

INTERVIEW WITH LESLIE B. McLEMORE

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by Pete Daniel

Pete Daniel: We got into this because you were telling me that you knew Ella Baker.

Leslie B. McLemore: Right

PD: Could you describe her physically at the time?

LM: When I first met her, Miss Baker was a woman of about 5'4" or 5'5" statue. I'm not very good at these measurements, and had very pretty olive skin, straight black hair that was beginning to gray some, sort of graying straight black hair, very attractive woman, actually. She was clearly a very articulate woman, had a, for a woman, a deep voice, actually, kind of a deep guttural sound, but an unusual voice. You were sort of immediately struck by her voice and how her voice commanded attention. She spoke in a very deliberate, thoughtful way, and was a person that you had to deal with. I was really impressed by just her broad breadth of knowledge and all the people that she had dealt with, because when I met Miss Baker, I had just graduated from Rust College. This was the summer of 1964. I had just come from Walls, Mississippi, to New York, and met Miss Baker. And after being in New York for a while, we came here to Washington, DC, and set up the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party office. Miss Baker was the leader of the movement to challenge the regular white Mississippi delegation in Atlantic City, New Jersey. We were on the northern front, more or less, and Miss Baker's charge was really to set up this office in Washington, to be the lobbying arm for the MFDP.

She assembled a staff that consisted of Frank Smith, Jr., who is now a DC city councilman, has been on the city council for a number of years now. Frank and I were involved in SNCC together in Mississippi. Frank was at Rust College as part of SNCC's sort of northern Mississippi organizing effort. Frank came to Rust and actually enrolled in some classes at Rust College, was taking classes, but really his primary purpose was organizing at Rust. I met Frank while at Rust at the beginning of my senior year. Frank was on the campus and had been around all that summer, and I was also that year president of the student government association at Rust and had been involved in civil rights activities before Frank arrived. I had been president of the campus chapter and was in the campus chapter of NAACP. The year before Frank arrived I had met Bob Moses, who had come to talk to friends at Rust, and I had gone to my first SNCC meeting in Atlanta. This was the fall of 1962. I'd sort of been involved with civil rights activities on the campus, involved with SNCC, and involved with the NAACP. I got to know Frank very well, because we worked in voter registration and speaker's bureau. We organized in north Mississippi, and I was sort of head of the campus speaker's bureau for Rust. We went to the adjoining counties to give voter registration speeches on Sundays. We would try to get on the program at Sunday services, so we went to Marshall County, Benton County, DeSoto County, and some to Tate County and Lafayette County, giving speeches on Sundays. Frank and all of us, Johnny Harris, John Morris, Floyd Tyler, some of us who were students at Rust were sort of the core group and a few students from Mississippi Industrial College, across the street from Rust, that is now closed as we speak. So I got to know Frank. After that year, after I graduated, Frank was still involved with

SNCC. During my senior year, Frank left Holly Springs to go to Greenwood to participate in what was really a major Greenwood voter registration drive and really never came back to the campus as a student again. But we stayed in touch because I was in Greenwood for part of that time between classes at Rust.

Frank invited me in the summer of '64, in June of '64, to come to New York to work with them in developing the lobbying arm, the northern office for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. That's really sort of how I got involved, because after I graduated that summer, I was working in this factory in Memphis, Tennessee, and had worked there for maybe three weeks to a month, not quite that long, actually, maybe two weeks. Because it was a hard job. So I got a call from Frank one day saying you want to come to Washington to work with us on the MFDP. Of course, I immediately said yes. Because before I graduated I had been involved in the MFDP; I'd been involved in the Freedom Vote Campaign, had been involved in the establishment of the MFDP in April of '64 in Jackson at the Masonic Temple on Lynch Street. So I had been there for the founding of the organization, MFDP, and had been involved, as I pointed out, in the Freedom Vote Campaign in '63 at Rust, and had been involved in helping to organize the party. Of course, I had been in contact with Frank and other people during that interim. In April of '64 the MFDP was organized. The following month I graduated from Rust College, in May, and then just the first part of June I got this job working in a factory in Memphis. I didn't quite know what I was going to do, except I had planned to go to graduate school, or to law school.

So Frank called me in June, and I arrived in New York City the same day that the three civil rights workers were reported missing in Philadelphia, Mississippi. That was the day that I met Ella Baker. I rode the Greyhound Bus from Memphis to New York, to Manhattan, and got a cab to Miss Baker's apartment. That is really when I officially became involved with Miss Baker. I had met Miss Baker prior to that in Mississippi, and, of course, she was at the founding of the MFDP in April of 1964. I was invited to join the staff. Miss Baker was there in New York, and Frank was there. I met this guy, Walt Tillow, white guy from New York, Jewish guy from New York, who was part of the DC staff. Later, once we moved and found office space here in Washington, we were joined by Charles Sherrod, who was the project director in Southwest Georgia, in Albany, Georgia. Charles Sherrod is still living in southwest Georgia and served for a number of years on the Albany, Georgia, city council.

Miss Baker, this impressive woman, was really calling the shots. Our mission was to, number one, lobby on Capitol Hill, to make the case for the MFDP with the Congresspersons on the Hill. Our other major responsibility was to travel to different state delegations across the country to convince them that when they came to Atlantic City that summer, in August, that they would support the MFDP as opposed to the lilly white segregated delegation. Miss Baker was really in charge of the total operation. She had the political smarts that most of didn't have. As I reflect on the reason I was really invited to Washington, Frank originally was from Newnan, Georgia. Miss Baker lived in New York. Walt Tillow was from New York, and Charles Sherrod originally from Virginia, but had been working all those years in Albany, Georgia. Quite candidly, there

was no one on the Washington staff that was from Mississippi. I was the person from Mississippi. A number of the interviews that we did with radio stations and newspapers is that they always tried to include me because I was really the bona fide person from Mississippi. I facetiously told this guy who did a chapter on me in a book he wrote four or five years ago, is that they wanted someone with a Mississippi accent. So I was their person with the accent.

