CORE Chapter 3

ANONYMOUS WHITE MALE

[Michael Lesser?]

Interview

White Male
CORE staff

0284
side 1 and 2
Baton Rouge, La.

Q: Uh, how old are you?

A: Twenty-nine.

Q: Did you attend college?

A: Yes.

Q: Where?

A: Well, at Franklin and Marshall College where I got a Bachelor's and Leehi (?) University and Syracuse University for graduate work.

Q: What was your major?

A: Political science.

Q: When did you finally get your degree from, what was it, Syracuse? no, Leehi.

A: From Leehi? I didn't get a degree from Leehi. I got a Bachelor's from Franklin and Marshall in 1958.

Q: Have you been working for the Civil Rights Movement since then?

A: No, I really got involved in the Movement in 1961 at the time of the freedom rides, and I started working through CORE at that time and in 1963.

Q: You said you first got involved at the time of the freedom rides.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you mean that you went on one?

A: Well, I...it wasn't the freedom rides, it was the following sit-ins, and I was just peripherally involved at the beginning, walking in picket lines, sympathy pickets in front of Woolworth's stores and...then becoming a little bit more involved starting a couple of ad hoc committees and publishing a civil rights newspaper and things, but I consider that peripheral involvement.

Q: Why did you first get involved?

A: Well, that's been so long ago that I really don't remember.

...except that...I don't know, I was just interested in what was going on and thought it was...thought it was right, but I wasn't, you know...that wasn't really the central purpose of my life, you know. That was just...just concerned a little bit.

Q: When did you join CORE and how did you come to work full-time?

A: Well, in '61 at Syracuse...I got involved in some...with some friends who...I didn't know it at the time, but who were in CORE, and we were conducting some civil rights activities in Syracuse connected with off-campus housing for Negro students, and...out of that--I didn't even know what CORE was at that time, but out of that...a couple of the others suggested that we form a CORE group, and I was very much against that at that time because I didn't think we should get involved in any organizations, you know. I thought that we as individuals ought to do this, and I didn't want to join any organizations, but I slowly got sucked in with my friends, and we formed a CORE group, and...I worked there in that group in Syracuse until I came south.

Q: Well, what about this CORE group in Syracuse impressed you so much that you really got into the organization of the CORE project?

A: Well, that's not exactly how I would describe it as happening. Well, what impressed me about the CORE group, though, you know, if you want to know that, was the fact that those people who were in it...were all very close friends, and as we started to draw in more people from the university and from the community, it became kind of like a family, people who were all of one mind. There was real singleness of purpose and very little argument except over technique and details, so that we were...kind of...we were a very united group, and I find that very impressive. Um... there were no squabbles or hanging or power fights. No one really cared who was officers; no one really cared who had what positions, and it was really a functional organization, which impressed me very much. But...you know, even then I didn't think of it as CORE, except that we went by that name, and when I came to Louisiana, it wasn't really as CORE, because or CORE, but because of the Movement.

Q: Why did you come to Louisiana?

A: Well, for a combination of reasons. I kind of found that I was just getting less and less involved in the academic pursuits; they were becoming less and less real to me, and I found that...thatI was getting very tired of... reading academic writing and then doing academic writing. I felt that I wasn't really involved in...in...in really dynamic things that were going on in the country, so...and

plus...the fact that another one of my friends, Rudy Lombard, an officer of the national CORE, was going south for the summer back home to Louisiana, to work on the summer project, and I asked him if I could come along, and he said yes, so I went.

Q: Why did you do that this summer though?

A: Well, that summer of '63 started out as a voter registration project, and it wound up with several weeks of registration in Plaquemines in September 1963 which, although it started as a voter registration project, through the summer in most of the communities in which we worked we became very much involved in other issues than just getting people registered to vote, and found that, you know, that voter registration really wasn't the only kind of solution that people could...people were interested in.

Q: Were you working in Plaquemines?

