

*Civil Rights History Project  
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Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture  
and the Library of Congress, 2015*

Interviewee: Reginald Robinson

Interview Date: December 11, 2015

Location: Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Interviewer: Emilye Crosby

Videographer: John Bishop

Length: approximately 3 hours, 27 minutes

START OF RECORDING

Female 1: From the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Emilye Crosby: Good morning, this is Emilye Crosby with Mr. Reggie Robinson on December 11, 2015, at the Library of Congress with the Civil Rights History Project cosponsored by the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. And John Bishop is also with us. Good morning, Mr. Robinson.

Reggie Robinson: Good morning, y'all.

EC: It's nice to have you here. I'm so glad you agreed to participate in the project.

RR: Well, it's been an uphill struggle, as you know, but there come a time.

EC: There come a time, yeah.

RR: There come a time.

EC: I'm glad you're with us. Can you tell us when and where you were born and about your family?

RR: I was born in Baltimore, Maryland, October 2, 1939, to Leroy and Leovester, L-E-O-V-E-S-T-E-R, Robinson. My mother's maiden name was Jenkins. I had one brother--I have one brother still living who is the oldest. His name was Leroy. I had a sister named Eula Jean and she was between the two of us. So it was only three siblings.

EC: You were the baby?

RR: I was the youngest, yes.

EC: What did your parents do for a living?

RR: My dad worked at Bethlehem Steel for thirty-nine years until he retired and he died a month after he retired.

EC: Oh, that's terrible.

RR: Yes, yes. But my mother did off and on kind of housework and stuff. She didn't really go to work until I was in like first grade. Then they started hiring babysitters and then I'd go to neighbors' houses while she went out and did piecework or whatever to bring in a little bit more. I went to Dunbar High School until about the tenth and a half grades when I discovered that I didn't quite understand what French was going to do for me. [Laughter] But I was looking out the window and I knew what I could do on the streets. So the streets won. And I was doing pretty well out there until a little job that I had kind of fell apart for all kinds of reasons, and then I was frustrated because I didn't know what to do and it was all kinds of things to get into. I have a cousin by the name of Josephine Thorn who at that time was a supervisor at Social Security and she had went to

a small business college called Cortez Peters Business College. She convinced my father--well, she convinced me first--that I needed to stop doing what I was doing and do something. So she convinced my father to give me another chance and I enrolled into Cortez Peters Business College.

Now, Cortez Peters Business College was founded by a black man by the name of Cortez Peters. It was either Royal typewriter or Underwood typewriter that financed him because he could type somewhere like 150 words a minute. They advertised by having him type with an entire orchestra, but they gave him money and he established three schools, one in Washington, DC, one in Baltimore, and one in Chicago. And these schools basically was teaching blacks how to pass government tests, [5:00] teaching girls how to do shorthand, they taught guys business law, accounting, and everybody had to take typing, and learn how to make and type one of them stencils and you learned what blackout was and all of those little fancy office things.

Then in [19]60 when the students at Greensboro sat in and things broke loose there was a group that was formed in Baltimore called the Civic Interest Group. It was a student group. And at the same time the dean of my school, Walter Dixon, was also the city councilman in Baltimore who had just introduced a public accommodations bill. He kind of ordered me, I was kind of like under his thumb because he would keep telling me my daddy didn't send me there to waste money, so he kept me under his thumb until he sent me to represent our school at the big school meetings. When I got there I met a lot of people from all of the colleges in Maryland, it looked like, but Morgan was kind of like the head honcho and things. So I got involved with the sit-ins around Baltimore until I got involved--I worked my way into the group until we started moving from direct action

to voter registration where we got some money to do voter registration and at that time it was concentrated in one general area which was Clarence Mitchell Junior's area. And we raised, oh, I would think it was about thirty thousand people in a very short period of time.

So monies was coming in and money had to be accounted for and we had an advisory group and everything. So I got to be, because I knew a little bit about accounting and I had worked my way into the group, I became the treasurer of the Civic Interest Group. We did that and then at the June meeting which Clarence Mitchell went to and came back and reported that the overall SNCC group was getting ready to move towards voter registration and direct action. And also at that time Clarence's grandmother had said that the NAACP--she was president of the NAACP and she had said that she was not going to get us out of jail anymore, bails, and everything. And then Clarence had to make a decision as to whether to continue with us or go with his family. So Clarence went with his family so that seat at SNCC from Maryland became open. I opted to take the seat to get to go. I won the seat. The night before I left we were at a party and I got hit in the eye with a pretzel so before I went I had to get some eye kind of stuff done. So I had this black patch over my eye.

So my orders was from CIG because by this time everything was happening in the South. We were getting the *Student Voice* and we were in contact with all of these guys like Chuck McDew, and everything going on in Nashville and everything that's happening everywhere, we're in touch with it. So my orders were to bring the next meeting back to Baltimore and at that time King had also stepped in because he's gotten the word that we're thinking about moving on Mississippi. So him and his boys is out saying, "Y'all can't do that, you're going to get killed" and everything else. So I got to

the SNCC meeting in Louisville, Kentucky, in July [10:00] of--no, it was June. I went in June of [19]61. When I went into the meeting of course I introduced myself and of course everybody thought I got injured in battle. I didn't tell anybody. [Laughter]

EC: You're looking like a wounded warrior.

RR: So of course they moved around me very easily and we were there for the weekend so this is, I guess, Friday night we're coming in and introducing ourselves and by Saturday we're having--we had gone all through Saturday fussing and cussing and everything and so we're now at Anne Braden's house on Saturday night, but I'm still not in with the guys because they don't know who I am. I don't know if I should say it, but Clarence didn't really have a reputation of being inside the group and working. He was known to be doing other things. So I was trying to find out what was going on anyway. I was standing on Anne Braden's porch drinking a beer by myself and this little lady walks up to me and she says, "Son, I know who you are." And I says, "No, I don't know nobody in this group." And she says, "Where's your people from?" And I told her my father was from Smithfield, Virginia, and then she says, "Where's your mom from?" I said, "Littleton, North Carolina." She says, "What was your mama's middle name?" I said, "Jenkins." She said, "What was your mama's first name?" I said, "Leovester." She said, "Oh, now I know who you are. You're McKinley." I said, "No, I got an Uncle McKinley." She says, "I know. You're exactly like him." This was Miss Ella Baker. She says, "You're just like him. He worked for me in New York. And I know your cousin Overdell in Baltimore." The church I went to was involved in all kinds of Baptist kinds of connections and stuff so it was a recognized church in the Baptist conference so she would have known my aunt--damn, can't even think of my aunt's name. But anyway

my cousin Overdell and her mama was very much up in the church and so that's why she knew them, and very active in the community.

So with that happening then Miss Baker kind of smoothed a way and I became a different kind of light, I guess, to Chuck and the boys and they began to hear what I was saying until I won the next meeting back to Baltimore to discuss this whole thing of going down. In the meantime Bob has already gone to Mississippi. It's now about August, it's getting close to August. We have the meeting and one of the first things we do is we were having this big rally in Baltimore at the Masonic temple and we were going to split the proceeds with King. King was the noted speaker coming. Everybody knew he was coming to town to be with us and convinced us not to do whatever and we're going to have this big rally and everything. So before the rally started I convinced everybody, our group, that what we would do is we would open the meeting before the preachers got there and have our people deploy and we would make the collection as soon as the people sat down. So then we did that and then we split the money between SNCC and CIG. So by the time Wyatt Tee Walker and the preachers were going through their thing at the rally and Wyatt went to say, "It's time for the collection" somebody pulled Wyatt's coat and said, "The collection's been done." [Laughter] [15:00]

EC: No wonder Wyatt wasn't giving you y'all the money.

RR: So—[Break in recording] hadn't been for Dean Dixon, Miss Baker, and then I go on and do the rest.

EC: So you were telling me about having the collection before.

RR: Yeah, so we did the collection and we split the money between CIG and SNCC and of course I said what happened to Wyatt. So then we went on with the

meeting and everything and then it was decided that SNCC was going to do voter registration and direct action. Somebody had to go in and be with Bob [and this is?] Bob. Nobody was saying anything at the time so I raised my hand. I was also recognized by the time I made my report about what voter registration we did in Baltimore, they thought I was a voter registration expert. but all we did in Baltimore was have a sound truck, school buses, and went around with big music and people came out of the house, got on the buses, we took them down to Gay Street, had big long lines, had the big press out there, had hot dogs, had a big party, people signed up thousands of people and a big scene and took people back home. Party in the neighborhood. Well, they thought that I knew what I was doing.

EC: That kind of party isn't going to work in Mississippi. [Laughter]

RR: So I was elected to go Mississippi.

EC: How did you feel about that?

RR: What, going to Mississippi?

EC: Yeah.

RR: Like I said, I mean I--I had done what I could do in Baltimore, I thought.

And without going into a lot of stuff I would have probably had a lot more trouble in Baltimore than I had in Mississippi, than what I did going to Mississippi and using my energies for that than what I would have done if I stayed in Baltimore. My life was in just as much jeopardy so I chose to be productive, as I thought I was being. So then, as I'm taking off for--thinking I'm--I take off from Baltimore to Atlanta where I'm to go change trains and go to Mississippi, go to the delta and meet Bob. When I get to Atlanta I meet Ed King who was our executive director at the time and Ed meets me at the train

station really in top hat and tails. [Laughter] He had just integrated the national symphony of Atlanta that night and he had been partying all night long with the people he had done it with. So he took me to the office and sat me down and he went home and changed and then he took me around Atlanta to introduce me to the people of Atlanta and of course SCLC at that time, we were on Auburn Avenue here and King's office was right across the street. So Ed took me in and who do we meet coming in the door but Wyatt Tee and Ed says, in his jovial kind of way, "Oh, Wyatt, I'd like for you to meet our new field secretary" and Wyatt looked at me and said, "Oh, I know which one that is. That's the one from Baltimore." Of course when Ed went to someplace else and Wyatt and I had a private conversation Wyatt wanted me to work for SCLC of course, but anyway I said, "No, I'm settled."

EC: You know, they were really recruiting hard.

RR: Oh, yeah.

EC: They put out a press release that they had Moses and Marion, I think.

RR: Yeah, and Diane. And Charlie. They had everybody listed in there. But anyway where was I?

EC: After Wyatt tried to recruit you. [20:00]

RR: Then we went back to the office and stuff and Ed got the word that I was not to go to the delta but to meet Bob in McComb. So I took off from Atlanta, went to New Orleans, changed trains in New Orleans, took the Illinois Central up to McComb. At McComb I was met by George Heads who was a local cab driver. George became a very good friend of mine. And incidentally, all through this until today, I don't drive. So George took me from the train station to CC Bryant's house where Bob and CC was



waiting for me. And Bob introduced me around, I met Bob, and we talked, and I met the locals. Then I was introduced to Mr. Webb Owens who was better known as Supercool Daddy. And I was told that Supercool Daddy was the man to see for--to do everything. So Supercool Daddy and I walked on off. We went first to Mama Cotton's house on Wall Street, set up housing, set up a deal to pay her. We went to Mr. Plevis's restaurant and Miss Quinn and set up a little thing to pay them. Went down and opened up a bank account in SNCC's name in the town and an account at the stationery store where I rented a mimeograph machine and stencils and whiteout and all of the stuff. We were doing business with the city because that was part of the plans that we had thought about. I mean you do business, they kind of look at it in a different kind of way, we thought.

But anyway, we went on and we got set up over the top [Berglin?] school, over the top of the supermarket was the Masonic temple. We set up a school there where we were encouraging people to come in. We did canvassing and it was my own fears, but I was canvassing in the projects with some of the local kids and there were some workmen, I could see them in this ground, in this sewer hole, in this ground hole. They were working, they were minding their business, but they were white men. I was thinking that they knew what I was doing so I was conscious of them every moment, almost to the point that I forgot about the kids that I had with me. But that was about one of the only times that I had that kind of a fear, and they weren't even paying any attention to me. So I got over that and then we went on and we set up the school. And in the school--the law of the state was you had to interpret the constitution of Mississippi in order to register to vote. You had to be able to read it and then interpret. And the way the registrar would do it when you come down, he would take the Constitution and flip the pages and turn to

any page in the book and say, "Write that, read that" and if my interpretation is not what it's supposed to be then you've failed.

So we had to first of all teach people to read and write. We had to encourage people to come for the reasons that they were coming for. Then after we'd get them to read and write and be able to have the courage to even take the test, we had to encourage them to go down. So that's when Bob would say that we have to always stick with these people and walk with them wherever they go. And that's when we started taking them down to the registrar's office. And Bob got [25:00] beaten and later on of course Mr. Herbert Lee got killed in the cotton gin by State Representative Hurst. And that's when the kids start sitting in and the kids start doing direct action and the town got involved.