I got to know Miss Baker. One of the things that I was just immediately impressed by was her knowledge of the political system, her knowledge of the issues, and her way of saying how we should present the issues, how we should fashion the issues. I remember going to the Hill on several occasions with Frank Smith, and we were talking about the MFDP. It was a requirement that I would sort of describe to them what it was like living in Mississippi, what it was like participating in the civil rights movement in Mississippi, and the importance of the MFDP as an organization, and why we needed this party as opposed to the lilly white party. So much of this strategy, because when you place it in context, Miss Baker really had the political know-how. She had the political smarts, given her background. Frank, of course, was much wiser in the ways of the world than I was. He had gone to Morehouse and had been involved in SNCC and had traveled around the country. Walt Tillow grew up in Manhattan, so he had a certain political elan and sophistication, and Charles Sherrod had been a project director in southwest Georgia. They were all politically astute in one sense. This woman, her last name was Jones, I can't think of her first name right now, but she was the office secretary, and she was from New York, too. So I was the Mississippi representative.

We would have these staff meetings, and it really consisted of Miss Baker sort of laying out the general strategy. She wanted our reaction. Most of this really was Miss Baker saying, maybe we ought to go to Minnesota this week, or we ought to go to California, or we ought to go to Massachusetts, and we were in constant contact. She was in constant contact with the leadership of these different state delegations. They were electing delegates to the convention. Based on what she heard in Minnesota, what she heard in Wisconsin, in Illinois, then she would say, well, maybe we ought to go to this convention. They are electing delegates here or there or there are having caucuses here or there. She was the chief political guru and honcho in that office, and our comments were sort of responding to ideas articulated by Miss Baker.

For me it was a major learning experience. In terms of just the politics, because this was really my introduction to Washington, DC. When I came to Washington in '64, this was my second trip to Washington. I'd only been in Washington two times in my life; this was the second trip. My bus ride to New York in '64 was my first trip to New York City. I hadn't been north a whole lot. Miss Baker sort of made it very real for me politically, because I had been a social science, economics, major at Rust. I had studied politics, been involved in the civil rights movement in Holly Springs and other parts of Mississippi. But I really hadn't been north and didn't really have that full appreciation and great interest in public affairs. I was an eager, recent graduate. She just said to me, you are going to go to Atlantic City, you are going overnight to Atlantic City to do some organizing, what we would call an advance person now. I remember initially going to Atlantic City, went with Charles Sherrod, went several times alone in an old Dodge,

driving from DC to Atlantic City, really hadn't driven north. The amazing thing was that Miss Baker just simply had confidence in all of us. She just simply said, OK, McLemore, here's the map. Here's the person that you should call when you get to Atlantic City. So it was the Reverend McNeil, who had a Baptist Church there, in town. And Reverend McNeil and I met, met Reverend McNeil's daughter, Gerry, who now works at the Library of Congress. We got to know each other. She had just graduated from Skidmore College. They introduced me to the president of the NAACP, a guy whose first name is Edgar whose last name I can't think of now, but who became a principal in the Atlantic City school system. I really sort of worked with Edgar and the other young people in Atlantic City organizing activities.

What I was primarily organizing for, we were preparing for the coming of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The delegation was coming to Atlantic City. Miss Baker just had me to go to Atlantic City and do the organizing. Between going alone and with Charles Sherrod and occasionally with Frank Smith, but Frank really did most of the traveling to the state delegations, sort of making a case for the MFDP. Miss Baker was in charge of that whole process. The real benefits to me personally, and this is my personal take on this, is that Miss Baker would talk about her days working for the NAACP, her days of organizing in the South. She talked much less about SCLC and Martin Luther King, as I recall, because that was much more immediate. She talked about Du Bois when he was in the office in New York editing the *Crisis*, how he was a loner, and didn't really talk to them or didn't talk to many people in the office, on the office staff, was always well dressed. He was just Du Bois. He kept to himself. She didn't really get

to know him very well. I'm not sure Du Bois liked a whole lot of people in the office. That was Du Bois. She talked about that. I found that really fascinating. I obviously had read about Du Bois and knew something about him. She talked about organizing in the South, organizing in West Virginia, organizing in the Carolinas, organizing the NAACP. I was struck then by how unusual it was for a woman, a black woman, to have been organizing in the South under those conditions. She had a wealth of experience. Aside from having formal meetings, staff meetings, it was just sort of listening to her talk about the difficulties in the things that she was able to do. She talked a bit about Martin Luther King, and a bit about SCLC, and a bit about Montgomery and the bus boycott, and all of that.

PD: When she worked for the NAACP, she was down in the South organizing a lot, but she eventually quit that job in 1946. Did she ever talk about the conflict she had with the NAACP?

LM: Yes, she did. She talked about the conflict she had with the NAACP over leadership, primarily over strategy. Part of it clearly was these people, these males, these primarily black males, white males, primarily people in leadership, who didn't really want to adhere to a lot of the recommendations and ideas and suggestions that this black woman had. She clearly was an equal among equals, and she saw herself as that. The men didn't see her in that light. So she talked about the conflicts that she had. She talked really about how SNCC as an organization embraced her ideas. She clearly finally had met an organization that shared her ideas, an organization that was willing to implement her ideas, a group of young people that were just simply more than talkers, people who

wanted to do things. I think that really is what charged her up, really turned her on; she had just really met her match in terms of people who were willing to go out and just take chances. She was wise enough politically not to just say, do this or do that, but she would just simply make recommendations, throw out ideas, talk about their life experiences, as it were. The leadership in SNCC picked up on that.

She sort of influenced the SNCC leadership and all of SNCC in a way that was not dogmatic, not dictatorial, but these are the issues. It was always an open-ended discussion. She had more influence on these young people then than anybody would have had who said, OK, this is the way to do it; this is the way we ought to do it, one two three, these are the guidelines. She never did that. People really picked up on her wisdom and her experiences. In Ella Baker, in 1964, we have to remember, we are listening to a person that not only knew the rhetoric and knew a lot of the theory, but a person that had lived a life of organizing and had met some of, all of, really, the major leaders at that time. She knew A. Philip Randolph, obviously. She used to talk a lot about A. Philip Randolph. Talked a lot about Bayard Rustin, course Martin Luther King, Abernathy, Roy Wilkins, Walter White of the NAACP. She knew and had met anybody who was anybody in leadership when it came to civil and human rights. All of the political leaders, the major elected officials, she knew those persons, had met them, had talked to them. When she talked, you got twenty-something year olds around the table, we were listening, we were all ears. Because this woman had lived it, knew it, worked it, and had been actively engaged. This really had been her life. For me it was instructive. I really found that part

of it, just listening to her and reading in the office, at night, books that she would mention, people she would talk about. It was just an amazing learning experience.