A: I worked in...in Clinton. Uh, frankly I spent most of the summer in jail in '63.

Q: What did you get put in jail for?

A: Uh, trespassing in the registrar's office, and I spent most of that summer in that jail in Clinton...and really didn't get to do a lot of field work and working in communities until the fall.

Q: Did you decide to remain in jail...rather than being bailed out?

A: Uh, no, not really. Uh...very...it's interesting, a very beautiful experience for me was that when I first came down here, I was fairly insensitive to people; I was fairly insensitive to the people who lived in the communities where we were working, and I think that was a fairly typical reaction on my part. I thought that...I didn't really think about what those people were saying and talking about and what they wanted. I was thinking in terms of...my ideas and ...my concept of what should be done, so I made a great many mistakes in the first few weeks I was here, and... when I went to jail in Clinton, it was because of one of those mistakes: I was very anxious to get out there and live a little bit dangerously, and I did it one day, and I went to jail. Uh...Rudy and...who I was working with in Clinton, thought it would be a very good idea for me to stay there. One reason was in a sense to get me out of the way, to get me out of his hair because I was...creating some, some difficulties, because I wanted to be everyplace, I wanted to do everything, and this was not sensible at that time. So they decided to let me cool my heels for a little while. Of course that wasn't the only reason, I'm sure

that was involved in that decision, plus my being in jail was able to...provided leverage in that community. People rallied around the Movement, and spending that time in jail gave me a good deal of time to think about what my role was in the South and the Movement, and it was probably a very good experience for me, being in jail. But at the time I didn't appreciate it, but I think I appreciate it now.

Q: You said you thought about whay your role is in the South. Did you come to any conclusions about what you should be doing?

A: Well, no conclusions. I don't think it's something that you can have conclusions about. I think it's a process of continual change with any civil rights worker's role, or even with the Movement's role in the South. Uh....and particularly what a white's role is in the Movement in the South. Uh...I was very sensitive to any of those considerations when I first came here, you know I didn't think in terms of color. I find that one really has to, that if you're thinking about the Movement and how it affects Negroes and Negro communities, you have to be thinking about how to develop leadership in those communities, how to help people articulate their own demands, their own needs, and how to assist people in fighting on those issues in which they are interested. Oftentimes I think that a northern white in the Movement has a concept of what equality is and what he wants the society to look like, and the tendency is to superimpose that on people who might not have those ideas. And someone who does that, I think, does more of a disservice to the Movement than a service. I think that... that there are a lot of considerations like that which one has to deal with and that these are always changing and that the role of the Movement in a community today is not what it was a year ago and will not be in three weeks what it is today. They're developing new ideas all the time.

Q: Do you still find that white northern students come down here to work on what they want rather than what the communities need?

A: Yeah, it's still very true. I really say that out of the whites that come to work in the South that...maybe 10% of those people really are sensitive to what their role is and...and really contribute something. Ane the others come down, you know, a lot of different people come down for a lot of different reasons, many of them very personal, in which they have to prove things to themselves and those people don't contribute.

Q: Then do you think that of all the northern whites that come down here, that only 10% are effective and the other 90% are ineffective or even do harm?

A: Well, when I say that the Movement's concept of itself and what people think about the Movement is changing and has to continue to change, I would include in that the whole concept of the summer project. Two years ago no one questioned whether you should have a summer project or not. Of course you should have it, and it should be as big and... and spectacular as it could be. Now here and all across the South, people are asking different questions. They're asking, should we have a summer project at all? What happens in the fall when all the white folks go back to their schools? What happens to that community? Is it...is its interest advanced at all, or in fact, is not that influx, that rapid influx and then departure of all these volunteers something that makes the Movement in the community reach a climax and then descend below the point at which it was before the summer project even started? So I question the whole concept of a summer project. I think that...right now my thinking is that there should be no summer project, that the effort in a community should be a permanent effort lead by individuals who are committed to working there for a long time, and who develop a professional confidence about what they are doing.