Because one of the things that I was told in one of my first training sessions was that we were not going into these cities to stay. You were going to either duplicate yourself or leave something there in order for people to hang onto or put them in touch with--put a group together that could connect with SNCC that SNCC could support any activity that's going on. But you want to go on and build something and leave something. Not to go and make a home there.

EC: Do you know where that was coming from, that way of thinking?

RR: Came from Ella. Raising from the bottom up. I mean if you're going in and thinking you know it all and you're going to stay there forever to do it you ain't passing on nothing, you ain't teaching nothing, you ain't building nothing. You're just building your own kind of whatever you're looking for. You're not giving anything to anybody. So it was always important to know that what you're doing is you're building things for somebody else to build on. So you're always working yourself out of a job.

So of course the kids got involved and they start sitting in and everything and Curtis Hayes and Hollis Watkins and Bobby Talbot, I think Brenda, a couple of others, went down to the bus station I think it was and got arrested. And again, Bob said that we had to support these kids and we also could use the PR. Like we'd leave them in for a certain amount of time and then we'd bail them out because we could use the PR and stuff. But Bob said, "Somebody's got to go and make sure that they feel comfortable in jail." And this was the first time that they had done that.

So I got elected to go and visit them in the jail. They were down in Magnolia. I got together with George Heads who said, as I got in the car, as we're driving from Pike County down to Magnolia, he pulls out a silver handled pistol and says, "Don't worry about a thing, sit tight." [Laughter] So we rode down to Magnolia and I was dressed-- and one of the things when we started with SNCC, you're always supposed to be dressed in shirt and tie. You're always supposed to be giving off another kind of image. So that day I was into my black suit looking like a lawyer or a minister or whatever and had my attaché case. I never will forget it, this old tobacco chewing guy was sitting on the side of this stairwell going up to these stairs and I walked up and he says, "Nigger, what do you want?" And I looked him dead in the eye--we were kind of like--he was sitting on a stoop kind of and I was looking him dead in the eye and I says, "My name is Reginald Robinson. I'm a field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. I'm here to see" and I pulled out my list, "And I'm here to see Curtis Hayes, Hollis [Mumbles], thank you." And he said, "You one of them northern niggers. I ought not to let you up in here."

And I didn't say anything else so then he turns and he goes and he opens this first door and the door slams behind me. He opens the second door and the door slams behind me. We go up these stairs and the door slams behind me. We go in and I finally see Curtis and Hollis and them, and they are like this. And he opens up the cell, the jailer opens up the cell and he lets me in, right? [Laughter] [30:00] And so I talk to them and get all the information and cool them down and they wondering what the hell I'm in there for. And I'm telling them what I'm there—"Just to give you support and let you know..." They say, "Well, how your black ass going to get out of here?" [Laughter] So when I got finished interviewing them and everything I turned and I said, "Jailer!" And he came and said, "What the hell you want?" And I says, "I'm ready to leave." And he opened the door. And of course everybody--each door opened and I walked back out and I went back and I made my report that everybody was fine. Called into Julian and everything was fine and everybody going to hang where they at, gave them my report, and everybody was feeling great. That's just some of the stuff that I had to do. I was mainly responsible for the upkeep of everybody. You know, making sure that the vendors were paid and stuff like that.

EC: Were you able to visit Brenda and the other girls while you were there? Did they let you see them?

RR: No, I didn't see them. We were giving out where we could.

EC: Can I go back a little bit?

RR: Sure.

EC: What were the Baltimore demonstrations like? How did that catch your interest once you got sent to that meeting?

RR: On the first part, a lot of these people that I met that was involved in the CIG were kids from west Baltimore and of course the white kids were upper class and everything else. So I was from east Baltimore so was kind of strike one. I had to do a little proving of who I was and kind of make ground and make room for myself. When I met certain people, certain things opened up for me. The demonstrations in Baltimore were really hilarious. I more or less became in charge of like coordinating the activities at some point. At the height of things, when we made the local restaurant association come into conversation, for about a two-week period we had three Renaults that we would pile anywhere from seven to eight people in each Renault and at lunchtime go to the biggest restaurants in Baltimore. And before being arrested of course they had to read you the Miranda Act so they would come, the police--we would go and shut down a restaurant, the police would walk in and read the Miranda and then if you walk out then you weren't arrested. So we would go back and get into the Renault and go to another restaurant and the police would come. So we had the police department going, we had the restaurants ( ) all up. And so finally the restaurateur says, "Let's talk to these crazy people."

Of course as some of them was getting arrested they also--and that's also when the NAACP also said that it was--the public accommodations bill was in the courts and it wasn't necessary for all of this activity to be going on. I'm only going to mention this person's name one time. His name is Mr. Little Willy Adams. He came to our rescue in terms of helping us with bond because his man, the Dixon bond bailman, was under his purview, and he came out. His wife also went to the house legislature. So he was a very political person and he was the one that continued [35:00] to support the students and the

activities. The sit-ins around Baltimore were not--nobody really got tossed around or really done in like they did in--I mean you got called names and stuff like that. I can't recall anybody really getting hurt or really being rough. When we got to South Baltimore it got a little ugly and we got into Little Italy we got a little scared, but basically Baltimore was not like going into a lunch counter in McComb or going to a lunch counter in Atlanta. When we went into the Peachtree Manor where there were ( ) and they threw us out. It's about the same.

But Baltimore was--Baltimore for me at that point was my stepping ground and how I was going to make it my way and I met and was supported by some very good people. when the voter registration activity kind of started the reason I got into a position of treasurer, which became a small stipend kind of position, was because of a Mr. Brailey, Troy Brailey, who was the union representative, AFL-CIO union representative, who it just so happens knew my father, just so happens was on this advisory committee to the students. But he was one of those people that came around and saw the little floundering somebody back there and he took me under his wing and showed me some few things. And then I wound up being okay. There was Mrs. Elizabeth Oliver who was a writer for the *Afro-American* newspaper and she was also part of the *Afro-American* newspaper family and her daughter Marsha were also a big influence in my getting ahead in things. Because they would introduce me to certain people or they would take me to certain parties.

So once I got involved and into SNCC things began to come around me and come to me that I took advantage of. and it all was a deal with the demonstrations because I became a worker for the situation and so when the guys called for who was ready to give

up school and go and do this number, this larger number, that we were talking about doing, I had no fear about signing on because it felt like I was doing the same thing I was doing in Baltimore. Not thinking the fear or the repercussions or whatever. I mean the same repercussions in Baltimore. I could have been killed, could have been locked up, could have been anything else. So Baltimore was a beginning.

EC: How did your family feel about the movement?

RR: My dad was proud. My mom--[Laughter]. Another person I'll mention that helped me a lot was a guy named Larry Steele. He used to be a stringer for *Jet* magazine and *Ebony*. Larry and I became very, very good friends. And one of the things that I had to promise my father when I signed onto this was that--of course he was big. He says, "Don't worry about me, but call your mom every other week and stuff like that." So this relationship with Larry became--Larry, on his runs coming through Baltimore and stuff, I would see Larry more than I would talk to my mom. So Larry would stop by and talk to my mom and soothe her that everything was okay and he had just talked to me and where I was and [40:00] what I was doing. So my moms was as cool as moms could be. I guess my sister was proud of me. I don't know what my brother really thought of me because I don't think he really understood what I was doing or where I was going or the chances I was taking, but what I said to him as I left was that if I survive where I'm going I'm going to be all right the rest of my life. And I ( ) look at you today and I'm pretty wealthy.

EC: So you had that foresight about what SNCC was going to be and that experience?

RR: No. I didn't have the foresight at that time, but I could fit it into what I had already done in Baltimore for about a year and the kinds of games and kinds of stuff I've seen people do and manipulations and activities. So when this opportunity came along I said what the heck, what's the worst can happen? I can make it or not. so once we got into the stuff in McComb and the kids--of course all the other activities that went on, and things and then when the kids walked out of school that particular day was the worst day ever for us because it really brought to mind that they were really down to get us. One of the things, they had a warrant out, a real warrant out, for Diane at that particular moment. So the night before that everybody was in town, all sixteen of us was in town. Bob Zellner had not gotten into McComb just yet. He was still in Atlanta begging to come in and we in McComb begging him not to come. [Laughter] Because we're singing and praying because we know what we're getting ready to face.

So finally that night he came on in. So that next day we're all up in the office. Faintly we hear in the background this sound and it's getting louder and louder and then we know what it is. So being who we are, we've always been prepared for demonstration stuff, so we broke out the signs and everything and came down and made assignments and stuff and came down on the street and met the kids and marched with them into town. Of course everybody took their positions. My position that time was to observe. I could get close enough to see what was going on and then report to Julian, to get to a telephone. And in those days to get a telephone you had to go through an operator to get out, otherwise--so I put the call in before the march started and Julian was holding. I think Charlie Jones was down at Dr. Anderson's house because Dr. Anderson, having the only



doctor's phone, could go straight out. We left Diane in the Masonic temple because we didn't want her to get caught. Everybody else took up positions and went downtown.

Well, by that time you know all hell broke loose. They jumped on Bob and they got everybody. And then things kind of moved--.

EC: It was Bob Zellner they jumped?

RR: Jumped on Bob Zellner. Then I think Moses covered him and I think McDew covered him and a couple of us covered to keep them from killing that boy. And then they pulled them off and they worked him some more. But anyway we finally got everybody out and back to Wall Street. But now in the meantime while everything is going on I'm upstairs in the Masonic temple looking down. The police come by and pick up Sharrod and Cordel. In the meantime [45:00] I see the big sergeant walking up the stairs to the Masonic temple. Inside the Masonic temple is a guy from Detroit by the name of A.G. Gaston and Diane. So I look at this back door. All of this stuff is coming to me as this sergeant, this big--I forget his name, but he's a big one and he was coming up the steps. And I looked at this black cloth at the back of the Masonic temple. I don't know nothing about the Masons, but somehow or another I thought that if we got through that black space we would be safe. So I told Diane and Gaston to come with me. We got through the black space and opened the door and where we were? On the roof.

But this cop walked all around the Masonic temple, all around, and went back out. I told Gaston, I said, "Y'all be cool." Gaston couldn't wait, he got excited, and he jumped off the roof and they caught him out on the highway. I got Diane back inside, we worked our way onto Wall Street, and as I said everybody got together. Then the decision was made that this was a little too hot for us so we could make decisions, so we

decided to go back to Atlanta. That's when we found out the next day the message on the Wall Street SNCC house, "SNCC done snuck." [Laughter]

EC: You know who done that?

RR: No, we never did. But we went back to Atlanta and gathered at [BB Beeman's?] and made the decisions as to what we were going to do. Bob, I think it was Bob Moses and Chuck McDew was going back into Mississippi. Charlie Jones and Sharrod and Cordel was going down to southwest Georgia. I was sent up to coordinate on Route 40 with CORE and then the assignments were made. While I'm working helping coordinate Route 40 with SNCC and CORE I get this call from Ruby Doris that says, "Get over to the CORE office, we've got four or five people of ours that just got into the CORE office saying that they're going somewhere to demonstrate and they ain't never demonstrated in their life" and blah, blah, blah, "Go find out what's going on."

I go over to the CORE office. There's all these people from New York. There's Faith ( ), there's--I'm probably not going to get it--Barney [Killstein?], and there's Peggy Dammond, there's Angie Butler who was doing--by Bill Hansen who had just demonstrated in Annapolis. He didn't come out of New York. And then there was a couple of local Baltimore folk. Their intentions was to go to Crestview, Maryland, sit in at the then-governor Tawes's restaurant in Crestview, Maryland. Now, this is at Christmastime [19]61. And they knew they were going to get put out so they had a theme of there was no room at the inn. [Laughter] So I'm trying to tell them, "are you all ready for this, you know, what can happen? You haven't had any training." The only one in the group that had any was Angela Butler because she was a part of the Nashville group. She had been there living in New York.

Well, we get them on buses and we go down there. We go into Crestview and we go into Governor Tawes's place. They read the Miranda Act, but they decide that [Laughter] they ain't going to treat us like they do in Baltimore. After they read the Miranda Act they locked our asses up. [Laughter]

EC: No warning?

RR: No warning. And this is the first and only time in the six years that I was with SNCC that I got locked up.

EC: Really?

RR: That's the only time [50:00] that I ever got locked up.

EC: You almost rival Julian then.