As a part of the northern organizing effort, the lobbying effort, I went back to Mississippi and went to the precinct meetings of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, got elected a delegate, got elected vice-chair of the party. Miss Baker really encouraged me. I remember there was some discussion about whether or not since I was on the MFDP staff, whether I should go back to Mississippi and become a delegate. She said, by all means. Because you are from, I was from DeSoto County, a county that didn't have a whole lot of people active in the civil rights movement at that time and was from the 2nd Congressional District, the Delta District, so she said, by all means, go back. Go back and become a delegate. So I went back and became a delegate and was elected vice-chair and all that. But she encouraged that. She sort of encouraged your political growth and development. I found that very rewarding. I'm sure to a person all of us who were on the immediate Washington staff, Sherrod, Frank, and Jones, and Tillow, all of us, they would tell you that all of them learned something from Miss Baker. She just had that kind of influence.

If you were talking to Ella Baker and she mentions, well, I was talking to A. Philip Randolph, or I was talking to Du Bois, you had to sort of listen. She got your attention. It was like being spontaneous, these conversations with her. When we had a lunch or having coffee, or whatever the occasion, just talking, all of us in the office would stop doing whatever we were doing and listen to Miss Baker.

Eleanor Holmes Norton, who was in her last year of law school, maybe had just graduated, I can't quite remember, either her third year or had just graduated, was in Washington. Eleanor Holmes Norton and Frank Smith were very close friends. Eleanor was in and out of the office and provided some assistance. She was not on the staff per se, but she was in the office most of the days, talking strategy. That is when I really met her and got to know her. Just to demonstrate how fluid this operation was, we were talking about delegate strategy, and I remember that Frank and Eleanor had this big argument and discussion in the staff meeting. It was just so fluid. We were really making policy decisions for the MFDP. It was heady, as I think about it now, but then I didn't think much about it. I remember that they went over to a restaurant across the street and had lunch and came back and said, OK, this is the legal strategy. We worked it out. It was just that fluid. We were really these young people, I'm twenty-three years old, and other people twenty-two, twenty-one, or twenty-four. Nobody over twenty-five, maybe Eleanor. It was incredible.

At the center of all this was Ella Baker. Giving direction to the MFDP, the lobbying effort, and then, of course, Bob Moses, was in Mississippi. We were taking our cues, including Bob Moses and the rest of the people, from Ella Baker. She was the person in charge; she was the person directing the process. Ella Baker was quite a power in her own quiet way, but people really listened to her.

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PD: Jane Stembridge said that she was in Atlanta in the summer of '60 working with Ella Baker, and Bob Moses came into the office. He'd come down from New York and

wanted to get involved in Atlanta. Evidently, from what Jane remembers, Miss Baker and Bob Moses had a conversation, and he pretty much decided like he could be more use in Mississippi. Evidently that was because of the influence of Miss Baker. She said, here's the place, with your ideas, you need to be. Did you ever hear any conversation about the relationship between her and him.

LM: I observed Bob Moses and Ella Baker in the same place, in meetings. Of course, Bob Moses had a great deal of humility. He was not the kind personality that Miss Baker was in terms of, well, Miss Baker was really a public speaker, too. Bob Moses, who was going to speak to the Fannie Lou Hamer lecture series group Wednesday of this week, meaning October 1, is not much of a public speaker. He is persuasive person. You can immediately tell that he is perceptive and bright and has a way of analyzing issues. In addition to Miss Baker's consummate political skills, she was also a fairly effective public speaker. I observed Miss Baker and Bob Moses in a lot of meetings. There was a profound mutual respect for each other. Bob Moses, like the rest of us, had this tremendous admiration for Ella Baker. It came to deference, if you will. Due deference was shown Ella Baker by Bob Moses and everybody else. She had been there; she had done that; she had seen it. That was a good relationship.

What I found to be a very interesting relationship was the relationship between, obviously, Miss Baker and Bob Moses, and as I pointed out, I really think everybody saw Miss Baker as this wise woman, as the wise person, who would not lead us astray, who didn't want us to say, OK, this the blueprint; follow it a through z, but these are ideas and

you young people are bright enough to pick up on what you think is good, what you think you can use, and what you can't use don't worry about it. I saw that kind of relationship.

Then, there was the fascinating personality of Fannie Lou Hamer in this process. Because Miss Baker was this sort of driving political force, because Bob Moses was dealing in '64, he was dealing with MFDP, but he was also dealing with the Summer Project. You had this whole Summer Project going on, and Miss Baker was primarily focused on the MFDP. That was really her baby in terms of getting it implemented. Bob Moses had been the brain child behind all of this, but Miss Baker had political know-how and skill that obviously Bob Moses never had. Bob Moses was a high school math teacher. Miss Baker had been organizing politically all of her life, so she brings to the table skills and experiences that none of us collectively had had. Fannie Lou Hamer, who emerges from the people, and became one of the spokespersons, quite frankly, the spokesperson for SNCC, because of her Mississippi experience. Miss Baker really used Mrs. Hamer in a very positive way to get the word out about Mississippi, about the MFDP.

As I told you, part of my job was to go to Atlantic City along with Charles Sherrod to set up meetings. Some of those meetings were set up for Fannie Lou Hamer. Miss Baker used Fannie Lou Hamer to raise money, to raise the level of consciousness. It was sort of fascinating to see Miss Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Bob Moses sort of work together in terms of moving issues forward. You had this wise political sage, Miss Baker; you had this very perceptive analytical philosopher, Bob Moses; and this earthy grassroots woman, Fannie Lou Hamer. How they worked together to project Fannie Lou

Hamer, and how Fannie Lou Hamer understood precisely what the deal was, what the arrangement was, who understood, after a bit of conversation, what the angle was on issues and how she could sort of cut through the issues to get at the heart of the matter. She would sort of fashion her presentation, her talk, what she was going to say, from the issues that had been bandied about. I'm talking about sometimes long, very long, meetings of SNCC people where you had Moses, you had Baker, you had James Foreman. Well, you had everybody who was involved in SNCC. Fannie Lou Hamer was this person who could present this kind of grassroots image to the world, I'm a Mississippian, and this is what happened to me. Here I am. And what these young people represented. How perceptive Mrs. Hamer was in sort of picking up on all of this and really sort of fashioning a very unique role for herself in the movement where she was the spiritual leader and the song leader and the preacher and the SNCC field secretary and the mother for all these people, which was quite an amazing feat. Whatever the occasion called for, whether she was speaking to the media or whether she was speaking to us in a SNCC meeting. After all of this dialogue, and all of the young college people demonstrating how smart they were, she would sort of cut through the bullshit, and say, OK, this is how I see it. This is what I am going to do. Sort of move it forward.