Q: When you first came down, were you planning on staying more than a summer?

A: I was planning on staying just the summer.

Q: Did...did you go [redacted] at the end of the summer?

A: No.

Q: Why did you decide to stay? Because of this conclusion about summer projects?

A: Well, I...You know, I saw that graduate school was becoming less and less relevant to me, and by the end of that summer I found that graduate school and any kind of thought about an academic life that I might of had had become not only less relevant, but totally irrelevant, and I was very much wrapped up in people and in how people live and what happens to them in everyday, and I found it much more relevant to my own life than my own thinking than the university ever was.

Q: When you decided to stay, did you stay at Clinton or go back to Plaquemines or do something else?

A: Well...at the time of the march on Washington, I came out of Clinton--I had just gotten out of jail then--and...uh... I spent some time working in Plaquemines through the demonstrations, you know, and then I went to jail from those demonstrations and spent a little bit more time there, and by the time I got out it was well into the fall, and I took

a couple of weeks for a vacation and went up to New York City and talked to some friends and...did a few things.

Q: Are you from New York?

A: Well, from New Jersey, but I've lived in New York City. But then I came back down here and worked in communities, in a number of communities in the south...southern Louisiana.

Q: (indistinguishable)

A: Yeah. That's...

Q: How did you become program director?

A: That's, that's a good question. It's a title which I don't particularly like. I don't...I just don't particularly like titles. I imagine it happened by accident because at the beginning when we were thinkáng about this summer project, uh, some people were arguing that the project... that the state ought to be divided up into regions, and that we ought to have a director for each region, a field director. I suggested that I didn't think that this was a functional way to operate. I thought that the program ought to be operated...in terms of...that the project ought to be operated in terms of programs, they ought to be program oriented, and people with competence in specific areas or fairly general areas of program ought to do that coordinating for the state. So the next day I was made program director.

Q: What do you mean by program?

A: Well, see, I...yeah...uh...I think that problems across the state in communities all over the South, in fact all over the country, are fairly similar, but that they manifest themselves in terms of that particular community in different ways. Um...but that there are general areas in which one can say that 'this is a problem,' you see, or problems of--we can talk about education. We can talk about the need for people to educate themselves...so the people discover, you know, themselves, discover what they already know and discover new things that they want to know. The whole process of people talking to each other, which people don't do on the level of discussing what they can really do about issues. It's a process of education. Uh...pre-school programs for children are...things which are very much needed in communities across the South, and developing these, developing them in a way that will be meaningful...is a problem which one can say exists in all the parishes of this state, so that you can divide up so that you can say that an area of program, which we need somebody who knows something about it, see, to advise people and suggest things and knows how to operate with people around the area of education. That's a program area. Then...people talk about politics all over the state, and they talk about it in many

different ways. They're not all saying, 'I want to register to vote,' or 'We need a Negro candidate to run for this,' but they talk about the way 'the whites got a sewage ditch and we didn't,' and they talk around those issues, and they come to...and this is part of politics, you see. So that's an area of program. See, and there are a whole host of these...

Q: Uh...are you the one that had this idea for community conferences? Is this your idea?

A: Yeah. It wasn't really my idea, and I don't know whose idea it was...uh... We had community conferences in 1963, although we didn't call them that, and they weren't very good because we called people together to try and tell them what our new program was and to get them to participate in that. They didn't...we tried to revise this idea of community conferences this past year...and I forget whose idea it was, but the way we'd been developing it has been entirely different than previously. It has been working our fairly well, and I've been involved in that, but it wasn't my idea.

Q: Well, just from the little I've heard about it, it sounds like they aren't interested in getting the people to talk about their problems together, and this sounded like it was the same kind of thinking that you had about programs.