RR: Yeah. So then they take us to Princess Anne, Maryland, and then of course overnight and everything, and then Juanita Mitchell--again, the Mitchell family becomes our attorneys. In the meantime we meet Freddie St. Clair and Walter Black. Walter Black from eastern Maryland and Freddie St. Clair from Cambridge, Maryland. They are the bond bailsmen. We decide again to stay in the amount of time to get the PR and everything. I got out to do PR and went to New York and everywhere and started doing things and raising money and the rest of the stuff that we did when somebody was in, getting bail and everything, lawyers and all of that kind of stuff. In the meantime I'm knowing Freddie St. Clair. So we get everybody out and we all go to New York for Christmas, but there's discussion about what are we going to do about Cambridge or what are we going to do about the eastern shore, not necessarily Cambridge. But we had now this invitation from Freddie St. Clair to come into Cambridge and that they would support us. So we discussed this in New York over the holidays and of course we're in

touch with Atlanta and it's decided that we would go into Cambridge and take a look-see. So that's when they asked Bill Hansen to become a secretary and he went back to Cambridge with me.

Well, at first the Civic Interest Group, NAG out of Washington, all of the--let's put it this way, all of the SNCC affiliates that was in the area was asked to mobilize and come in on weekends. We used to have just weekend demonstrations in Cambridge. We continued to do that until the community started doing--getting involved in the demonstrations. Then it became, as Cambridge began to grow it became a spot and everybody wanted the spot. But again, our rule was we build, we grow, we leave. Cambridge had a very strong organization. Freddie gave up the organization early on because not only--Freddie was in business. His dad was a funeral director so he was in business so the business became much more important than being chairman of a civic organization where you've got to be going to meetings and running around. So then his cousin, Gloria Richardson, steps in. And the St. Clairs has got an old history of Cambridge where the great-great-granddaddy was the first city councilman or owned slaves there, I don't know, something like that. But they go way, way, way back. So when Gloria took over it was another kind of scene. So we had somebody to also do something about business and something about organization and stuff. So we built some other people around her that the local organization became organized enough to deal and negotiate with the National Guard and Kennedy and everything else. So I began to say, "Ruby, I think we need to back off."

Well, before we could do that the white establishment said that they were going to hold a referendum on public accommodations. Gloria said that no black folks was

going to vote for the referendum. I said, "You can't do that." She said, [55:00] "This is Cambridge, I can do anything I want to do." I says, "No, you can't because you're an affiliate of SNCC, we've got people dying in the South for voter registration, we've got people getting locked up. How does it look, an affiliate up here advocating no vote when all of this activity is going on?" She says, "I run this one." I says, "No, you may think you run it." So of course I went back to the board.

EC: When you say back to the board--?

RR: I went to the board that we had built in Cambridge and explained what I was saying and they said, "Of course we've got to vote."

EC: What was her position? Can you explain it for people who don't know?

RR: What was her position, what?

EC: On why they shouldn't vote.

RR: Because there was enough white people to vote for the referendum in order for black folks not to have to vote for it to pass. So black folks wasn't necessary, for black folks to participate in order for it to become law. Which may or may not have been--there's more registered white folks that that could have happened, but the point of it was we could not stay out of a vote no matter what the outcome would be. Whether they'd whup us or not we couldn't stay out of the vote. So of course that became a bone of contention. Then it was sort of--at that point we were getting ready to have a conference in Atlanta and Ruby asked me to stop at all of the black campuses, told Bill Hansen and I to stop at all of the black campuses. Black and white campuses, coming down to talk up the conference coming up. Now, I worked with Bill Hansen in Cambridge, Maryland.

EC: And Hansen's white.

RR: And Hansen's white. I've always felt that Hansen was hiding from his own community because if he was daring enough to do the shit that he did in our community then I'm quite sure he could have convinced some white folks to come on and understand what was going on. He had a very arrogant kind of attitude about the way he would express himself. Like when we were in New York he hadn't even really become a secretary yet, but Angela Butler at that time had become a star almost. She was on Jack Carson and she had already [been?] in the Juilliard School of Music so she was on her way so they knew people. Peggy was into drama and stuff. These kids were going places so they knew people. When we got to New York we were at a party with people like Godfrey Cambridge and Barbara Attea and even there was Sal Mineo there, but at this party somebody came to me and said, "Hey, man, you've got to get your man in check. He just caused Sal Mineo to leave." I says, "What are you talking about?" The way that he came on to him about what's going on and saying that you've got all--I mean it was just so rough till he just made the man feel bad and just left.

When we left New York going back to Cambridge there was no reason--we're going out at night going into being picked up in Cambridge at night. There was no reason for Bill Hansen to announce, or as we're getting on the bus going out of New York, where we're going and what we're going to do. When we got to Cambridge on these weekend things, when we would go to the Choptank Inn the reporters would always come to me saying, "Hey, Reg, you going to Choptank Inn with Bill Hansen?" I'd say, "Hell, no." He says, "Why not?" I said, "Even if the Choptank Inn opened tomorrow I wouldn't go in there and get nothing. Not even a carryout. But if that's what he thinks

he needs to do then that's what he need to do." And he would go in and [1:00:00] he would get hit upside the head with iron chairs and bottles get thrown through the windows and then each week he would go back and I would tell him, "That ain't necessary to do. You don't have to do that." So we would have these kind of things. So when we got to Virginia Union, Reggie Green, who's now a minister in Washington, DC, said to me, says, "Baby, if you go on to too many more of our schools you're going to lose out." I said, "What are you talking about?" And then he started talking about how Bill was. And I had been complaining to Ruby. So Ruby says, "Okay, here's what we'll do, we'll split you up. He'll go to the white campuses, you go to the black campuses." So we split up. So I then went on to Livingston College and other colleges to talk up the conference.

I went from Atlanta to Selma. I think the guy's name was Johnson or something like that. Anyway he was a young minister, he was a young divinity student. He smuggled me on campus and I stayed on campus for maybe about two weeks before they found me. I moved around the city and did a report. I'm sorry we can't find it.

EC: We'll find it some time, I know we will.

RR: And I did all of the topographical stuff about the Air Force being there, the economy, and met--and what was important was I met twelve ministers and we called them the Twelve High. I also met Mrs. Boynton while I was there. So I made my report and then I went on to the other colleges and then after our conference in making new assignment it was decided that Bernard Lafayette would go to Selma because of these twelve ministers. Because him being a young minister, he would relate better to what

we've established as the leadership. So him and [Colya?] I think went on in there and that's when the other activities began to happen.

EC: I had no idea there was a ministerial connection, but that makes a lot of sense.

RR: Yeah, that's how it happened. We used to meet at a joint called the Chicken Shack.

EC: In Selma?

RR: In Selma and then I'd sneak back on campus. [Laughter]

EC: Let me go back and ask you a couple of things. So in McComb you referenced Bob Zellner and you all not wanting him to come and him wanting to come and then he got jumped. Not everybody is going to have that picture of Bob Zellner. Can you explain what the issue was with him for people who don't know?

RR: We weren't too sure what was going down, but we knew from other experiences that if we had a white boy up on the smudge it was going to be a lot rougher than what it was going to be. So we were trying to keep the roughness down, but Bob was insisting of course his position as being a part of us and he wanted to be there. And we don't quite want our asses kicked this bad this time. And that was the same kind of thing that I go back with Bill Hansen. I mean but Bob Zellner was far different than Bill Hansen. I mean Bob was a person that was very interested in talking and moving with his community. He was not trying to hide. And his credentials was much different than Bill Hansen's. He was not trying to hide. But the only thing was at that point in time we just felt as though it would have been a lot easier on the situation if he did not come. But



now, by his being there really pushed the envelope because it aggravated the policemen and they saw this white boy up in there and they just couldn't [1:05:00] help themselves.

EC: I've heard him say they were like pulling his eyes out.

RR: Oh, yeah, they wanted to kill him. They wanted to do him in. So that was the only thing, we were just trying to keep it from being as rough as it was.

EC: How did you all deal with the fact--I mean you all are young people and you go into McComb and then what is it, within like a month Mr. Lee was murdered by the legislator? How did you all cope with that?

RR: When we first heard about it that was our first experience with realities of stuff that we had done. Our first reaction was to run, but then we had a long conversation with Amzie Moore and Amzie Moore pointed out that one of the things that we had to do was to show that, again, that we were not afraid and that we were in support of what we're talking about doing. It's the same thing of going down and seeing the kids in jail. So Amzie suggested that the funeral become a mass meeting and that we do the mass meeting. If I remember right, Bob and McDew were on the platforms talking, Sharrod and Jones were just milling in the crowd, and I had the assignment of taking a picture of Mr. Fred Allen who I didn't know but Doc Anderson knew. And I had to walk with Doc Anderson until he spotted Allen and then as I pointed the camera to Mr. Allen, Mr. Allen almost took my head off, but we got this picture. But later on of course Mr. Allen was killed. But our position, our first position, was of course to run because we were looking at death ourselves. But then Amzie convinced us that we had to stay. And that was the same kind of position we did--I guess when we got together and went back to Atlanta it

was so devastating and we were so strung apart we couldn't put ourselves together there in McComb. We had to get stretched out.

And that's when Big Jim came into play. That's when we really started organizing and SNCC became a little more organized. I mean we had somebody to answer to. I mean Ruby was a commando and you could call Ruby and you could get the right connections about doing things. You weren't afraid of being--I traveled a lot on my own. I wasn't afraid of not ever being connected with my home base. I was never afraid of being caught out there and not being covered. But then when Big Jim came in things started to organize a little better and then you saw yourself moving in a different kind of direction. And then I began to be used in different kinds of ways.

EC: When Ruby's playing that role she's actually still a student, right? At Spelman?

RR: Just about. And she's sitting on a WATS line and she's giving directions and moving us around and stuff, yeah.

EC: And Big Jim, you're talking about Jim Forman?

RR: Jim Forman of course. For people who don't know can you talk about Amzie Moore and who he was and his role?

RR: Amzie Moore was an old post office person. First of all he was in the military and he was a soldier and he came home. Of course all of the stuff that he met in Mississippi he couldn't deal with. He was a postal worker and he still wasn't getting satisfaction. He became involved with the NAACP. He was just a person that continued to try and find his freedom where he lived. And he was [1:10:00] a person who was unafraid of the possibilities of his actions. He just went on and did what he thought was

necessary to be done. And what he did was he hooked up with other people of the same like and began to organize and do things. So when the idea of--when him and Bob talked and the idea of us coming in and doing things, they thought about Baltimore County might have been a little rougher to get started in than a place like McComb where there was other possibilities and other resources. Because all of these guys, Amzie Moore and CC Bryant and old Supercool Daddy, all of these men within the state knew each other. Aaron Henry and all of these people. So we weren't walking into anything new. We were walking into something that was already built. It just needed a little, I guess, workers.

And so when Bob went in and then they decided that the plan was to go to McComb, even after that Amzie continued to be an advisor of how to go about doing things and where to go and what to do and what to say and just gave us the skinny on Mississippi and how to conduct yourself and how to protect yourself. And he was a tall man.

EC: I know that you mentioned you were the first person to join Bob Moses in McComb. Am I remembering right, did the house you all were staying at or that you were staying at one point get bombed?

RR: Later on after we left.

EC: That was later on?

RR: I think it was after we left.

EC: Can you tell us about it?

RR: No, because I was gone.

EC: You were gone?

RR: I was gone then.

EC: All right, I'll have to figure that one out. You've already described that you were involved in the sit-ins in Baltimore and also voter registration and you mentioned SNCC was debating the two of them in that summer of [19]61. Can you talk about what that debate was about and what you thought?

RR: At the time I wasn't too sure as to what the debate was all about because as I looked at direct action we were going into lunch counters and the other places, going into stores, trying on clothes, and being more direct about what we're seeing is not happening. Well, in the same sense that if you're dealing with voter registration and you attempt to register to vote they're going to hit you in the head so I don't know how more direct does that get. So I didn't really see the difference in whether I was operating on voter registration or operating on direct action. When I had left McComb and started dealing with Cambridge, Cambridge was more dealing with accommodations and direct action, but it was a lot more intense than what I was doing in Mississippi because I didn't have to put up with the National Guard in Mississippi. That was somebody else that had to deal with that in Mississippi. But in confronting Bobby Kennedy in Mississippi was the same as confronting Bobby Kennedy in McComb and Cambridge, Maryland, where in Cambridge, Maryland, after a meeting he says--he was handing out, there was little PT line boats that his brother used to run, there were tie clips, so he said to me, he says, "I would give you one but you don't wear a tie." I says, "You white folks been hanging me long enough, I ain't going to wear no tie for you to get me." [Laughter] And he turned red of course.

But you know, he says, "I remember John Doar talking about you from Mississippi." Well, that's all right, who I am, [1:15:00] we meet again. This time we met in person when it was in Cambridge, but he had heard about me in McComb through John Doar. Well, one night in Mississippi, Bob had taken this guy down to register to vote and then he didn't register, but we needed an affidavit. So we had to go out to his house to get the affidavit. There was Bob Moses, John Doar, Marion Barry, and me, and George Heads. We went out to this guy's house in this open field and George says of course, "Y'all wait till I give the word that I got him, that he comes out." Because the old man was sitting there with his shotgun so then when he realized who we were he cut the light on. You've been in Mississippi?