At the back of this, at the back of this, at the center of this during that time frame I'm talking about, '62 to '64, you had the presence of Ella Baker and Bob Moses. Clearly, there was profound mutual respect that Miss Baker and Bob Moses had for each other. There have been some public statements that Bob Moses made about Mrs. Hamer, the

movie, "Fundi: The Ella Baker Story," that Joanne Grant produced on the life of Ella Baker, Bob Moses talks about Baker and her influence in all of this.

I can sit here now and talk about what happened in '64 and '63, and as I reflect, and this sort of gives me occasion to reflect on that, it was quite amazing that the remarkable ability of Ella Baker, who was much much older than the young SNCC people, how she was able to mesh in with them, starting in 1960 through this whole period of time and how she sort of set the political agenda and how the leadership, Forman and Bob Moses and John Lewis and all those people, really just saw Miss Baker as being the person who would really do no wrong, who would not lead them in the wrong direction, how they kept the faith in what she meant. How courageous those young people were and how we went out to do things and how we had really picked up on the ideas in a very subtle way that Miss Baker had thrown out there. Bob Moses, all of us, were influenced by Ella Baker. I think without Miss Baker's influence and guidance and direction, SNCC would not have been nearly as effective as it was. Miss Baker had seen and had dealt with hardball politics. She had seen it close up. When we got to Atlantic City, this was something she had replayed in her mind and her life for years and years. For us, it was orientation 101. She had been through that. She was in graduate school. She was way beyond us. We experienced the process, and we learned from it. Miss Baker anticipated a whole lot of what happened.

PD: I get the idea that when she moved up to Harlem after finishing Shaw, she got emerged in all this grassroots stuff. Then when she worked for the NAACP I think she wanted more grassroots organizing than the NAACP was willing to implement. So then

she goes down to SCLC to try to straighten out the office stuff after the bus boycott and keep it going, and I get the idea that she thought that Dr. King and maybe Mr. Abernathy and some of those people weren't quite pushing or grassroots enough. It was too much top-led thing. What Jane's told me, when the summer of '60 came and the sit-ins started, this is what I've been looking for. It's not working through these organizations that are geared into the establishment. You've got to get around that. Get these people out here that aren't consumed with organization but are willing to work with the grassroots.

LM: Well, the fact of the matter is that Martin Luther King and his cohorts and his colleagues really were not militant enough, were not radical enough for Ella Baker. We could cut it a lot of different ways, but that's really what it amounts to. She was involved in NAACP, and the NAACP, as we both know, emphasized a kind of legalistic approach to issues. It was much more bureaucratized than Miss Baker was really willing to deal with or was accustomed to or wanted to deal with. So she had this civil rights organization that emphasized a legal approach, and she was grassroots, much more for direct action. So SCLC, when she became the SCLC's first executive director, she clearly saw that Martin Luther King was not willing to take the kind of stands on issues that she thought King should take. When they went to Shaw and organized, eventually organized, SNCC, they went there with the notion this new organization would be a sort of a student arm of SCLC. Ella Baker said, hey, I think we have arrived here at a point where you want to be an independent organization. All this energy, firepower, and intellect they decided after a few months to go out on their own as a separate organization. Meeting these young people and their energy and fervor and militancy is something that Baker was

really looking for. At this point in her life, she just simply met the perfect combination of young people who really wanted to move an agenda forward that she was really profoundly concerned about. Who didn't have the hangups and didn't have the baggage, who didn't have the reluctance that the people in the NAACP and the people in SCLC and Dr. King had. This was really a perfect marriage for Ella Baker. I think it clearly energized her in ways that she probably didn't anticipate when she first met them. She clearly soon abandoned the SCLC and moved in the SNCC orbit and was the advisor there for SNCC and made a profound difference. I think it is interesting that so many people now know that Ella Baker is going to be much more appreciated in death than she ever was in life.

PD: I get the impression that she stayed behind, she never wanted to step out in front. She wanted this stuff to work. She knew the way to inspire people to do this grassroots stuff that she spent her life training to implement.

LM: That's right. I think you're right. She clearly was a behind-the-scenes person. More young people, more scholars are going to know about her now because I think of what's emerging. Joanne Grant's book that's coming out very soon on Ella Baker, the movie, "Funday," there are follow-up activities that are being planned in honor of Miss Baker. She is really going to get her just due in death.

PD: But I want a photograph of her. She stood so far in the background she didn't step up and have her picture made very often.

LM: I'm sure there are a goodly number of photographs around, too. If anybody would know where some of the good ones are, obviously Joanne Grant would know that. She's a person that you ought to talk to at some point.

PD: There are so many ways to cut this, from 1960, from the time of the February 1 when the sit-ins started, it's almost like, and I have to go back, too, to *Brown v. Board* and Dr. King and there are certain milestones in there that were part of the civil rights movement, but in 1960 it's almost like the world's turned upside down. The South cannot control, after the sit-ins, the white leaders don't know what to do. They were willing to talk to Dr. King now, they were willing to talk to the NAACP now, but they could have a dialogue; they could talk to them. But they don't know who is leading the sit-ins. Because it was spontaneous. They don't know how to get at SNCC because there's no real leader. It's grassroots. You don't have that vulnerability. Then, the other thing that strikes me is just the people who got involved with SNCC, in my mind, are some of the most important people of the twentieth century. That moment is one of the most important of the century. Look who you have there: Ella Baker, Bob Moses, and it goes on and on. Without that spark from the sit-ins, Bob Moses probably would not have come south, Ella Baker wouldn't have been able to seize the moment, Mrs. Hamer wouldn't have gotten involved on the grassroots level. You just go on and on.

