Chavez or Eva Moraleses being elected in Latin America. That's what that's mainly about. We announced in 2008 In November, the formation of the African command Whose purpose will be to build military bases down the east coast of Africa That is to see to it that Africa with its people and its minerals will be maintained and controlled and dominated by plantation capitalism. And by the military of the United States, it's one purpose, 800 military bases, a budget of nearly a trillion dollars, but we no president in the last 40 years has had the money To finance entirely head start for all the children of America, no Republican, no Democrat, no Congress. We have a trillion bucks being spent

now in Afghanistan, Iraq's almost a trillion, but we have no money To stop infant mortality rates in the first year of life in the United States, none that

Speaker 4 (28:45):

Represents the moral, spiritual, political bankruptcy of the powers that be in the United States, which makes us the number one enemy of peace and justice in this country of ours. The second thing I want to say about this is that from my perspective, every war that we have fought in the last 50 years has essentially been a war of racism, Essentially, a war of racism, therefore of sexism, therefore of plantation capitalism, having nothing to do whatsoever, either of the safety of the American people, of the need of the American people for the kind of life, if we want. And so the final point I want to lift up, I should just add now the United States has as at Maine ally, Western Europe, And a part of this issue is that white civilization in the world insist. And I'm gonna say it this way. We are The most important civilization that has ever existed in the human family. And we intend to preserve the prerogatives of white civilization of the last 500 years. I say this very deliberately And very con concretely, there are many symbols of this. So my final point goes like this, That we need a nonviolent direct action movement in United States

Speaker 4 (30:29):

In the 21st century, That begins on issues that relate to the American people That enables us to move again on the issues of equality, Liberty, and this for all 300 million of this people that we call the United States. It must be an inclusive, Uh, revolution Martin king in his speech, April the fourth, 1967. He essentially said that in his speech at Riverside church, It must be a revolution of politics, a revolution of morals, a revolution of our values, Uh, and the like, So I want then finally to insist That one of the things I learned from the movement of the past is that there is no other way to change this nation except through nonviolent conflict and struggle. And Those of you think that somehow there are practical effects of the gun or the bomb or the nights stick. I wanna push you hard to indicate that you must change your minds. When I say nonviolence, I'm not talking passive and I'm not talking passive resistance and I'm not talking protests primarily or agitation, nor am I talking, running a away from conflict and from difficult issues that we human beings face. Most of us raised in America in a society of violence. Do not understand that the term nonviolence did not begin until Gandhi 19 0 9, 19 0 7, 19 0 8 in South Africa. It is a 20th century word and phrase and understanding

Speaker 4 (32:37):

There are those academicians and pacifists and others who teach world nonviolence began back with Buddha or Jesus or Ashoka. And all of that, uh, has a point to it. But the point I'm making is that G not Gandhi, Moes, Kandia India, introduce nonviolence as a science of social change. That produces what it says. It's going to produce change, not change that we can make, but change that is made towards freedom and justice and community and hope He experimented with that process. It is an old concept, but never termed the concept Nonviolence

Speaker 4 (33:30):

And Gandhi introduced also a methodology that requires discipline and strategy and planning. It also requires people who are prepared to submit themselves to a discipline that makes a difference in their own lives, but also makes a difference in the way in which the movement moves and challenges our current times. So let me read for you. And that's why I brought the book up here. A wonderful discuss that has been a part of my thinking for many years, I bought this book in 1953 or 54 in India itself in NA poor India. It is, um, a conversation that was recorded in a book That was published in 43, Whose author is Mohan KA Gandhi.

Speaker 4 (34:27):

And it records how on March the 14th, 1936 in India, a man by the name of Howard Thurman and his wife Sue, and a couple by the name of Edward, uh, Carol, uh, uh, um, spent some time in India. And one of the main major things they did was to find time to have a conference with

Gandhi. And he went to him. And so let me, this is an extraordinary discussion. It almost has become for me a kind of a piece of scripture because I learned something new from it all the time as I read. So imagine this scene, maybe in ward in the Seru, um, Ashra mag Gandhi, Um, Gandhi sitting on the floor in his office, in his bedroom and, um, the Thurman and the carols sitting near him around it. And he ed, usually a secretary who did recording and this secretary recorded this conversation, Dr. Howard Thurman as is nonviolence from your point of view, a form of direct action And God replies. It is not one form. It is the only form I do not, of course, confine the words direct action to their technical meaning, but without a direct active expression of it, nonviolence to my mind is meaningless. It is the greatest. And the activist force in the world, one cannot be passively. Nonviolence. Nonviolent is a term I had to coin in order to bring out the root meaning of a hemp side.

Speaker 4 (36:09):

In spite of the negative particle non It is no negative force. It is a force which is more powerful Than electricity, More positive than electricity and more powerful than any even ether At the center of nonviolence as a force, which is self acting. Aysha means love in the polling sense. Uh, HHA includes the creation and not only human A HHA is not a, a negative force, but a force superior to all the forces put together one person who can express a HHA in life exercises, a force superior to all the forces of brutality. And then they said, come to United States, Come to America. We want you for the purpose of the problems that we face. And Dr. Thurman explained that Negroes were ready to receive the message For at Gandhi responded. Much of the peculiar background of our own life of our life in America is our own interpretation. Uh, uh, Thurman insists. When one goes through the pages of the hundreds of Negro spiritual, spiritual striking things are brought to my mind, which we remind me of all that you have told us today, Well said, Gandhi, Bidding goodbye. If it comes true, it may be through the Negroes that the adulterated message of nonviolence will delivered will be delivered to the world.

Speaker 4 (38:01):

Now, I want to say something about that because I like to insist that we black people and I see many white friends as well, But we black people in America are called to be the bridge people Between the supporters of a white civilization that has caused so much mayhem and violence in the world And between the rest of the peoples of the world

Speaker 4 (38:32):

Towards for creating a new earth and a new heaven. What I have learned from the past is this that the United States governments, its plantation capitalists are not on the right side of truth or the right side of the universe or the right side of history. Therefore can only continue to make a mess of the world can only continue to create the escalation of violence and of division and of hatred and untruth. And even to the extent that it could very well become the vehicle for the explosions that would either buy a whimper or a bang assault, the earth and the human race such as no one has ever imagined. The alternative to that in my judgment is for us to learn new ways of living in the fullness of the creative power and energy of the universe to insist that life is a gift and that gift has in it, its own powers. Those powers are not the powers of destruction and hate, but the powers of truth and healing and helping and repairing and restoring and establishing justice for all Liberty, for all community for all. So I say, if this meeting is to be a meeting of power, let it be one that indeed continues to soil. So the seeds for that nonviolent revolution that the nation needs without which this nation may be lost.