EC: I was raised in Mississippi.

RR: You when there ain't nothing around--it's like one of these up over top of you and you sitting and ain't nothing out there but darkness. We sat there and talked with this man for I don't know how many hours to convince him to give us an affidavit. One of the things that the man said to us was, "I'm really afraid because you never know what these white folks going to do. You never know where they at. They might be out there in the darkness or you go out there to your cow and they turn green and they jump on you." For years Marion and I, every time we would see each other, we would greet each other with, "Watch out, the white folks might turn green." [Laughter]

But to just demonstrate between Mississippi and Cambridge, I mean I was still dealing with the justice department on the one hand and then another story about John Doar was when John Hardy, who was the second person that came into Mississippi, came in to work with Bob there were some people down in Tylertown and he went to work

with the people in Tylertown and he got locked up. Well, they beat John pretty bad and when John saw John Doar coming in to the cell block or somewhere he kind of reached out for him and John Doar kind of gave the hint about you don't know me. And then later on of course John spoke with him and got whatever necessary--John Hardy was very, very hurt that he was snubbed by--but John Doar became a good friend, I mean over the years. We did a lot of stuff together. He even showed up in Cambridge again because when things got hot there was a guy in the justice department by the name of Hubbard that went to school with Pop Herb and Pop Herb St. Clair went to Lincoln and old man Hubbard was in the justice department. So John Doar brought Mr. Hubbard in to Cambridge to talk to Pop Herb to see if he could get things calmed down and if you would have known Pop Herb every second word with Pop Herb was, "You pig fucker."

[Laughter]

EC: So that didn't go too well. [Laughter]

RR: So we had relationships with the justice department in different kinds of ways. So the work in Mississippi and the work in Maryland didn't differ but so much. But I guess they both had the same dangers as it always had and anywhere that I went--when the voter education project came up, the VEP project came up, I had worked a couple of other projects before this, but after Mississippi and Alabama and everybody got the money there was a little puny piece of money left [1:20:00] for a project in Orangeburg, South Carolina. So we had been wanting to get back in Orangeburg to check it out and see what's going on, but the people of Orangeburg, the NAACP and all of the adult folks, saying, "We don't want none of them SNCC people in here." This is before Cleve gets shot and everything else. But they said--and Randy Blackwell, who

was working with VEP at the time who was also a professor in the HBC kind of situation, he got together, I think, with Dr. Thomas at South Carolina State and then they worked out a situation where I would come--where SNCC would come in and it would take the voter registration list that they had and the captains that they had in their organization and put the captains with the voting people in the list so that on election day this captain would know everybody that votes. Before computers. So this captain would know everybody in his precinct then these people would be broken down in precinct and these are your eligible voters. So they promise that we would come in and do that and do that only. [Laughter]

EC: They really thought they could make that deal?

RR: And they also wanted the money to come in from VEP.

EC: Sure they did.

RR: Because State would get a little piece, NAACP would get a little piece of it, but they had to take us in this thing. So I wound up going all over the state before I could get this job done. I had to even go down to Charleston, South Carolina to talk to the president, Mr. Charlie Brown, and all of the people of the NAACP of Orangeburg and the advisory council. I mean it was just a hodgepodge of stuff. So we set up this little house and we started going to work, but of course I recruited a couple of students to come over and help out.

EC: Of course you did.

RR: And in the meantime found out that there was a problem with the cafeteria and at the time there was a guy named Pete Bryant who was our representative from South Carolina to SNCC. And of course I mean I couldn't be a SNCC representative in

town without conversing with Pete. I was never seen on Claflin campus or State's campus. I could go to State's campus because I could meet with Dr. Thomas, but I couldn't be seen on Claflin's campus because there was nobody I was supposed to be seeing there. But one day somehow or another the cafeteria just broke out. Somehow or another they had a demonstration. I was not even in town. [Laughter]

EC: You had your alibi.

RR: I was nowhere in sight, nowhere around. Came back a couple of days later, but anyway. Those are just some of the things. And then I hooked up with--they sent me in to work with the northern student movement. Dottie Burlage had a project in Raleigh out of the northern student movement and they sent me in to kind of support her on her situation.

EC: Did you know Jane Stembridge?

RR: Jane Stembridge, I knew her for a very short period of time.

EC: She worked on that project, didn't she, in Raleigh?

RR: But she came later.

EC: You mentioned the National Guard in Cambridge. Can you talk about what they were doing in there and how that worked?

RR: By the time the city, the local folk, took over they had really closed the town down and I think the mayor of the city got terribly upset [1:25:00] and he felt as though the state police was not doing what it was supposed to be doing. And of course being the eastern shore of Maryland and the Tawes and all of the Watermen, the eastern shore has a very big influence on the state of Maryland. So then it was decided that I guess it was getting completely out of hand, that they would send in the National Guard



to squall this situation. They sent down a general by the name of George Gelston and George became--George actually became an ally because we would have meetings, me, him, Gloria, Fred [Ricegow?] who was one of our lawyers, we would have meetings in Baltimore at Fred Ricegow's house about strategies of what we were going to do. The Guard was in there to squell [*sic*] things and I kept telling George that that was not going to do it, that it was only going to make things worse.

One of the things that happened between George and I is that after we got up some kind of relationship he said to me, he says, "You know, you're a very interesting person. I'd like to have you as an officer." I said, "George, I can't be no officer. I can't even be in your Army." He says, "Oh, come on, what you talking about?" He says, "What's your status?" I said, "What do you mean, my, status?" He said, "What's your civil service?" I say I'm 4-F. He said, "You're 4-F?" I said yep. He says, "How'd you get to be 4-F?" I says, "I'm mentally incompetent." [Laughter] He says, "Come on, you know who you're talking to?" I said, "I'm talking to the adjutant general of the Maryland National Guard." He said, "You know I can check you out." I said, "Go ahead. That's your prerogative to do that." He said, "4-F?" So he let it go. So a few meetings later he says, "You did that, didn't you?" I said, "I did what?" He says, "You are really 4-F and you're mentally incompetent." I said, "I told you. You didn't believe me?" He says, "If you don't mind could you tell me what happened?"

I said, "I went down to your Army and there was this sergeant and this sergeant put these boards in front of me and he said, 'These are ink blots, tell me what you see.' I said ink blots. The sergeant said, 'No, you look in them and these are ink blots, you look in them and you see something in them. Tell me what you see.' I said, 'I see ink blots.'

So the sergeant says, 'No, you don't understand.' I said, 'Yes, I do. If I'm going to be in your Army and you tell me that they're ink blots I'm going to believe that they're ink blots.' Incompetent."

EC: Incompetent or hardheaded. [Laughter]

RR: So George said, "I don't know how you did it." I said, "Let's go past that, George." So we would do things like George would say, "Reg, don't have a demonstration this time." I said, "George, I got to, we're pushed against a wall." He says, "If you've got to do it let's go down to this certain point, you kneel and pray and then I'll hold my boys off. You kneel and do your little thing and then you go on back." We did that a couple times, right? And things went well. But one time we did it and George was out of town. His next in charge was Colonel Tawes, the nephew of the governor. We get to the point where we're going to stop and pray, Cliff Vaughns, one of [1:30:00] our most distinguished people, decided that he's going to charge these young white fixed bayonets eastern shore crackers. They grab him and going to stab him, all hell breaks loose, they shoot tear gas, mustard gas that night, all over the town, especially the black town, black section of town. All over everywhere. So of course Stokely and several other people got arrested that night. I was helping people with the--Danny [Lyons?] has a picture of me helping a couple of people who got shot with canisters.

But anyway I then went and with the doctor and finally got Stokely and everybody out of jail and things settled down again. And then we went into negotiations again with the National Guard. We negotiated on the basis that there was no blacks in the National Guard and there was an offensive kind of attitude towards them. So a few weeks after that then this guy named Boxer, I think he was Colonel, he came down as

George's second in command and he was a black guy out of Baltimore. So then they integrated the National Guard. so then the National Guard became sent back as an observer of the negotiating team and we began to negotiate with the city and with the-- that's when Bobby Kennedy started coming in a little more. And so that's my estimation of George. But George played a very vital role in keeping things together because before he came in there was going to be a clash between the black and white community. And everybody knows that everybody down there is a hunter and nobody was really afraid of nobody down there once the word was out and it was very difficult to keep a cap on things because at one point in time there was this open field that buttressed the black and white community and one night the white folks was trying to come across the field and open fire and fire was returned and we didn't have that no more. One night you could hear the car start as it came around Race Street and started at the end and raced up the street and you could hear shots going off. And it goes up and you can hear it spin around and as it came back you could hear the open fire, but you heard fire returned. You could hear that motor going on out of town. So it was becoming very, very dangerous because there was nothing in between to stop that from really happening except that the Guard was there to hold back the situation which allowed that talking to happen.

At that time, and also in Cambridge, we made a lot of promises and a slowdown on things because, I'm not criticizing Mr. Weaver who was at the HUD department, but a lot of promises was made that was going to come into Cambridge. Gloria was made a lot of promises of things that was going to happen that I don't even know whether they've happened today, but they did give a lot of concession. And the community still is a very strong community and that was our purpose was to leave a strong community.

EC: I've heard people say that Cambridge in many ways was more like the organizing in the north after the Voting Rights Act as opposed to like the delta. You know, that the issues were more like the ones that happened later. Does that make sense to you? That it was more like about jobs and access as opposed to--?

RR: That's where it came from, from the beginning. It was sort of like the march on Washington was about jobs. I mean jobs were leaving from down there, folks had to go as far away as Delaware to work. [1:35:00] There was several factories that had closed. The Campbell factory had closed down there and the Watermen were not really functioning. And black Watermen weren't making a lot of money. So the job situation was poor. The school situation was terrible. And everything that you could probably name would be in the mix.

EC: You've talked about this a little bit, but can you describe what kind of person Gloria Richardson was, what kind of leader?

RR: Gloria was [Pause] I don't want to say a charismatic leader, but she followed orders to a certain degree in the beginning. She had a sense of leadership coming from the people that she was--as far as I knew she was listening to what was demands coming out of her board. Because she would meet with her board and her board would give her directions as to what to go on, but then somewhere in this life I guess she took on another kind of thing when she started running with people like Jesse out of New York--I can't think of Jesse's name now, but the whole ACT group. And she earned her name correctly and I think she's--in recent years she may have gotten a few things out of kilter, but I think without her taking over from her cousin and the name of St. Clair being

what it was, that's what made the Cambridge movement what it was. And she deserves every bit of accolades and support for her activities for building such an organization.

EC: You've mentioned this a little bit too, but can you say more about what the position was of the NAACP in Baltimore and the conflict between the students and the NAACP?

RR: That was very basic because once we had gone and sat in and we had a number of cases in court their position was we've got this in court, the same as what their position has always been. We've got this in court now so there's no need of spending any money of you kids going out there doing these things and make us spend money to get you out of jail. Our position was we had to push the envelope because you've been sitting on the court action and if the court action ain't happening then some kind of action's got to happen to make the court action happen. So we said we're going to go ahead on. So I would imagine that they thought that we were finished and then Mr. Adams came along and gave us life again. And then the other supporters came along and we began to move again and we were able to do the things we were doing. But as I said, in the beginning I didn't know that what we were doing was building Clarence's ward to run back there then. But that was the first part of the voter registration activity. Then it spread out.

EC: When did he run?

RR: I forgot. I think it was [19]63, [19]62, or something like that.

EC: That early?

RR: That early, yeah.

EC: Was Norma Collins part of that Baltimore student movement?

RR: Yeah.

EC: Do you know how she went from that to the SNCC office?

RR: I had a little something to do with it. Of course when the group came back to Baltimore [1:40:00] for the meeting--.

EC: In [19]61?

RR: That's when they started meeting everybody and that's when Norma met folks. And Norma began to find her way to do things and then Norma signed on to go to Atlanta to work. And before I knew it she was in and rolling.

EC: I think Julian told me that his early memories are him and Norma and Forman and maybe John Hardy and that they could all barely fit at the same time in the office. Does that sound right?

RR: That sounds right. It was a very small office. [Laughter]

EC: Did she come out of Morgan?

RR: I don't know whether Norma came out of Morgan or not. I don't know exactly. All I remember was that she was like secretary to Clarence Logan who we called Skip. She was very tight with Clarence. The leaders at that time was Clarence Logan and Phil Savage who was heading the voter registration stuff, but then [Lavinne?] West was the Morgan president. Just how Norma--I think Norma came with Skip because things became organized once we started doing the voter registration. There was records to be kept and things to be done so it was necessary for a secretary at that time.

EC: Did you know August Meier?

RR: Yes. Yes, I knew Augie Meier.