LM: And you had CORE, that had been founded earlier at the University of Chicago. When the sit-ins and the Freedom Rides took off, James Farmer, all of that whole generation of people identified with CORE, Dave Dennis, all of those people who were involved in the southern civil rights movement. All of those people came before. So you

had SNCC, CORE, SCLC, those organizations that were mostly involved in some form of direct action, voter registration, etc. As somebody pointed out, back then to do voter registration was also direct action, because your life was on the line. All of those activities and organizations really began to refashion the terrain. People saw King and his cohorts as being folk who were really mild, conservative, respectable mainstream leaders compared to some of the tactics of James Farmer and the SNCC people and the other type of local grassroots organizations who were just sort of overnight being developed but spontaneous young people sitting in and calling in to question the segregationist policies of the South. It was a whole different ball game. It was like a whole new set of rules that people had not had to deal with before, and it made it very difficult because the local leadership found it difficult to respond in the traditional manner. These people were coming from different places, had different ideas, they were not easily controlled. You couldn't buy them off. It made it very very difficult.

PD: I want to ask you one other thing. When talking to Jane, who is a white woman, she goes down to Atlanta and starts working in the office with Miss Baker and Dr. King. Here's a southern white woman in an office with black men, and she's basically saying, "We are in the same social space." Then Connie Curry. She was at the first SNCC meeting and was on the board, she said, immediately. She's a southern white woman. Then there's a whole group of white women who got involved about that time. As far as I know, I don't remember, except for Ann Braden, who got involved and worked on an equal basis in public with black men, simply because the whole segregation system was set up to prevent that. You would never have black men and white women sharing the social

space as equals. That's what it's there for. But here, this is a kind of a break with that. These white women suddenly are not only willing but comfortable and eager to do this. Was there ever, or first of all if I can get your opinion on the significance of that, and then if there was any discussion about whether this was important or not.

LM: Let me tell you, just sort of coming from my own naive rural Mississippi background, Rust College, sophomore, freshman, junior, senior, and then especially my last two years, when I was a junior and senior, when I really began to see this kind of interaction, when I really got involved in SNCC and going to SNCC meetings in different places. It opened up a whole new world for me from the perspective of dealing with people, black folk and white folk. Quite frankly, I was a bit hesitant because of being in a world that I was really not accustomed to. It turns out, obviously, that it was true of most of us. I'm talking 1962, now, for me, '63 later. So it opened up a whole new world, a different world, a world that I readily embraced but personality-wise I was a fairly shy person, sort of withdrawn. In certain forums, because of my public posture on issues, and I'd been involved in high school in the student government association and class president and all that stuff. So I was not unaccustomed to being before people, but I was not accustomed to being in an environment where you were, quite frankly, dealing with things in a political sense, where you were on a regular basis sort of making decisions, or being a party to an organization where you were asked to influence decisions, where your opinion was sought, where you were a part of the decision-making group. I guess that's what I'm saying. That was different. It was different because you were a part of this group, and you were making decisions that would have an impact on the organization. At that point

in time, it eventually had an impact on the country. It was different. It was heady. It was the kind of thing that you would call home and talk to your mother about. It was the kind of thing when you would go home, you would have conversations with, in my case my mother and my grandfather. I would talk to them about it. I would describe a world that they had not been introduced to. It was a world where you were equal in the council of decision-makers.

I was really impressed and quite overwhelmed by how knowledgeable, how articulate, the blacks and the whites were. My own age, students, college students, who either had graduated or who were still in college, or had dropped out, or whatever, but they were simply so fully aware of what was going on in the world, not only in this country but internationally. Who could talk about the implications of it. They talked about it in SNCC. The relationship between this country and Africa, and the impact of what we were doing and how it was going to play out in Africa. It was a heady environment. I remember initially, early on, going to some of the SNCC meetings in just necktie, jacket, and dress, and you come in an SNCC people in overalls and all this stuff. I was a student at Rust, campus leader, and all this. I just remember, I looked out of place. Then, on my campus, I'm one of the bright guys, one of the well-spoken guys, and how I just simply felt inadequate. Being around these articulate young people who were talking about this philosopher and that philosopher. It was really heady. It was the kind of thing that made you go back to your campus, go back to your room, or whatever, and just go to the library and just books, and try to read. That's what I did. It was really educational. This was really a world for me where we were sharing the same social space with white

women and white men, and we were seen as equal. I was overwhelmed by it. I guess at the time, I thought, well, this is absolutely fantastic.

Now, we really, I didn't talk, and I can't remember being party to many conversations where we would sort of talk about, OK, here we are in this place at this time, and here are these white women, some of them southern and some of them northern, and we are sharing space with them. Didn't sort of come up like that. The way it played itself out later, later meaning like a year, was this beginning discussion about the role of white folk in the movement, what role should they play. Should not they be in the white community organizing whites as we are organizing blacks, because the racism and all these prejudices were with the white community and not necessarily in the black community. So why don't you go there? So it was the very beginnings of those kinds of conversations. Frankly, none of this kind of analyzing, OK, how are we going to relate to black men and white women. I've heard some of the white women say in recent years, is that SNCC gave them the opportunity to do things [tape 2, side 1], they had responsibilities, whether it was writing a position paper, or whether it was going out to make a speech, or whether it was going some place to raise money, but whatever needed to be done, they were a part of doing it. They pointed out, Casey Hayden, Connie Curry, heard them say, that it was never a question that this is not a woman's job, or this is a man's job. It was never that kind of thing. In SNCC they just didn't notice those lines of demarcation. Now, I'm sure that there were probably sexist comments made and this and that and the other and racist things made during the course of working, but as a kind of normal and regular environment, it was not, this is a woman's job and this is a man's job. That was not an

issue. As I reflect on my experiences, I really was just sort of impressed with the kind of skills, again how articulate these people were, blacks and whites. For me it was a sea change, it was clearly the defining moment in my life, when I joined SNCC and got involved in the civil rights movement. I just simply saw black people and white people working together, common goals and all of that, as just simply being ideal. And women, yes, had a role to play.

Because, at Rust, my student activities with the SGA, my student activities with SNCC, you know, black women were a part of our group, the real leaders. Johnnie Harris, Lonear Windham, people like that who I recall right now, immediately, they were just as in there as I was. To see them, and, of course, all of this goes back to some point in your childhood. I grew up in a family with this strong woman as a mother, so I had a real appreciation for women. I never really thought a whole lot in sexist terms, because I really never thought about things that women couldn't do or shouldn't do. Clearly, it was a reflection of my own environmental circumstances. I'm sure other people had come up with different circumstances. My grandfather was the male figure in my life. He was a different kind of male. He wasn't macho. He didn't believe in corporal punishment. This was a different guy. My mother was the one who believed in applying the switch and the rod. I think that really had something to do with how you bring your perspective later on to these activities. I'm just saying in witnessing and hearing with my own ears, we didn't get into that kind of thing. Clearly, there were interracial romances and all of this going on, which I thought was great. From both perspectives. There were white guys dating black women, and there were black men dating white women. I really didn't really think a

whole lot about it, except that I thought it was the way the world ought to be. The way I still think the world ought to be, although I'm obviously a bit old-fashioned now. Some things you will probably hold on to regardless of how old you get.