A: Yeah. Uh...the idea is that, as I suggested, that people talk about the same things and they use different language, and they have different experiences, but...there are people from one corner of the state who are talking about the same things that people from other corners of the state are. The problem is to get these people together. And frankly in a parish, or even in within a town there are people who are talking about the same thing or who perhaps think about the same things but are not articulating anything about them, who need to get together. They don't need anybody to tell them anything. All they need is someone to give them the opportunity to get together so they can talk to each other, and that's what these community conferences do.

Q: I guess in this form they just started this summer. Is that correct?

A: Yeah, right.

Q: Have you done...found that people have come back with new ideas or an idea that their problem isn't just theirs?

A: Yeah. Uh, I think the really beautiful thing about these conferences is that you can ask someone who attended

one of them--who's been attending these meetings--what he thought about the meeting, and if you ask this about a regular kind of meeting, people will...he will say, 'It was mighty fine,' or 'I really enjoyed it,' and that's the end of it, but if you ask someone about these conferences that have been held, they will start off by saying, 'It was a mighty fine meeting, and I really enjoyed it,' and then this guy--many of the people who were there--will go on to tell you what they enjoyed about it, see, what was good about it, and they really go into detail about what they learned from it and what they contributed to it. This is something I had never seen before, and that tells me, you know, that these are very valuable.

Q: Are you going to try and continue them after the end of the summer?

A: Yeah, very definitely. I think that if nothing else has come out of this summer, that these conferences, that are in a sense the focal point, are the most important things that we've done.

Q: Are you planning on staying on...did you just become program director when them started discussing this summer or last spring?

A: Uh, well, I left Louisiana for about 10 months to work in the North last September, and I came back this...this May, and I was made program director a week after that.

Q: What were you doing up north?

A: Uh...well, I was working as a field secretary working with chapters, CORE chapters in the West, the midwest. (phone rings) I think we're getting a call.

Q: Is that for you?

A: No...

Q: Um...well, now are you planning on staying on as program director?

A: Well, if I...I don't know if as program director because I don't like a title and don't like being slotted like that, but I plan to stay on, yes.

Q: Do you find that you have a lot of administrative duties when you'd rather be out in the field?

A: Yeah, it's very much that way. It seems to me that once you give a person a title, you do him a real disservice, in

that you tie him to that title, and then when you give him a desk, you compound that disservice by giving him a desk, which he feels somewhat compelled to sit at, and ah - it seems to me that titles and desks and offices and assistants and all that kind of stuff give you obligations which are fairly meaningless in terms of your operating in the field, and which only seem to bind you.

Q: Well I know there are times.....when you haven't been in Baton Rouge.....Have you been out in the field?

A: Yeah, I've been spending a day, or two days, or three days on each project that I can, and I've also been in New Orleans talking with some other people. Talking about our ideas and how we want to implement them. Other people who are very - in what I consider the vanguard of the movement. Trying to develop ideas... Dave Dennis, who's program director for the South for CORE, a title which he feels kind of like it puts him in a straight jacket, you know, and Rudy Lombard, who was all things to CORE at one time or another - a member, an officer, and a staff person - who's now not connected officially with CORE very much, but who's very much involved with the movement, and in fact is not connected officially with CORE because he felt that that kind of restricted his activity, you see. And Jerome Smith, who's another CORE field secretary, who has been very much involved in the culture of New Orleans, and some new things that the movement really hasn't considered yet.

Q: Do you mean these are his ideas, or this is the way he has been working that the movement hasn't considered yet?