EC: He's got a bunch of papers over at Schomburg and so if you can read his handwriting he's got all these notes.

RR: Yes, I was at his funeral.

EC: Were you? Sounded like he played a role in advising some of the students.

RR: He was one of the people, I would say, that was a part of the advisory group. There was an adult group that was attached to SNCC and Augie being a teacher out at Morgan was close to the students. And then there was people like Reverend Bascomb and the Reverend Vernon Dobson and Reverend Frank Williams, Juanita Mitchell, Katherine Adams.

EC: And these were all the adults?

RR: These were all the kind of adult advisors. And when any and everything would go down in any major kind of way they would have something to say or some advice to give. Wasn't always taken. Like we would use Bascomb's church a lot. I had to report to Miss Adams as the secretary. She was secretary to the advisory group so all my records had to be cleared through her to get more money to do whatever. But Augie was just an advisor to the group. He was one of them adult kind of people.

EC: Were you at the march on Washington?

RR: Yes, I was.

EC: What was your role for that?

RR: Just to show up.

EC: Just to show up? You didn't have to coordinate a group or anything?

RR: No. Didn't have to do nothing, just find my group and just be with them.

EC: What do you remember from that day?

RR: Singing and eating good food and just having a good time that day. I ain't paid too much to the speaking because I got pissed off because they had already bumped us, what we wanted to say. So I wasn't [1:45:00] too interested in nothing what anybody else had to say.

EC: So what did you think about that whole thing about changing the speech?

RR: I thought it was like it is today, the powers win. If you want to be in the game you've got to play by their rules.

EC: Play the game. So did you have anything to do with recruiting Judy Richardson into SNCC?

RR: [Laughter] No, I didn't recruit Judy. Little sis just kind of emerged. She was one of them people that came down as one of the first busloads of students that came down to demonstrate on weekends. And somehow or another she kind of stuck. And then I looked around one day at who I had on my right side and on my left side and she was just doing things and we were just moving along and things were happening and she was useful. And then the next thing I knew we were heading on out and I was headed to Atlanta and she was headed right with me. and then I think we went to Bill Hansen's wedding and from there we went to Atlanta and that's when she ran into the big folks and there she stayed and there she's been ever since.

EC: She said Forman wasn't going to let her leave to go back.

RR: Not when she could type like she did. [Laughter] Because they were looking for people to sit on that WATS line when them reports came through, somebody that could take it all down. I can't really say that I'm responsible for little sis. She just happened to come along and latch on and we just went on through.



EC: Did a lot of people do that?

RR: What, latch onto me?

EC: Yeah.

RR: Nah, I can't think of any. Well, maybe a few. But she was one that we just kind of bonded and went on. McDew and I are very, very close and Bob Vance and I were very close, Karen Spellman and I were very close.

EC: When did Karen come in to the movement?

RR: She was with NAG.

EC: NAG brought a lot of people.

RR: At that point in time it was NAG and then there was Nashville. They had several hubs. There was Atlanta and there was a lot of competition between these folk too.

EC: Can you talk about that?

RR: Well, I mean--[Laughter]. There was the leadership and who was going to be and who was not going to be, who was going to follow true nonviolence, who was nonviolent and who wasn't nonviolent. You take a fellow like McDew who comes from Massillon, Ohio, you can't really convert him into nonviolence. You might get him to understand a position. A Bernard Lafayette with his kind of divinity kind of feeling could, I guess, absolve what Jim Lawson was saying in such a different manner even though McDew had known also Jim Lawson as well.

EC: And think about them both coming from Massillon.

RR: That's right, but McDew as a person is a totally different character than Bernard Lafayette, but they both could come together under the nonviolent banner and move situations and make things happen.

EC: You didn't go to the meeting in October [19]60 in Atlanta, the SNCC, sort of the second big meeting? That would have been--was that before you had that leadership role in Baltimore?

RR: I didn't get there until, I didn't get involved until [19]61.

EC: Do you have a sense of why McDew kept getting reelected as chair? What it was that people wanted about him?

RR: As far as I knew [1:50:00] he had the kind of [Laughter] he had the kind of command of loyalties. I mean when him and I really got to know each other we had certain things in common. So I took him on as my chairman. With me it was the kind of attitude, this is the chairman, he says what goes on. The same thing happened when Jim became the executive director. Whatever the boss say do, you got to go and do this. But with McDew and I, we became more or less close brothers. [Pause] I really don't know where to go with this one.

EC: You know, partly I was interested just because--I've heard about the competition and some people saying that the SNCC office was in Atlanta because Nashville got the first chair and then questions about whether Diane Nash should have been chair or Marion Barry. And McDew says that he became chair in part because Ella Baker picked him out because he wasn't lobbying for it and that that was a factor.

RR: That's kind of what it was. He didn't want it. And there was too much competition between the schools being the schools that they are and they became a school

competition and that's what Ella saw was this competition between them and nothing was going to happen of what she was talking about us going out and doing. But Dew was kind of outside of that and he was not a part of them so he could bring them together. So I guess--well, that's always been his explanation about it and he's also kind of been outside of them. I mean he kind of says until I came along I was the only other outsider because I didn't come from any of the traditional pieces so he could use me. We became allies about things and doing things. So yeah, I mean they had heavy competition going on, heavy.

EC: So it's interesting because I'm trying to think, out of the first group, the first sixteen, were you and Chuck the only two that weren't deep south?

RR: Chuck was deep south. Chuck was South Carolina.

EC: I was just thinking about where he grew up.

RR: Oh, where he grew up, I see. [Pause] I can't think of who was--Paul Brooks was out of Chicago and I think his wife Gwen was out of Chicago or somewhere. Diane was out of Chicago.

EC: That's right. What was Paul Brooks like?

RR: A very straitlaced kind of person. Very matter of fact and academia, you know, one of them kind of straight guys. [Break in recording]

EC: What was Diane Nash like when you met her?

RR: If you can imagine my walking into a hotel conference room for the first time and I don't know who they are except for their quick faces, but I've seen them in the *Student Voice* and there's my seat and my seat is right across from Diane. And I'm looking her right straight in the face with my patch over my eye [1:55:00] and I've never

seen such a beautiful woman and I'm paying more attention to--I ain't paying attention to nobody else around me. And later on after I meet Connie Curry, Connie taps me on the shoulder and says, "That's a very interesting doodle you have going on there." I said, "What do you mean?" She says, "I saw you doodling you and Diane with your little heart." And I hadn't realized I was sitting there doodling Diane and a heart and everything. She's just a gorgeous woman. So then as I began to meet people and understand what their role was in different kinds of ways I began to formulate what I wanted to do before Ella came on over because I didn't know how I was going to accomplish what I was going to accomplish. And then of course when Ella kind of took me and then it became a little more open.

I began to talk with Diane and became friends and everything. It was very interesting when the kids got out of school and there was the big warrant out on her. My responsibility, not only of observing what was going on, was to protect Diane and make sure that she didn't get picked up. And then over the years we've been good friends. But yes, Diane was--ooh, lord, one of the prettiest women I've ever seen.

EC: What did you think of the position she took the next summer when she was pregnant and said that she would go to jail in Mississippi? You remember that?

RR: Oh, yeah. I just thought Diane was just a brave woman. You just go and do anything necessary to be done. I mean this is a remarkable woman. She also reminded me of another woman that I met in South Carolina by the name of Grace Brooks who was a teacher at South Carolina State and was also this same kind of very beautiful--and Grace finally left South Carolina State and joined the Free Southern Theater and acted in that. And that was the way that she wanted to give to whatever she

could do. And then there was the people that came around--I had it on the tip of my tongue. Anyway she'll come back to me. She married Bill Withers. She became very-- anyway we had some very beautiful women in the movement and I've tried to always support them in whatever it is that they want to do. I mean I of course didn't want to see Diane go in like that and I never wanted to see her get hurt or any of the sisters to get hurt, but if one of the sisters wanted to make a decision about doing something I was there to back them up.

Because one of the things that that I really learned in the movement, there were some very, very beautiful, strong sisters. And beautiful, I mean not only in the facial features of Diane, but in all of the other ways that beauty can be stored. I mean Judy is a wonderful person. Bobbie Yancy, when we first learned how to raise money we were put before a group that made us cry about how you had to do this kind of stuff, but she still did it. Shirley Wright Cooks, who came down and was working in the movement. And of course there was nobody like Ruby Doris, nobody like Big Mama. And then there was Jessie Johnson who took care of us with the money and stuff and made sure we were okay. There was Connie Curry and [2:00:00] Casey Hayden and all of these people were--Casey we also thought was like a movie star. Casey was a beautiful gal.

EC: She seems like she must have been one of those really charismatic people?

RR: Oh, yeah. And so the women that came along, the Jean Willis Smiths and the Brenda Traverses and Mrs. Cotton who we were talking about, nobody really knew but lived in a whorehouse.

EC: You say you didn't know?

RR: At the time we didn't know it was in a warehouse, but we were just anxious--we were glad to have some place to stay and nobody else was ready to take us in. Until we got to moving around and meeting people. But that was okay. [Laughter]

EC: She took good care of you?

RR: Took good care of us. And a lot of places, like in Cambridge it wasn't until, I'm going to say the underworld came in to understanding what was happening in Cambridge did the local community really--it was the guys that they always been putting in jail that started going on demonstrations. There was the guys that hung in the pool room that started to come in out of the pool room. So they made the change and then the respectable folks got together and said, "Yeah, we'll make this board because we've got to keep things going" and then things began to operate around. But it was the underworld.

EC: Why do you think they came out first?

RR: Because they were unafraid. They were more unafraid than the rest of these folks. What did they have to lose? They thought they were gaining.

EC: Do you think they're happy with how it came out?

RR: I can't say that because I haven't been in Cambridge in quite some time and understand there's a few statues around, but I don't know how well people are eating, I don't know what the housing situation is, I don't know whether we own any businesses. I don't think Pine Street is up again. I mean there used to be several businesses, black businesses, on Pine Street. I don't know that there's any businesses. I don't know what's going on so I can't say that people are happy. I know the people in Mississippi ain't happy. I mean they've got more black elected officials in Mississippi than any state in the country and it's still the poorest state in the country. Black folks don't own any

production companies. I understand Nissan just went back into Canton. It seems like to me with the types of money that's been reported in the black community, it seems like we can get some kind of institution, financial institution, on a corner and start building maybe a laundromat or general store. Everybody ain't got to go out to Walmart. I mean everybody can't get to Walmart. I mean just go back to the old general store. Have a filling station on the corner, have a restaurant where folks can come in off the road or in town, and have some kind of institution, financial institution, that sits there on that corner, regulates the business, makes sure that money moves around in that community, and then moves out. I don't understand all the stock exchange and everything, but I know that when you got money moving around this way and you've got money moving over here and coming back to you, that you can then go out, you can sit at the big poker game and afford to play. You can't sit at the poker game if the stakes is a thousand dollars and you ain't got but twenty-five cent. You ain't going too goddamn far.

EC: Not far at all.

RR: So I would like to see some of our black businessmen take [2:05:00] the chance of putting some money together, taking one of these small towns, putting a financial institution on the corner, I don't care what you call it, but that financial institution will allow you to open a Laundromat. Everybody got to wash their drawers. Then I understand that these tools that are used to make computers are done in such a fine fashion that you don't need a PhD to put the circuits together. You just need a little training and you can do a decent job. This kind of financial institution could bring in a company in a place like Greenwood, Mississippi. Put up a factory, put up a restaurant, put up a Laundromat, and let that money spread around in that community. Before you

know it you start building houses. I ain't got no money. If I had some money I'd do it. I ain't had no money since they paid me [964?][1964?].

EC: SNCC's salary?

RR: SNCC's salary. I ain't had no money since then and still ain't got none, but I'm very rich. But that's what I would like to see coming out of this. Because we done all we could with voter registration. We got people hopped up on voter registration and from what I can see, and it might sound a little awkward, but the vote has taken us a little way but we've got to get out there and we've got to find some way to do it economically. And then we can control who's in the Congress and we can control who's in the Senate. We can back the boys in there and we can then say, "You don't go back no more if you don't do so and so." We can't do that because we don't pay for them.

EC: I know you worked in, was it, Buttermilk Bottom in Atlanta?

RR: Eh, I was there for a little while.

EC: Were you involved at all in Julian's campaign?

RR: No. I was involved in John's first campaign.

EC: When he ran against Julian?

RR: Yeah.

EC: In the [19]80s?

RR: Yeah.

EC: When he got elected.

RR: No, that was--he ran two times, didn't he?

EC: I'm not sure.



RR: He wasn't running against Julian when we went down. I think we went the first time and he wasn't running against Julian at that time because Marion and all of us got a motorcade together and went to help him out.

EC: I'm not sure of the details of some of that.