For me, then, it was really an important period in my life. It sort of defines who you are later on. Because if you get a group of people round a table who were active in the civil rights movement, to a person, you will end up hearing people say, this was the most important period of my life, or it provided a frame of reference for where I am now, or it's a point of reference, or whatever defining moment or sea change or what you want to use. That's what it ends up being. At these reunions that I've been to, and noticeably the reunion of the 1964 Summer Project that was held in '94 in Jackson. After Black Power, people went separate ways. So many of us did.

Then clearly these reunions have demonstrated in a profound way how much we really liked each other. And how much we really miss each other. These reunions have sort of rekindled relationships. People staying in touch with each other, visiting each other, working on projects together, whether it's environmental or civil rights or labor or what have you. Just from 1994, and we're talking three years later, so it's quite incredible. The bond that was initially formed thirty years ago now, thirty-three years, or thirty-five years ago, how that bond was still there. When some people hadn't seen each other in twenty years or thirty years, how people sort of reconnected. Which I really found very remarkable. It's something about what happened then. It was good. It was not all good, but it was good. In the long run, if you look at it over the long term, it really had a real impact on public policy, had a real impact on the lives of people, and so many of

these people who knew each other then, it was one of the most remarkable things. I discovered in just listening to people talk is how much of their lives they have shared with their children. And how the children who were there, who had not met so and so but had heard this person's name mentioned throughout this person's childhood. I've never met you, but my mother or my father talk about you all the time. Or my little brother has your last name, or your first name. I mean, quite amazing stuff. Some it was part of the formal session, it just sort of came out, it was just the emotion attached to it, how people embraced each other, the crying, the tears, and the happiness, and the sharing. So it says something about what happened all those years ago and that cement, I mean, how those relationships were cemented, because of that. Incredible period.

We started off talking about Ella Baker, but Ella Baker really has something to do with all of that.

PD: When I hear you talking about this, in my mind, I told Jane this the other night, I said, you know you're my hero. You are too. I think any sensitive person that saw what your generation did, which is my generation, but the people who, especially in SNCC and the surrounding organizations, especially in Mississippi, which became the international focus in '64, is that you can trace almost all the good things that have happened in this country as far as making people aware of people's differences and abuses, it comes with women and gays and right down the line, Indians, sort of gave a voice to people who before, like you said in those meetings, you have a voice, that was the blueprint. Ella Baker could see if you get this out there people will learn they have a voice, no matter whether society looks at them as queer, or as black or as Indian or as handicapped,

whatever, it opened up a whole new area where people have a voice to say, you have got to accept me as an equal, because I'm an American. And I may be a little bit different from the Brady Bunch, but I'm an American. That's why I think, in my mind, you go back there, it's just this magic moment. I think that's why you still have that cement. There was some magnificent stuff going on there.

LM: People experienced clearly just a variety of things together. When you think about it, it was a remarkable way to grow up. Under the circumstances you had to make life-altering decisions, because a lot of this involved personal injury or personal safety, bonding with a person. It was a matter of trust. You soon discovered this was a person that I can trust or I can't trust. This is a person that I don't mind being on the firing line with because she's going to be with me, or he's going to be with me, or he'll watch out for my back, or she'll watch out for my back, and I'll watch out for her back, or what have you. What happened is that you had this remarkable period of maturation, just people maturing before your eyes. The things they were doing, like Ella Baker said, Hey boy, go to Atlantic City and write newspaper articles for the newspaper and make speeches on behalf of the FDP. Here I am this guy who comes from Mississippi, who has this stutter, hadn't been introduced to the North before. But she says, hey, she has all the confidence in the world in you. You go out there and do it. Go to Capitol Hill and walk the halls of Congress and lobby people. Go out to wherever and speak to delegations about Mississippi, or stand up before delegations in Atlantic City and talk to them about Mississippi and why the MFDP ought to be seated. So you had that maturity. So I just remember being a sophomore at Rust, and then just how the thing just sort of fast

forwarded, the increase working in a freedom vote campaign, helping to organize the MFDP, and all of these things sort of occurring and how I matured as a person and how I matured politically and how I developed a much larger perspective on the world. You had these people that you thought in so many ways were unique, they have had different experiences and a lot of them had, but so many of them had the same experiences that you had. They were learning and growing and developing. So this cementing of relationships and then after Black Power this breaking away for so many of us, and then this coming together again, and then this rediscovery of each other. Really discovering profoundly how much we really and still like and appreciate each other. And how we even saved some of the same things, the books, posters, how we taught our children, how we told our stories, how we named our kids. It's quite amazing.

It had been ten years since the last reunion. Now we're saying we need to do it ever five years. Obviously, we're aging, but also it's the notion that we really do like each other, and we want to bring each other up to speed. And all those people who are on-line now who are communicating with each other about what's going on with their different projects. It's incredible. It's really incredible. It really helps. Just with my son, Leslie, forcing him, exposing him to the music back then. He initially said he didn't like it. Now he's embracing it and know a lot about it. Let's play this; let's listen to this. Just talking to them about the Temptations or about Bob Dylan. It's really sort of transmitting the culture. As you get older, you can have a greater appreciation for what your parents did, the parents before them. How they transmitted what they knew to you and other generations. We are in a position to do that now. From baseball to music to politics to

books to ideas. For us, who were active in the civil rights movement, what we do is we end up conveying a lot of that to our grandkids and to our kids, which I think is very very important for the country.

PD: Speaking of all that music and everything, I want to talk about leisure. We've talked about music and the effect that music did or did not have on the way people thought about the segregation system. But what kind of leisure life, I'm not sure which way to go, in the Freedom Houses and all that. What would people do to break the tension?