A: Well, the ideas. There are some concepts that the movement in its organized form really hasn't been able to deal with. One of the reasons it hasn't been able to deal with them is because it's organized, and it's organized to do certain things. But, for instance, last Sunday there was a parade in New Orleans - Creole Festival, which is held once a year, some weekend or another, in July or August, when the people just happen to decide they want to hold it. And this is a parade which comes out of the old funeral parade tradition, you know, the old jazz band tradition. And people - Negroes in New Orleans are very much tied to this, this is an institution, that really isn't an institution, but it's a part of the culture to which people are very, very much tied. They sew elaborate costumes and umbrellas, and they second line, which is marching behind the bands and dancing, all day, you see. This parade started at nine-thirty in the morning and didn't wind up - marched all over, every Negro neighborhood in New Orleans just about - and didn't wind up until about dark that night, around seven o'clock. You see, I think that that is animportant thing. Why would people spend all day second-lining? on a band parade? Why? That's a very important part of the culture. But if you ask those same people who will march all day behind those bands - "how does the movement relate to them?" - they can't tell you,

because the movement doesn't relate to them, because the movement tends to tell them what they ought to be interested in, or what they ought to be concerned about. Well these people, you know, have a bag of their own, that the movement never reaches, and that's millions of people, you see, who have a real cultural tradition which the movement is insensitive to, and I think that it has to become sensitive to it, and that's what - some of us are trying to deal with that, and find that the movement in its organized forms doesn't deal with that, and is perhaps incapable of doing that. And we're very much concerned to see that the movement becomes relevant to the lives of these people.

Q: How do you make something like the civil rights movement relevant to the cultural traditions of the people?

A: Well, inherent in that statement - you know, that statement that you made really scares me - to think that the movement - the civil rights movement hasn't been relevant to the culture and the lives of thousands of people in New Orleans. To think that is hasn't is very frightening, and to think that it has to make itself relevant is perhaps to say that in its present form it can't do that. I don't know. But, you see, I think, for instance, that people have to be tied together, that people with different - within a culture have to be tied together and people in different cultures have to be tied together. People who have in a sense some common interests, and needs, and desires. And that those needs and desires are very important. Ah - what the movement is talking about now is community organization, saying we have to go in and organize communities. And to me that is one of the most insensitive statements that anyone in the movement can make - to think that anyone has to go in and organize the Negro communities in New Orleans is to say that the person who says that doesn't know a damn thing about New Orleans, cause the Negro communities have a culture and a tradition and are organized in so very beautiful and subtle ways. People are tied together in a way that makes it irrelevant to say that they have to be organized. There's nothing that those people can learn about organizing from us. To say that we're going to go in and organize those people is stupid. What we have to do is go in and learn from those people - learn from those people what really is important in their lives, and what - and how they organize themselves, and find out about those communities, and attempt to relate to those communities, and create a dialogue there between them and us, and between those communities and other communities. But to say that we have to go in and organize them, you see, is foolish, it's absurd. I think we have to be much more humble in our dealings with people, and realize that we have a heck of a lot more to learn from community people than they do from us perhaps. And the movement doesn't do that.

Q: But.....does this have a great deal of relation to the civil rights movement as trying to win specific objectives?

A: Yeah, that's a real question, you see. Ah, to say that if - what people in New Orleans do , what their culture is, how they live - to say that that isn't relevant to getting specific demands across about integrating things or political or social, economic changes...(end of side 1)

Q: Is the culture tradition - is it relevant to specific civil rights....?

A: Well, what I mean to say is that the movement tends to think in terms of getting people to see the importance of its demands, and therfore to rally around those demands. Now rather than to say that what that community does and what people in that community want are the really important things - you know, rather than to say we are to go into the community and help people achieve what is already important to them - what is important to them, you see.

Q: You mentioned that one of your friends left the organized movement. Is this something you might do yourself?

A: Well, yeah that's a possibility. Ah, because I find it sometimes very difficult to operate in the context of a title - CORE field secretary or Louisiana program director - I'm not sure what those titles mean, except that other people are pretty sure what those titles mean, and that prescribes what I can do, so that if someone else in this organization feels what I'm doing, that my own particular bag isn't relevant to what he thinks I ought to be doing, then he begins to define what my activities should be, and say "You can't do this." Now say I want to go to New Orleans or - and just immerse myself in that community, and find out what I can find out about it and learn from those people there, and think for a while, or any kind of other activity which I feel is important to my own development, which I feel contributes to the movement - if that organization which has defined what I am by calling me a field secretary or by calling me a program director thinks that that is not relevant to its own goals, then they tend either to prescribe my movement and activity or say that I, you know, have to go. Well this hasn't happened, but it's a likely thing to happen, and it sets certain obligations and responsibilities upon me, which I'm not sure that I can really live upto. In another way if I need some freedom - I think I need some freedom to operate and do those things that I think are important, and if CORE or any other organization can't allow me this freedom, then I have to reconsider my position in that organization. I'm not saying that that has happened, but I think it's a possibility in any orgainization.