RR: Because we wouldn't have went if he was against Julian. So it was probably the first time.

EC: Part of the reason I asked is, I'm jumping ahead a little bit, but sort of as people left SNCC they did a lot of different kinds of work that in many ways seemed like a continuation. So just Judy as an example got involved with Drum and Spear Bookstore. And some of the people were working in Lowndes on elections. Like when Bob Vance moved to Lowndes, do you know? He was in that first group that went in and started organizing, wasn't he?

RR: He was.

EC: So what did you do as you came out of SNCC?

RR: Let's see. I left SNCC in [19]65, December [19]65. McDew was here in DC and he was director of United Planning Organization center number one and he brought me on as his second in command in the center. We ran that center for about a year before politically we got put out. Then after that Ed Brown--.

EC: Rap's big brother?

RR: Big bro. Ed Brown asked me to come back to Mississippi and [2:10:00] work for the Child Development Group of Mississippi. I went in as the social service director. I worked there as social service director until I got put out of there.

EC: You had a habit.

RR: They were in the process of breaking up CDGM and we were at this meeting with one of Senator Stennis's people and this man just kept--every time he got ready to say something he would preface it with, "Can I say something, you boys?" "You boys" and "Can I tell you boys?" So finally I asked him, I says, "Can I ask you a question?" I said, "Why is that every time you get ready to say something to us you've got to put some preface on it about you boys? Ain't a damn boy in this room." Well, you know what happened after that. I lost my job because you don't talk to white men in Mississippi that way and you don't talk to Stennis's man that way. So I got fired again. [Laughter]

So then Noel Day who was married to Peggy Dammond was part of an organization called OSTI, the Organization for Social and Technical Innovation.

EC: That's a mouthful.

RR: It was and they were full of shit too. Noel brought me in because they were dealing with a lot of housing situations and they were dealing with a lot of community people and involved in--the first project was Detroit and was working with the Free Detroit Committee and the Free Detroit Committee was getting ready to take over the east side and there was this community lady that was blocking them from doing it and they didn't have nobody that was going up in there talking to this lady knowing what she was going on. So that was the first time I got caught up into going into the black community and reporting back. After that project I went on--Noel had talked to Kaiser and Gypsum out in Oakland, California. He had convinced Kaiser Cement and Gypsum to work with the Panthers [Laughter] to acquisition a piece of land called Acorn in east Oakland. They were going from acquisition to building--acquisition, planning,

building, managing, all of this and it was based on a forty year plan, but they didn't have nobody to get to the Panthers.

So Noel had me to come out and of course find a way into the Panthers. Of course I knew Stokely and Rap and everybody and so I start talking to them. They said, "Reg, ( ), we'll go for this one." So then he turned me over to the Oakland people. When I went to the meeting--I was in the Oakland meeting for a couple of weeks or so and when I went to the meeting with the Panthers I was told, "We're not going to deal with you. One, because you've been riding around town in a steel gray Cadillac." I said, "That belongs to Kaiser Cement and Gypsum." "Well, you belong to them" and blah, blah, blah. I said, "But you haven't even heard what I got to offer." "We've heard a little bit of it and we don't believe it," blah, blah, blah. I said, "Thank you." I called Noel and I said, "Hey, it ain't no deal. Ain't no need of going through this bullshit." And in the meantime I had met other people in town. So I said, [2:15:00] "Noel, there may be a way out of this. I met some community folk. Maybe we can switch it over and give it to the community folk." So he said, "See what you can do."

Timothy Jenkins, who was an advisor to SNCC from the very beginning, and Tim comes out of Yale, out of National Student Association, Tim is always I consider to be the mouthpiece of SNCC. So I called the mouthpiece and I said, "Hey, man, didn't you introduce to me to somebody that you had a partner somewhere out here? I'm out here in Oakland, California" and he said, "Yeah, I got a man out there by the name of Donald Warden." I said okay and then I told Tim what I was doing and everything and he says, "Okay, look him up." So I looked up Donald Warden, I got with Donald Warden, and then I met a Mrs. Love who was in charge of social service department of Oakland. I met

a Mr. [Dumbreau?] who was a construction person. I'm thinking the NAACP's person's name was West. I'm not sure about that. But I formed a community group. That community group got together with Kaiser, got the acquisition of the land. The senior citizens house sits today called West Project Acorn.

EC: What was Kaiser's motivation?

RR: I think Noel told me that Kaiser was trying to show some level of calmness that could happen. There would be a demonstration that other things could happen. If housing was a problem this is one way that you could do it and it was a way to show folks who had not been involved in acquisitions and all of the processes of going about building houses or getting into the business, they were willing to put up the money. And this was from big Kaiser Aluminum. This was a subsidiary of Kaiser Aluminum sitting there in Oakland and I guess this was part of their payback to Oakland. So I stayed with this company for a little while longer. They had several contracts with different cities with the model cities kind of stuff and each time I would be called in to go talk to the black community, but I couldn't hear what was going on in the white community. So finally at a meeting I said [Laughter], "Why can't I know what's going on in the white folks' meeting when I only got to go to the black folks' meeting and take back what you all say happened in the white folks' meeting? Why ain't I there to understand what's going on?" "You don't need to understand what's going on and you're fired." [Laughter]

EC: You have a real talent.

RR: So I'm out on the street again. I'm married by this time. I got married late [19]66, [19]67, somewhere like that. Lasted four years. I'm now having back pains,

I'm having real sharp, sharp back pains. So I go to the doctor and the doctor tells me that I'm having muscle spasms and he gives me these little yellow pills and he tells me I have to take them three times a day and after I take them I have to sleep for two hours. I left the doctor's office and stopped by my favorite druggist and back there in them days you could get a whole shopping bag full of reefer for ten dollars. [2:20:00] I got me some reefer and I went and got me a fifth of Jack Daniels. I went home and that same chair that I have sitting in my bedroom now, I sat in my chair, I set the pills on my desk, and I took me a shot of Jack Daniels, I rolled me a joint, and I sat there and I was trying to figure out how I'm going to sleep for six hours, take care of family--I only had the wife at the time, but how am I going to work and sleep six hours?

The first conclusion I came to, that couldn't be done. So then I started thinking about all of the things that was happening to me at the time. I had just been out on a consultancy with a buddy and I was working what we called a fish tank. We were working for this black consultant, this black architect, that had a black and white staff and he wanted to sensitize the staff. so I had all these people in the room that I knew something more than each one of them and I had to make them interact in order to get them to understand that this man wanted you to do his work and the hell with whatever you might think of him or whatever you might think of him. Just get the contracts done. Afterwards my guys was telling me, said, "Reggie, you did a great job but you almost blew the act because you smoke three packs of cigarettes in an hour." So that thought kind of came to me and I lit up another joint. And I said to myself maybe cigarettes has got something to do with it.

So I decided the next day I was not going to smoke. I was going to do everything I did normally every day and I went through the day. I came home, my wife was blowing smoke because she smoked at the time. She's blowing smoke in my face so I talked to a buddy the second day and he told me, said, "You go three days, baby, you got it made." I went fishing the third day. I ain't smoked since.

EC: Three packs to nothing?

RR: To nothing. I just stopped. The next few days I continued to look at them pills and said, "It ain't over yet." Then I thought about coffee. I'd get out the bed, put my feet on the floor, I had to get a cup of coffee. Before I could wash my teeth I had to get a cup of coffee. Before I sit down to have a cup of coffee I'd have a cup of coffee. I'd take a bus, before I could get on the bus I'd have a cup of coffee, get off the bus, get on the train, have another cup of coffee. Before I walk in the office, have a cup of coffee, get to the office, have a cup of--phone ring, got to have a cup. Interview somebody, got to have a cup of coffee. I'm like this here. [Laughter]

EC: You probably spent a lot of time in the bathroom too. [Laughter]

RR: So I said coffee is the other one. So I got rid of coffee and started drinking tea and other kinds of things. Feeling a little better now. Now I'm working, but I'm working at something I do not like. I do not like it because I'm not free and I'm caught up into taking care of family and my daddy's always--my daddy taught me--when my daddy got paid the whole family sat there and he'd delve out the money. He took care of the family first. Then he'd look at his hand and say, "Work shoes" and then whatever else he had to do. That's the way I felt. I was in the position in that first OSTI thing, I didn't even see my pay check. Went to the bank. She had the bank account. I was on an

expense account. I had enough expense account to do anything I wanted to do. So I ain't even seen money.

Now this little other little job that I'm doing now, I see the money but the money is, I mean I'm doing shit that I just do not like. So the job is a problem. The job is becoming a problem, the marriage is becoming a problem, for all kinds of reasons. Bobbie Yancy calls me. oh, I finally got--I hadn't quite got [2:25:00] rid of the other job yet, but I'm on my way, I'm getting rid of this job because this job is part of my miseries.

EC: The one for the black architect?

RR: No, that was just a quick consultancy.

EC: So this is the OSTI job?

RR: No, that was an outside job. Now I've left OSTI.

EC: So who are you working for now?

RR: I'm working for--who am I working for? Northwestern University. I'm doing one of them welfare programs where they got to teach people to read and write or else they get put off of welfare. I got a school more or less that's running from kindergarten to high school with thirty-five-year-old women and derelict men and--whew, lord have mercy. And young students who haven't got their life together and crashing out and it's just becoming--I'm just not wanting all of this stuff. And then married to a psychiatric social worker too. And I'm just used to doing my own hustle. And one of the things that me and my wife had an agreement on is that once she got her masters then she would handle things, since we were talking about little babies, till things get right, then you take care of things while I put mine together. Of course by the time it came round for me, "Go to school, do this, do that." I didn't tell you what to do. Do what you do and

I'll do what I do and I guarantee you everything going to work out. Well, all of that's happening.

Anyway I get this phone call from Bobbie Yancy. Bobbie says, "Got a project in Memphis, Tennessee. If you're free come right away." Hot dog, I made it home. I walked through the door and there she was, my ex-wife, and she says, "I'm getting another apartment, I'm leaving." I says no--and what I said to her when we first met was, "Whenever you get tired of me don't hesitate to tell me that you're going to go because if that's the end that's the end." So when she said it I says, "No, hold still." I says, "I'm going away for maybe about six weeks and when I get back then we'll talk or something or other." And over the course of time I'd already packed some bags and stuff. So I went on this project. This project was one of the first black caucus dinners in Memphis, Tennessee, working for A.L. Nellum Associates. So we did that project and we came on back and Bobbie gave me the option to meet her in DC because she was getting ready to take over a whole project here. So I get back to Boston and things ain't what they used to be and ain't what they was so I said, "All of that stuff I got packed in the corner and my records and my chair [Laughter], send that to the address I'll send you" and I left Boston. And I've been back here in DC since [19]81.

EC: How come you think so many SNCC people have come to DC, made DC their home?

RR: You can make a living here and then with so many of us here we could get together and help each other. one of the things that happened to me even after Bobbie took the position with Nellum, it wasn't a solid kind of thing to do because he wasn't prepared to do the kinds of operations that was necessary, to do the kinds fundraising that



was necessary, so the project just kind of fell apart and then there I was out there again. But because of who I knew around town I could get other consultancies and little things to [2:30:00] survive. And then friends would loan me money pay rent if I couldn't find the rent. Then I got involved in the charter along with John Wilson. So I met and made friends that way and I was involved with a computer company called Afro-American [Datanamics?] which was at 14<sup>th</sup> and Kenyon and it had the only computer in the ground outside of any black institution between here and New York and it was a PDP 1145. It would cover this room.

EC: Now you can put it in your pocket.

RR: [Laughter] Got it right here. [Laughter] So we did all kinds of activities such as--our main thing was doing polls and things. And we did Marion's poll, very first poll, to the numbers and showed where he whupped everybody. And of course showing him that and working things out, after the election we were rewarded with a few contracts and things were going along very well. But back there in those days electricity was bigger than what we could do. We couldn't keep that big machine rolling and couldn't bring in enough contracts to keep it rolling so the lights went out. So after that I kind of went on unemployment for a few years, which was a good thing.

Then I was asked to come in work with the youth division--I worked for Pride before then, but I was asked to come in and work with the youth division in Department of Employment Services when Marion was doing his first--it was the time he was doing his second summer youth program, when we did the forty thousand. The first time was kind of a disaster because they hadn't done the checks and balances that was necessary to keep up and match up these kids. So we matched up kids and kids went to the right

places, they got their checks, and it was a successful program. And we did forty thousand one year in the summer and twenty-five hundred in the school year. I stayed with that program for about two or three years. Then I went to work as an investigator for the Department of Employment Services in the Department of Unemployment Insurance.

EC: See if people really weren't--?