LM: Well, let me tell you. We would have , it was a combination of venues. We would, in the Freedom Houses, we would have the local radio stations, which was the source of the music that we were listening to then whether or not it was the Four Tops or the Temptations or B. B. King or Muddy Waters or Howlin' Wolf, or what have you. It was an occasion to celebrate. Real good times were had. Remember now, I spent most of my life on a college campus, so I was not always out in the community, but as I recall the real good times were when we would go to a local club in Greenville or Holly Springs or wherever we were and sort of have our fun along with the local people. Sort of the local population. We would listen to the music whether it was on the juke box or whether it was a live band playing the blues. It was just this great release. Dancing was so much a part of this ritual. Whether or not you could dance or not it didn't matter, but what would pass for dancing, right. It was great. The introduction, cause I remember just talking to people about the music, about the blues, cause I had grown up, as you well know, near this place my grandfather owned, a joke joint and cafe, as we called it, to dress it up.

Howlin' Wolf, Muddy Waters, I had heard that music all my life. That was one of the

areas that I could really sort of help some of my friends who hadn't been introduced to that culture. It was great.

I remember just being in Greenville one night and being at a club. SNCC people were there and local people were there, black folk and white people. I've always been sort of an observer. I haven't been sort of a headstrong person. The older I get I guess I'm getting more headstrong, but I used to be much more reserved about immediately going into things before I just sort of looked at them thoroughly, especially being in social environments. I would observe the local people and how they would sort of look at the civil rights workers. And how with great admiration, it was always great admiration that they saw black people and white people working together. It was just an amazing feeling. You could be in juke joint number 29 wherever, in the middle of nowhere, and civil rights people were there and black folk and white folk together, some dancing and drinking and having a good time, and how the local people really appreciated that. Some of these same people who would tell you that I'm not going to turn the other cheek, I'm not into non-violence, but who simply admired the courage of the young people but also who sort of admired the social setting where you would have blacks and whites together, and how the local people would sort of join in the fun, how they would become active participants in the process of making music or dancing, just making merry. That I found very fulfilling.

I remember when I took some of the civil workers home to Walls with me one evening; I can't remember the occasion. We were sort of there, and just the people in my home town. My grandfather, and friends I knew, they were just absolutely pleased. My grandfather was always, my mother was always fearful for my safety and that kind of stuff,

but when I brought my friends, we had been out doing freedom votes stuff. This was '63. We were just there in the cafe listening to music. They were drinking beer, the only thing I drank at that time, at least I didn't drink there. How people thoroughly enjoyed themselves and how my folk were just pleased to meet some people I was working with. We did that on more than one occasion. We were there in the area and said let's go to Walls, went to Walls. I have some of them, a couple of my college friends and all that. Just the way that the people just sort of embraced and appreciated what we were doing. Some of them would say I don't have the courage to do all this stuff you'all are doing cause I don't want to turn, or whatever, but it was just that. It was a way of just enjoying. That really occurred throughout.

We would have things in the Freedom House where we would dance and music, and kids from the community would come around. We would have games, teaching kids how to play chess, cards and all that. You sort of worked very hard and played very hard. It was just a great release. People obviously would leave Mississippi and go to Memphis, go to New Orleans, go to different places like that. Of course, going to Atlanta was always a great trip. The national headquarters of SNCC was in Atlanta. And that was always a good time. Going to Atlanta and to different places. I remember just being in Atlanta in a lot of different places, on Hunter Street, people just having a good time, people staying up all times of the night, playing music, reading poetry, just fantastic.

We would have these meetings, these big meetings. I remember we had these meetings at the Interdenominational Theological Seminary, ITC, in Atlanta. We would have these meetings that would go on and on. Then people would just, all of a sudden,

wine would appear. The SNCC meetings just lasted forever and ever and ever.

Somebody would bring up a jug of wine, here and there, so we started passing wine bottles around. Then, of course, the meeting ends up being a party. Those were just great pleasures. People just sort of, just said hey, start embracing, and dancing. It was a heavy time.

PD: I don't know of any other time like it.

LM: I don't either. The music of the movement clearly was important, the Freedom Songs, all of these things, because they really sort of gave people courage and new energy and all of that. Engaging in these activities outside of the regular day to day grind. It was important, because it really kept you going. Without that, more of us could have gone bananas, quite frankly. It helped people put things in perspective.

Being in the movement was sort of like being in a self-contained world where you have a different set of rules and regulations and you have a different mission, a different role, different goals, different objectives. You were surrounded by people that feel like you feel, and, obviously, that is not the real world. You are moving toward a certain objective, a certain goal. You have certain instrumentalities that you are using in order to try to get that done. So you listen to each other and you are trying to make your case. In one sense, it can get to be very intoxicating. You are sort of in this self-contained world. Stepping outside of that gives you a greater sense of reality, really, what's happening out there. And that was part of the joy of it, because it was so intoxicating. You are so wrapped up into it. You have energy that you don't normally have. You have the ability to stick with a task because of the fact that you are involved in this really self-contained

world. In Eric Hoffer's terms, you are the true believer. What you had is a union of true believers who working toward the same goal. It just made for quite a heady atmosphere.

PD: Do you know how many people were in SNCC? Say in '63, '64?

LM: Not very many, not very many. We're talking about a small number of people. The people who were actually SNCC field secretaries, who actually were on the SNCC payroll was an even smaller number. It just seems so much larger because of the activity that went on. Activity here, freedom movement, direct action, voter registration, and wherever you were, whether you were in Mississippi or Georgia or the Arkansas Delta or where have you. Not really a major number. But the spin-off impact of people who were influenced by SNCC and the friends of SNCC in the North and people in the community who say I'm a SNCC person, who were never on the SNCC payroll. SNCC people, or who identified with the organization, who worked, who were part of this organization or that organization, but also identified themselves as a SNCC person, or a CORE person, or an SCLC person, or an NAACP. But the SNCC cadre was a really small one. We are talking about a small number of people. But that had a major major impact on the world around it. I think that's what gave it this sense of being huge, when it was really small.

PD: It had a huge reputation.

LM: That's right, that's right. Just because of the people who were identified with SNCC, who embraced the SNCC philosophy, who wanted to be associated with SNCC in one way or another, raising money, or participating in voter registration drives, or on college campuses. The SNCC influence was really huge. In terms of SNCC members and paid staffers, we're talking about a minuscule number of people.

PD: How many people were killed before the start of Freedom Summer?