Q: Well, if a situation like that came up, would you leave the organized movement and continue, you know, with your own type of civil rights activity?

A: Yeah. Because I would be doing that not because I wasn't interested in the movement anymore, but because I found the movement too rigid or following an orthodoxy which I couldn't. And I think that people need to be free to do those

things which they feel to be important to themselves and the movement, and - yeah, I would, you know - I would only do that so I could operate in the movement in a manner which I felt was more important.

Q: Would you continue here in the South?

A: Yeah, yeah. And in fact in Louisiana.

Q: Why would you stay in the South.....?

A: No, I don't think that the South is more important than the North or that the North is more important than the South, or that Louisiana is more important than any other place. I think that what is important is people, and they - people live and suffer all over this country, all over this world. I would want to stay in Louisiana because I think that a good deal of my intellectual and - stimulus is here, and those people whom I communicate with are here, and those people whose ideas I live on and who live on my ideas, and those people who I really have an interchange which developes myself and my thinking about the movement are here, you see. And that includes community people and people who work in the movement.

Q: Do you see any advantages in having organizations to work through?

A: Ah - yeah, I seecertain advantages, I suppose. Right now I've been thinking more about the disadvantages than I have about those advantages though, you see. My feeling about organizations is that what is true about CORE is true about SNICK, is true about any other organization - that they become more and more organized. There's no such thing, I don't think, as an organization that becomes less rigid and less structured - that organizations only become more rigid and more structured as they develop, and that there comes a point where this becomes - gets in the way of activity.

Q: What about something like the FDP, that's run by the people rather than by on outsider?

A: Yeah. Well, I think that that is - that principle is the kind of organization that needs to be developed. But I don't - I also have questions about going into that very quickly, because I think that one must really take a hard look at the FDP, before one says that it's a grass roots organization run by the people, cause I don't think if you visited the Washington office and really analyzed the power structure of that organization, that you would find this to be true...

Q: What do you find there?

A: Well, you find people who have become leaders, who maybe are from Mississippi, but who are no longer of Mississippi.

You find white lawyers, and you find white and Negro intellectuals who tend to develop the policy of that organization - now this is from my limited experience with it - tend to develop the policy of that organization from Washington or the office in Jackson. And you see though, I think that FDP, because of the necessity of organizing for the challenge, organized in this way, so that decisions even in that organization and policy come from the top and filter down, rather than really coming from people in the communities and going up....

Q: Yeah, I know that in Jackson....some of those, their candidate - one of their condidates had sort of become a person who was more interested in speaking around the country than... staying in Mississippi and working there.....

A: See but I don't - I'm not against FDP. I think however, that the people in FDP have to look at themselves and see what they're doing and see where that's leading, and before anyone else forms an FDP, they have to find out what FDP is really like, and see what mistakes have been made there, and see what mistakes they must avoid, if they really want what we tend - what we refer to as a grass-roots organization.

Q: When I first heard about this community conference it struck me if something that I don't think happened in Mississippi, which is people from all over the state getting together and discussing their problems, maybe I'm wrong about this, but if there were a third party to develop in Louisiana, that it might have a much better basis because the people would know each other, and they'd be more in the habit of talking over their problems with people in the community, rather than....