RR: That's right, and I busted quite a few. [break in audio] And I saw quite a few that was arrested. And at that time the government was changing over from paper to data. I got involved in that and when I left government I was an assistant land administrator. I was operating at least a hundred machines, managing and maintainancing a hundred machines. I left the government twenty years to the day. only because I had planned to stay longer to help my partner because I had promised I would help her until she got through to--got all of the data in straight and she was moving pretty well and I'd promised to stay with her until October. But that May we were very, very busy one day. I mean up to our elbows in work and the director came up and said, [2:35:00] "All right, everybody stop and go down to the war memorial." So we said, "Why would we have to do that? We're busy." "Everybody has to be there." So we went. Of course bosses tell you what to do.

EC: They do have that habit.

RR: Yes. So we get down to the war memorial and we hear this person. So this person finishes what he's got to say, then he says something like, "And as you leave out pick up my records and tapes." So I turned to my partner and I said, "( ), right?" Pick up records and tape? What is this we're doing? And then I find out that this

guy was somebody they hired to come in as an incentive speaker to get us to do more work and here we were elbows asshole deep in work and they take us--I said nah, this don't make no sense. So I said, "Linda, I'll see you back uptown." She said, "Where you going?" I said, "I'm going to personnel. If this is the kind of bullshit that's coming down through this--" and the administration had just come in, a new administration had just come in and got new people coming in with all of this. I said, "If this is the kind of bullshit that's coming in, I'm gone." I went down, put in my papers. I was sixty-two years old, I was at May and I came in in May [19]61 [sic] and I left May 2001. I've been out now fifteen years doing exactly what I started out to do in 1961 is to become a free black person. And if you notice my emails I, comma, my last name, the reg, comma, FBP, and I'm dead serious about it. I am a free black person. I do every and anything I want to do. And that was the purpose of starting out.

EC: That was your goal?

RR: That was my goal, to become independent. I ain't got no money.

EC: But you're independent.

RR: I'm independent and not rich.

EC: I have a few things, can I go back a little bit?

RR: Hey, do what you got to do.

EC: Do what I got to do.

RR: Took me long enough to get this one.

EC: I heard that. [Laughter] I know it. I ain't going to waste it neither.

[Laughter] What were you doing in summer of [19]64? Freedom summer.

RR: [Pause] Oh, I was in New York. I was fundraising.

EC: Fundraising?

RR: Yeah, I was--actually all through [19]64 after--let's see. I left and went to work for Joseph Tydings, Senator Tydings, just before the challenge. I spoke with Miss Baker about it and she says, "If you feel as though it's going to advance you in understanding what's going on and everything, then go ahead and do it." So I did that, then I came back. Then I was assigned to go and lobby for the MFDP. I went to California and I went to Oregon. I came back and then I was sent down to Atlantic City to assist in locating housing and necessary stuff, support pieces for the people coming in. Hooked up with Mary Lovelace who was from NAG who was already on the job trying to deal with this thing. And Mary, being one of those beautiful, beautiful black gals of our outfit, [2:40:00] we ran into one of the biggest gangsters in Atlantic City by the name of Reggie Edgehill and all of a sudden we started getting hotel rooms and accommodations and everything else that was necessary for us to bring our people in.

Then after that then I was sent to New York to do special gift fundraising. I stayed in New York until I went to--.

EC: Is that when you and Bobbie were working?

RR: That's when me and Bobbie were doing the special gift stuff. Then from there I was assigned to go to Philadelphia to set up the Philadelphia office for fundraising. Then a person by the name of Fred [Mealy?] came to town and just I guess I could say fucked up everything that we had built and was going in an opposite direction and we lost our gains that we had in Philly. So then Jim pulled me out of Philly and was sending me to Texas to meet up with a group of people who wanted to do some fundraising in Texas. So now I'm sent to--I've got to go through Atlanta and this is about late [19]65 now and

things are in a disarray. And so things came--they don't know which way to go and what to do so by the end of the year McDew calls me and I leave. That's what I was doing in [19]64.

EC: Seems like you did everything. Seems like you were the person that was on call for whatever was needed almost. Is that accurate?

RR: Call me that or call me advance man, call me pickup man.

EC: Forman could just rely on you?

RR: Right? Because one time we weren't getting reports out of the field so Jim and I jumped in the car, and of course I don't drive, and we drove to all of our projects through Mississippi, through Georgia, Alabama, and everywhere. Event went up to check on the ( ) in north [Grana?]. And while Jim did that I talked to people and got reports and put reports back to Julian, even written reports and phone calls and stuff like that.

EC: Is this probably [19]64, [19]65?

RR: This is [19]63, [19]64. I don't start the light activity until after--about late [19]64.

EC: How would you describe Jim Forman for people who didn't have a chance to meet him?

RR: How would I describe the boss? He was a matter of fact kind of guy. He was a military thinking kind of person. He was a person that could tell you the plan and tell you your spot in the plan and if you carried out your spot and bring it back, it fit. If you deviated from the plan too much it didn't fit. But if you followed him and did it the way he wanted you to do, everything would work out.

EC: Were you in the meetings, all the big meetings about what kind of structure SNCC should have, the debate about the floaters and the, what, the freedom high and, what was it, the structure? Did you get into that?

RR: Tell you the truth I was at a lot of those meetings, but when it came down I would only involve myself when it became time to say what we're getting ready to do. "Reg, we want you to go so and so and so." I didn't get into those philosophical conversations about Fanon's words on [2:45:00] and Du Bois might have thought another thought or Frederick Douglass did something. I didn't get into all of that. If we were going to move on a situation, the strategy is this, what's my position? Am I lookout, am I moving in, am I going to set up stuff? What you want me to do? And then I go do it. That was my position and I worked very well with Jim in doing that. I worked very well with McDew in doing that. And that's kind of I guess why I--.

EC: And Ruby Doris?

RR: And Ruby Doris. The boss lady was perfect for getting me to do anything she needed me to do.

EC: What about the freedom rides? What was your thinking on the freedom rides? You have any interest?

RR: By the time the freedom rides had started I was in McComb. And when they were coming back to Jackson, returning, in [19]61, we were making preparations for some of them to come down and work in McComb, which we did. That's how Glen Green and Travis Britt and Ruby Doris and her boyfriend Billy came down. And there was other freedom riders that came down to work on voter registration. I got only involved in the freedom rides in Alabama. One of my assignments was that once

Montgomery said everybody can ride the buses one of my jobs was to go in to Montgomery and ride the bus up front. [Laughter] So I mean I'm him.

EC: And that's like after they had attacked people coming off the bus?

RR: Yeah, well, that's kind of where it was. And that's why I was a little skeptical when I was involved in this New York thing coming out of New York and Bill Hanson is announcing--and going into Cambridge you had to go around into a dark corner where the bus stop is and who knows who would have met us up in there. I mean there was a certain amount of secrecy about this shit that you did. You didn't just go flagrantly. And now Bill is a professor in Nigeria or Lagos or somewhere. And I don't know how he felt, but at the fiftieth he was only one walking around in the grand [booboo?]. So I don't know.

EC: So Hansen reminded me of Arkansas which reminded me of my good friend Worth Long. What was Worth like in the movement?

RR: Oh, Worth was a charm. He too was somebody that you would listen to and you know that had a knowledge of organization. And he was somebody you could work with. And he was somebody you know you could walk the line with. If you were in the struggle with him you were there with him and he was there with you. He wasn't afraid to be out there. He was a good man.

EC: Were you ever in Albany?

RR: Yes, I was in Albany. One of the things about Albany is that the girls had gotten locked up and Jim and I went out to see about them and we were on our way back and Jim had to go to the bathroom so Jim made this stop. And he went into this restaurant, into this kind of filling station, [2:50:00] and he came back out in a hurry

holding hisself and he got back in the car. And I said, "Why are you holding yourself? Didn't you go to the bathroom?" He says, "No." He says, "I'll hold till I get down the road." I says, "What's wrong?" He says, "There was a guy in there with a gun and I didn't think this was the proper opportunity to give up my life for the revolution just to take a piss so I decided to get back in the car and let it out down the road." So that was just one little thing about it. But then one of my jobs at the height of--I was in there before King came in and I was helping Sharrod to do some stuff. Then I was brought back in when all of King's men came in and my job, because some of those guys knew me like YT and Andy and everybody, I could kind of slide around. So my job was to hang around Dr. Anderson's house, they had a Dr. Anderson in Albany where they stayed, and just listen.

EC: So you were the spy, the SNCC spy?

RR: I was the SNCC spy.

EC: Next to SCLC?

RR: Next to SCLC. But now, one night I was sitting there and YT came to me and said, "Come on, take a ride with me." So we got in the car. We drove to the jail. YT say he would take this tray in to doc. I said, "What?" He said, "Take this tray into doc." Now, they had made a deal with the chief of police that no food would come in to doc, not unless it came from--.

EC: The movement would feed him? The black community?

RR: Right. So I said, "I'm going to take this in?" He said, "Yeah." So I kind of said, "Oh, you son of a bitch, you're paying me back." So I took it in. and him and Martin and Abernathy was in there in their cell and they both had on silk pajamas and



they were both laughing and talking and I gave each one of them their trays and Martin sat down and said thank you and immediately started eating. Old Pork Chops--that's our nickname for Ralph Abernathy--looked at me and said, "Boy, they forgot the chocolate ice cream." I said, "Yeah, but I ain't bringing it back." [Laughter] As I proceed to say, "Jailer!" [Laughter] So I went back out and Wyatt and I laughed and we went on back to the house and sat around and looked some more, listened some more, whatever. And then I did what I had to do and followed Sharrod's orders and went up in Baker and [Turow?] and did voter registration and stuff like that. But I was only there for a very short period of time.

EC: In that early period?

RR: In the early periods. And doing the--the big one is when I was really there, spent time there.

EC: What about Selma? Did you go back to Selma after your scouting trip?

RR: No, I never went back to Selma until 19--when did Bob take me down in there?

EC: Vance?

EC: Yeah. It must have been about eight or nine years ago when they started the jubilee stuff. He took me down in there and I was really surprised to see all of the turkey wings and the festivities and everything and he says, "I just wanted to show you what's going on from your work." And then he took me to the folks that was involved in the jubilee and everything and he introduced me as the first SNCCer that landed in Selma. And of course folks says, "Oh, yeah, okay" and that was it. [2:55:00] But that was about it.

EC: Got to find that report.

RR: Right. And so then I would go down every year because Bob would do his thing and the jubilee would do his thing. Bob had an organization called The Trail and The Trail was made up of people that was up at the center of things in Lowndes County. That's where the tent city was on eighty. Right there where they put that incentive center now and they're still trying to get Bob's information. Bob's still ain't going to put it in there because he didn't want them to have it.

EC: Was that tent city, was that from the voter registration in Lowndes or was that from the march?

RR: That was from the march.

EC: And you didn't ever go into Lowndes during the movement? Were you part of the Lowndes organizing?

RR: No, no. I hooked up with Bob later on in about--doing some other kinds of stuff, but we were always in touch.

EC: He came out of Atlanta, right?

RR: Yeah.

EC: Was he a Georgia--?

RR: Morehouse and all of that. Him and Joanne Vance came out of--.

EC: How did they meet, do you know?

RR: In Albany. Because Joanne is from Albany.

EC: I knew that.

RR: Yeah, that's how they met.

EC: So he was down there working?

RR: Right.

EC: Okay. You want to stop here for a sec? [Break in recording]

RR: Ella became, she became a friend, she became a close mother kind of thing. I guess I got close to her because of the relationship of my mother and her. And when I was changing over from the Tydings campaign going back in the field to do the lobbying for the MFDP Miss Hamer was in DC so I got Mrs. Hamer, Mrs. Baker, to come over and my moms fixed lunch for them and my moms and Ms. Baker had a real old girl get-together kind of thing. When I got married, the night before I got married, Ella and Joanne Grant took me out and got me drunk. [Laughter] Tried to make sure that I am doing what I intend to do. And then I of course got married at Belafonte's house and of course my mother was there and of course Ella and my mother, of course knowing each other, was like my support pieces. Ella was mama.

I mean when I ran into--before I left Cambridge in between things, things got kind of tough and I was having trouble at home with my moms and I was actually--I don't want to--I was actually having trouble in Cambridge and I needed some time out. So Ella suggested that I go talk to Joe Baker who was one of the medical committee for civil rights and she was a psychiatrist and so Ms. Baker suggested I go talk to her. And when I went to talk to Joe of course she says, "You ain't crazy. You're just mixed up in a lot of stuff that you can't figure out right now. So what we're going to do is we're going to send you to Mount Eagle--" not Mount Eagle. Peekskill--"Peekskill, New York for about a week and what you're going to do up there is just rest, read, do everything, and at the end of the week there's a fundraiser, the Paul Robeson [3:00:00] fundraiser. It's the

history of when Paul Robeson spoke in Peekskill and John Hammond junior is going to be on the program and everything and you're going to just take yourself a little rest."