A: Well you see, the problem there is that - that who says that what develops in Louisiana is going to be a third party? We say that - we may be thinking along those terms, cause that's the way our minds run - you want to develop power, political power - you organize a party, organize a third party, you see, And I think that idea may be fine if it really comes form the people in those communities, and if they have the experience that tells them this is what they want to do, and they're willing to organize it from their end. But for us to say that this is our vision, that we need a third party in Louisiana, is to contradict what I think are, you know, the principles upon which we need to be working - that those ideas must develop, however haltingly and however; you know, painfully - those ideas must develop in the minds of the people in the community. The third party - I guess that's O.K. But it need not be, and there need not be one organization which develops in this state, you see.

Q: Do you have any plans at all for ever leaving the movement?

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A: I'm not - I don't have that much vision that I can think that far ahead.

Q: Do you think it will be a long time before what needs to be - what needs to happen happens?

A: Yeah, and also, in terms of my own life, I don't have the vision to project my life so many years in advance. I'm very much involved in what I'm doing now, and I only see that, and really not much concerned over what happens to me after that, cause there may not be any after that, but, you know, what - I'm attempting to allow my own life to develop according to whatever needs I may have. I don't know what they will be.

Q: What's your reaction to Governor McKissen's formation of a bi-racial committee? Do you think this will be at all efrective?

A: No. One reason is that it's formed by the governor, it's a state structure. Now people have been fighting structures of the state all their lives. And so there's a new one created, which has all the so-called Negro leaders, and white leaders on it, and this is something else that people are going to have to fight, because it's a creation of the state for the purposes of the state. It is not a creation of the people, the people didn't get the idea, or - and it didn't spring from the minds of anyone in any community in the state, who went and said, "This is what we want." It was created by the governor for his own purposes, and therefore it cannot have the interests of the people - of the Negro people in this state.

Q: Have you ever been active in any other movements like the pacifist movement?

A: No, not really. I'm becoming very interested in those things - you know, the enormity of the - the implications of the Vietnam war and our intervention in the Dominican Republic - I think are very real things now, and I think it's very necessary for people - people in Southern communities, poor people in Northern communities, poor people in this country, and in every country to become involved in that - to say the government doesn't speak for me anymore, I've gotta speak for myself, I have a right to do so. And I'm very interested in it for that, because this is an enormous crisis that we're in, which just keeps, in the President's words, escalating and escalating, and with no rhyme and no reason, and it's a very sick thing to watch, and I think that people have to start sayingstop, to say no, even if people want that, they have to say it happens because I want it. We want it, people want it. And not because of some interest the government may have,which has very little connection with what people need and what people want. So I'm very much interested in this, yes, but I've never been formally in any movements before.

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Q: You say that the people say no to this kind of thing if they don't want it. Do you think that the ways that society and American democracy run now, it's possible for them to do this....?

A: Well, I don't think it's possible in the context of the institutions we have and the way our government has developed. Cause I don't think that government can be responsive to what people, just as people say. It can be responsive to what a person as head of a corporation says, or what a person as a powerful figure in an academic institution says. People like that, but it can't be - it's not geared to be responsive to what just people who may not have any money, and who just happen to live in this country, and happen to be a part of it really want, or really need. There's no mechanism for that. Governments talk to governments. People in power talk to people in power, you see. Even when they talk to people who aren't in power, they don't understand what they're saying, and they don't listen, you see. And I think that people who feel this way have to say to the government, "You don't speak for me. I speak for me. And I'm tired of having President Johnson speak for me to Premier Krushchev, or you know, or some other head of state who purports to speak for the people of his ocuntry", you see. I think people have to say I speak for me, and I will speak to the people of other countries, I will express my desires and opinions, and I don't need a government to do that for me, cause in effect, a government can't do that for me, it doesn't do that for me, you see.

Q: Well do you think that having people say the government does not speak for me is going to have any effect on either the attitudes of people in other countries or the attitudes of our own government?