So I went to Peekskill, had lots of fun, and spoke on what I knew about Paul, about Big Pauly, and then got a surprise of being taken to Sam and Helen Rosen's who Sam Rosen was the doctor that went to Russia to bring back Paul Robeson. And while I'm sitting there in Katonah, New York, outside resting my feetses in the good sun, this big black man comes out and sits next to me with this deep voice and we introduce ourselves and damn, if it ain't Paul Robeson. So then Doc comes out and they had such a house that they had a sauna and you walk to the sauna and then you walk down these stairs and you get under this natural stream. So here's us men in this sauna buck naked running out, running down under this ice cold mountain water and just talking. And I am with Paul Robeson. Well, I can't thank Ella enough for taking me out of this situation.

So I go back into Cambridge and I'm revitalized now and I've gotten all my stuff together as to what I'm doing so I'm talking to Ruby about what's going on and what I'm feeling and what's happening. So Ruby's saying--that's when we began the process of my moving out because one of the other things that Gloria did was Gloria tried to petition Atlanta for me to stay and it was really time for me to go. And so that became a bone of contention.

EC: Did she feel like they still needed your help?

RR: Yeah. But I knew that they were on their own. I got rid of all of the surrounding people like, as I said, the NAACP and all of the big organizations was coming in once we got things going, when the students were coming in. So now the board is taken care of and taking care of the situation, but there was this other group

coming in. With Carol Rogoff, this reporter was very hard on Carol so I got Carol to get this reporter to take me for a ride. And we had a little conversation about silk suits and guys who wear denim and the organizers who work in denim are closer to the people, the local people, and the ones that's in these shiny silk suits are coming in making collections. Well, the story got out the next day and of course the local folks wanted to know where such a story came from and what they all linked it back to the NAACP and they chased them out of town. So the local board then began to run their own business and they had nobody else outside of SNCC who not making any turf kind of--.

EC: SNCC didn't want to build itself up?

RR: Right, building the organization, but we were making good on what SNCC was doing in Cambridge and Cambridge was doing okay. So it wasn't necessary for us to control as the big organization. The idea was you make these things and then you control them and then you last for hundreds and hundreds of years.

EC: That's the NAA's approach?

RR: Well, yeah. And the NAACP has come a long way and done a damn good fight and still doing a good fight, but their fight isn't the only fight. They take the fight to the point of the courts, but the courts [3:05:00] are part of the system which has a certain amount of dictation. But just like what's happening today, you've got to push the envelope. I grew up in Baltimore. All of that stuff that had happened last week from Freddie Gray just didn't happen. People have been out of work, people have been taken away from opportunities.

I got a cousin that lives in Pikesville. When you're going out to her house you have to come up ( ) up Liberty Road and if you get to Liberty Road and Belvedere

on one side of the street is the Pimlico race track, multimillion-dollar operation. On this side of the street is junkies laying in the street. It does not make any sense. This side of the street is the Jewish community, clean. This side of the street is junkies. A multimillion-dollar operation sitting here. Downtown Baltimore, you've got the wharf, you've got all of that money coming in and people coming in and buying. You've got the new Hollywood Theater gambling and going on and you come three, four blocks, nothing. You've got people out of work. You've got black people that will walk down to the wharf, going to Philips and will look different, look at you differently. And ain't nothing changed in Baltimore. Until something comes about in all of these cities, I mean if they chase that dude out of Chicago what's going to take its place?

EC: You talking about Rahm Emanuel?

RR: Yeah, what's going to take its place? It look like they may or may not convict this guy in Baltimore, but the police are part of the problem. The police are part of the power and the power is which controls--that's what's controlling all of these wars and everything else. They said on the television this morning that they're going to take away people's oil in order to stop them from killing people. When you take away somebody else's income what are they supposed to do but fight you? So it's the same thing in Baltimore, the same thing in Chicago, the same thing in Ferguson. They got to do it. And we can play a role and it seems to me to be very simple. There's more rich black folks today than there was in 1920. It seems to me that there ought to be enough to have guts enough to put the money together and come to the poker table and play the game. We can do laundry bets, we can do computer--we can get together with one of

them companies that do the computer tools, we can teach people to get jobs, decent jobs, to make a living. And that's where I think we ought to go.

EC: You think that's the direction?

RR: I think that's the direction because voter registration is leading us to people who are elected on the Hill, I don't see any difference in them having--I don't know exactly how Congress works but they work from rules. So when you become a part of a rule then you become a part of the problem. So you can't do this because this rule goes over here, you can't do this because this rule's over here. I'm no different than anybody else. When they say we're going to have a black President I start thinking that my world is going to become different. I did not expect no black President to hold no beer conference after another black man has been stopped in his doorway and locked up for going in his own house and he's got to sit down and make an appeasement? Uh-uh, no. There's something wrong.

EC: That's not from a position of power.

RR: We're not in power. And these boys that sit up on the hill, God bless them [3:10:00] but they ain't doing no different than the boys did in construction except too many of them ain't spitting tobacco on the side. But I don't know about--I know that voter registration leads to new leadership and new leadership leads to change in a sense. Ferguson now has a chance of changing because now more black people are involved in the process.

EC: What did you think of SNCC's move towards black power? What did that mean to you at the time? Do you see a connection to that now?

RR: That's exactly what I'm talking about now. The move towards black power was not to use guns. The media threw the whole thing off when they could latch onto Bobby Seale and the rest of them with their gunplay. I mean we weren't talking about--we were talking about the same thing that I'm talking about now, opportunities to make money in order to create money for people to make money to buy houses, to be able to control schools, to be able to get recreation centers, to do things for kids to make kids grow, and do things in our community that we know that we want to have our own religions and do what we want to do without being dominated by it. We were not talking about guns. Because we know we can't win with guns. The Indians didn't win with guns and nobody else won with guns. I think when Japan was trying to make some kind of deal they dropped the bomb on them over there and locked up everybody over here. You can't deal with these people that way. So if we had our base functioning in such a sense that they knew that we would come after them, the black politicians as well as the white ones, with a power base, coming from a power base. Some of these entrepreneurs that have made money, some of these black folks that live in the Watergate, some of these ones that don't have to worry about it coming back on them, that they can do things without it coming back on them. Put that money together. Put that money together and let's go out and fight.

EC: So this is going back again, but did you ever organize or go back in Mississippi after you left McComb?

RR: Yeah, I was with the Child Development Group in Mississippi.

EC: That's right, you already told me that. Other than that though?

RR: Nah.



EC: So do you have anything else you can think of I haven't asked?

RR: Nah. [Laughter]

EC: You're not going to help me out there, are you? If I can't ask you you're not going to--[Laughter]. All right, I can't argue with you. What do you want people to know about the movement?

RR: That we were lucky enough to have somebody like Ella Baker to present us with a very, very simple plan as taking people from where they are and bringing them up. Those that are already on top don't necessarily need to push, but they need to support those from the bottom. And if those from the bottom would understand what the opportunities are for them and given the opportunity to look at that and examine that, then more people would move on their own and make decisions based on their need which would be, I think, a thing that the majority of folks would begin to see that we all need the same thing. And it would be easier to come together. So I think that we left folks [3:15:00] something that I think wasn't dealt with in any other movement, we dealt with a thing that let folks know that they are the leaders, that there's no one leader. If you get up and you want to do something somebody's going to follow, but you've got to go and do what you want. You've got to know that you want to do something and you become a leader then. If enough people do that then we have a movement. We don't need another Martin Luther King. We're all Martin Luther Kings.

And that was one of the things that we tried and are still trying to get away from. I mean even that movie that Oprah did--.

EC: *Selma?*

RR: She used a lot of money to tell a story that could have been told a totally different way and give up a lot of information that would have been true instead of some un-factual situation. And compare that to the one that Robinson did called *Freedom Song* where he depicted us going into Mississippi, registering people to vote, getting the people involved, as opposed to having Jim and John sitting in front of a conference with Jose reprimanding Jim Forman. That has never happened. Jim was not that kind of person. Jim was as old as Martin. Jim was more of a leader than Martin. And Jim had his own organization and was aware of the fact of having his own organization and having the strength and backing of his own people to say any damn thing he needed to say. And at that point we were already been chased out of Selma and he's already--not Selma but chased out of southwest Georgia with them blastering [*sic*] in and not leaving anything.

EC: You talking about SCLC?

RR: Right. But I'm talking about the movie.

EC: Yeah, I know. How they showed it.

RR: Right, and then Oprah in a car--and then John in a car with Martin driving and Martin talking? That's bullshit. Martin ain't drove no damn where. And we didn't put John Lewis out. It was John Lewis's choice to leave. Always believed that he wanted to be an SCLC person anyway because he was brought up under that preacher, Jim Lawson, love thy neighbor, Gandhi, whatever that stuff was.

EC: Were you at the meeting where Stokely was elected?

RR: No.

EC: You weren't there?

RR: I wasn't there for all of that either. But Oprah could have used her monies to do a different--if she wanted to do anything she should have shown the relationship that went on because they were scared to death in Selma and they were scared to death in Albany, Georgia, and each place they were telling us, "Don't do this, y'all going to get killed." The same thing that adult advisors was telling us everywhere, just stop.

EC: Yeah, it's not a very good depiction of the movement.

RR: No.

EC: And a bad depiction of SNCC.

RR: Right. For some reason they want to either rewrite the history or write us out and that's one of the things I think the value of the SNCC legacy project is because it's coming back in a way that allows us to say and do what we know to do, which is organize. I just got the email asking [3:20:00] what to do, when to do, raising money, and everything, and I responded, "I'm available except for a couple of things." I got to take piano lessons and recognize them dates and I'm trying to get some new knees so those are the only things, otherwise I'm available to move. If you want me to go down into Selma and go down into Ferguson to talk to some of them, I'll go. Whatever you need me to do, if it don't conflict with my obligations, I'm free to go.

EC: So you're still playing that same role?

RR: I still play the same role, if you need me. If you don't need me leave me alone and I'll go fishing, which is something I love to do.

EC: Any final thoughts for the interview?

RR: I guess it's my dream to see a group of black folks come together in a financial kind of situation that's honest enough and got enough guts to not be worried

about consequences but to be worried about program and what's moving ahead. And use our resources for what we know we can use them for, for simple kinds of things that we could get involved in and help our community to grow. Such as if we had a bank on the corner that could loan Ms. Johnson twenty-five dollars to open up a Laundromat, loan Bill Henry twenty-five dollars to open up a pool hall and that money comes back as some recreation. Somebody else may want a restaurant. Maybe we can talk one of these companies, one of these high tech companies, of coming into a small town like Greenwood. Ed Brown had a manufacturing company going on, [Carl Mace?], where they made denim. Why can't we find outlets and then let that money roll around in the community before it goes--then it can go out on the stock exchange.

Mr. Adams, who I mentioned earlier on, they didn't find out that he owned Park Sausage. You know what Park Sausage is? Park Sausage is a sausage that's been out for years and it had a commercial called, "Ma, more pork sausage," but it was known as a black-owned business, but everybody thought it was owned by Henry Parks but it was actually owned by Mr. Adams. And until it went on the stock exchange nobody knew that it was owned by Mr. Adams, but Mr. Adams was pushing money around in the community from a policy book. If one man can have all of this business--he had businesses on Pennsylvania Avenue from North Avenue down to Green Street. He owned the Royal Theater which was all a part of the chitlin circuit. I'm saying if one man can take his finances--he sent his wife, the first black woman to go to the Maryland state legislature. If one black man can put this kind of money together and do these kinds of things just think of maybe seven or eight putting in some money and going to work.

And when the Klan walk up and say, "You can't do this," fuck you, we got enough to do it.

And somebody told me, says, "Reg, once you build this kind of thing the bigger people will come in and buy it." I said, "then that makes it even better because if we got something small here and the bigger people want to buy it that means that more economics is coming down in here and that's what we want to see." We want to see it grow. We don't want to see it to stop. So if that can happen I'd love to see that happen.

[3:25:00]

EC: Sounds like a good plan. Just got to talk somebody into it.

JB: ( )

RR: That's it every day.

EC: I can't thank you enough for agreeing to the interview. I'm just really honored to have a chance to do this interview with you.

RR: Well, it all has something to do with me too. *USA Today* just did a thing with me and supposed to be coming out soon. I was looking for that report and didn't find it and then there's other kinds of questions that's coming up about me. So and then SNCC legacy is trying to pull stuff together for us to do things so I figured--.

EC: They'll be able to use this.

RR: Right. For whatever reasons. You know my policy of somebody coming up and asking me for an interview, but if it's done in the context of what the legacy is doing and you go to Charlie and Charlie approves it and everything that's cool with me, but still if anybody comes to me--.

EC: I know the policy.

F: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

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