A: Well, yeah - I - I don't know. Ah - see Ithink that what we need to develop, if we're really going to talk about democracy is to really develop democracy based upon the participation of the people for whom decisions are made. And I think people have a greater ability than the political scientists tell them they have. I was always taught when I was studying American Government that the reason we have representative government is that the electorate at large has the ability to say yes or no, to policies which are presented to it. And I used to really believe this, because this is what they taught me in college and in high school, this is what they taught me, and I never really questioned that until I started to really talk to people - in Louisiana, who had much different ideas - people who had their own ideas about what this government ought to be doing, and what their need were. And I, you know, developed a real respect for people who in effect were saying to me that I have a damn sight more capability than just saying yes or no at election time, that I have the ability to develop my own ideas, and policies that I think are important, and what I need is help

in articulating them, you see. I don't know what the end will be. But I think that if we're going to survive, and I don't mean America survive, I mean if, you know, if people on this earth are going to survive, if in fact the planet is going to be here, people have to start attempting to develop themselves and at least say that this is what I want, and this is what we need, and this is people talking, and you know, telling governments. You know, I really don't know what the end of this is, I just don't have a grand design, you see. I don't know what the end will be.

Q: Are you very interested in any of the political parties that now exist....?

A: No, I have no - I'm not a member of any political party. I'm not interested in that, except that I think that right now there's something that needs to be challenged, you see. Are you talking about the Democratic and Republican parties?

Q: Well, and you know, Socialist...

A: Yeah, well you see, I think that all of these parties, and all the fringe parties,,and third and fourth and fifth parties that exist are in a sense the same.. That they really don't talk for people. They don't talk - there's no party in this country that talks for Joe Carter, Reverand Joe Carter in Saint Francisville, yousee. Joe Carter talks for himself, and he's fully capable of doing that, and there isn't any party that exists - Socialist, Socialist Labor, Progressive Labor, any of these guys - who talk for him. Although there are a number of them who say they tlak for him, and who would love, love to co-opt him, and get him to sign his name to their list of members or sponsers, cause that would enhance them, but it wouldn't enhance him, because he doesn't need that, you see.

Q: Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about?

A: Well, no, you know I - I've just been attempting to response to your questions - which has led us far afield, I imagine from what you originally wanted to talk about.

Q: You've been talking about - well, partly the different ideas that the movement can have, and then in part how it works...

A: How do you relate to that? How do you relate to some of the things that we've been talking about? I get the feeling that you've had a little difficulty asking questions - I'm not sure if what I've been saying has been something you've never heard before. I doubt that - these ideas aren't original. Are they things that - that you've never dealt with, or that are - that you don't know how to respond to?

Q: Back to look at cases - like when you were talking about understanding the culture - what the people in New Orleans and the South... Well, you know, I'm use to the idea - what they

explained to me in the organizations...it's trying to find out what the people want, so I'm used to that, but I was thinking of it, you know, in political - in terms of specific aims of the civil rights movement, instead of aims that maybe have nothing to do with the civil rights movement, but are still what people want.

A: Yeah. You have a conception of the civil rights movement, you see, and the movement has a conception of itself - which maybe isn't related to what people really want. There's a real question - why is it people don't participate inlarge numbers in the movement? They don't in New Orleans. Nothing happens in New Orleans. Why doesn't the movement address itself to those people? What about Baton Rouge, right here? How long have you been in Baton Rouge?

Q: Probably about eight days is all..

A: Who have you met in Baton Rouge?

Q: The people in the (?) houses.

A: Do you ever see any community people in this office?

Q: Um, not to speak of. Maybe some of the people going around are, but I - you know, I haven't been talking to them very much. We - in some of the communities we've been in, we've been talking to people from the communities, but they were the people who were working with the civil rights movement again.

A: But you've been talking with people in communities?

Q: Yes.

A: Have you interviewed any of them?

Q: Yeah, I inter - in Jackson, I interviewed..... I'm going to turn this off.

A: O.K. (end of tape)