LM: When they were looking for the three civil rights workers, they came across several bodies of people. I think the number has been quoted as to as many as nine to eleven people who had been involved in some aspect of civil rights. Striking out individually or part of some collectivity, just when they were looking for those guys. Then, of course, you had the James Reeb, and Viola Liuzzo killings in Alabama. Then, you think about the killings in Mississippi prior to '64. When Bob Moses and Reggie Robinson and Marion Barry, those people, and Bob Zelner went to McComb in '61, that same year and later you had the killing of two black men who were associated, one directly with Bob Moses and one indirectly in the voter registration. Over in Amite County in Liberty, one guy, Herbert Lee, was killed by a state representative (E. H. Hurst).

[Tape 2, side 2]

LM: Then a Mr. James Allen, he was getting ready to change his testimony, who had sort of recanted and changed and was getting ready to move north and was killed before he could leave Amite County. You had those killings. Then, of course, even prior to that the killings of Reverend Lee in McComb, and the killing in Brookhaven and places like that. I was reading something not long ago where someone said, it's really impossible to capture the true number of people who were killed. There were untold people killed or hurt or sort of disappeared, who had some association real or imagined with the civil rights movement that people got rid of, got killed, for one reason or another.

Which only demonstrates that was a lot at stake, it was risky business. People working together in numbers during the freedom days to get people to register to vote in

large numbers so numbers would provide some security. All of that was important, because when people felt that they were isolated, the fear really could consume you. That happened to too many people, because I remember going to so many houses and some lone person had told me, come by this time tomorrow and pick me up and take me to the court house and I'll be ready. And you'd go, and they weren't there. The trick was to say, OK, I have five other people going with us, or ten. It took me a while to figure that out.

PD: Good strategy.

LM: Yeah. But eventually I did. But it's this notion of being out there as the Lone Ranger, and people didn't want to do that. They knew of so many stories of people disappearing. They did not want to become a victim.

It was a time that was exciting, challenging, and dangerous, but I think, most of all, when you look back on it, most of us would say it was clearly a time of great growth and was very rewarding. Again, it just altered the lives of so many people. I guess the tragedy in one sense is those people who have not been able to transcend what happened then. People who are still sort of living in the sixties. We do still have a lot of people like that.

PD: How do you mean?

LM: People who every reference point is made to what happened in '63 or '62 or '64. Or they live in a world where it's still '63 or '64. They just simply haven't come to deal with the political realities of where we are now, have not really come to appreciate the foundation that they laid then and how important it is to take advantage of these

opportunities of where we are now because of the foundation that was laid. They are sort of tied to what happened then. They see the world in the context of 1964 or '65, or whatever. Quite frankly, the world had changed. They had a lot to do with the changing of this world. They made the revolution. Unfortunately, they are not in position to take advantage of what they made. I find that to be a tragedy.

One of the things, going to that seminar this summer at Harvard really sort of helped me in terms of my own experiences. Except when I'm talking to you or if there is some kind of special occasion, most people don't have any idea that I ever participated in the civil rights movement. I'm really sort of into where we are now. I'm very much involved in my community, I'm very much involved in things political, so I'm very much involved in what the world is now. With my own personal satisfaction, what I did then, what I was a part of, and I think what I'm going to do more now on a systematic basis is share some of my experiences with the students that I teach. But that's something that I really have not done. I think it's important.

I was really trying to, in my own mind, I just really didn't really want to be so tied into what happened to me then that I'm not able to function now, that I'm not able to see the world in the context of 1997 and beyond. I guess really what I'm saying is that so many of us are so tied to what happened then until we are unable to provide a kind of reference point of here and for the future. I think it's possible for one to share those experiences and to appreciate those experiences and to write about those experiences, which is something that I'm going to do. And to write about those experiences in such a way that you can help inform people and still not just sort of wallow in the fact that what I

did in 1964 was so important so I can't do a damned thing beyond '64. I really think that is a tragedy.

PD: Yes, that's not the only thing you've done. You have gone on and done all these other things. I know what you mean. I know people like that too. It's like a high school athlete who reaches that peak and never goes on to play college or anything, but his whole reference is back to that eighty-yard touchdown return.

LM: Exactly.

PD: And the world goes on.

LM: The world does go on, and I find that so many people, they either are there or they simply cannot move beyond that point. And they are bright folks. They had so much to offer then, and just think about what they could offer now. The same creative people.

Bob Moses clearly represents the then and the now. This guy has gone from organizing the 1964 Summer Project, organizing the McComb Project in '61, and being a part of the freedom struggle, and moving to Africa, and living for nine or ten years, and coming back, and starting his algebra project, which is quite remarkable. Who sees technology as a challenging cutting-edge issue in the nineties and beyond. I think he's right. He's doing something about it, who has this project in some school systems across the country, from Massachusetts to Mississippi, and who is back in Mississippi as his base. That's a good example of someone who said, OK, I did it then, but the challenges are still out there and they take different forms, and I'm dealing with them.

PD: Well, we went a long way from Ella Baker.

LM: Yes, we did.

PD: But that was good. In fact, we were sitting here talking, and I was thinking, every once in a while, Leslie, you dropped one of these lines, and I'd think, uh huh, I can use that. That's just right.

LM: In one form or another, all of us who came in contact with Miss Baker, she really influenced and flavored our lives in some kind of a way. From Bob Moses to Hollis Watkins to Eleanor Holmes Norton. Ella Baker flavored our lives in some form or fashion. Most of us who knew her fairly well, and obviously some of the people knew her much better than I did. There are time when you sort of think about Ella Baker. I know there are lots of times when I think about Ella Baker. What would she say? What would she do in these circumstances? Because she just that kind of influence. As long as we live and as long as we pass these things on to our children, Ella Baker doesn't die. She lives. Which is a very good thought. To think that through us and through our children and through our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren that Ella Baker lives, and Fannie Lou Hamer lives. It's important.

PD: Yes, I think the values live. That's what I think is important, like with my children, and my grandchildren. The memory of all this and its importance will go on.

LM: That's right. That's the real beauty of it.

PD: I want this to go on. I don't want all that segregation stuff to go on. We've got to get it down on a side track and run it off somewhere. This is the kind of thing that should be our memory. For this is the finest moment the South ever had. There's no doubt about that.

LM: Absolutely right.

PD: You can take all those elite moments of slavery, all the Civil War battles, all that stuff, none of it will hold up to this band of SNCC workers that put more on the line. They put just as much on the line as anybody marching at Gettysburg.

LM: Of course.

PD: That's never said, and it's never put in that framework. But this was the South's finest moment. It wasn't Picket's Charge.

LM: It wasn't. No question.

PD: I just wish historians would get to the point where they could say that, and I wish that the populace would hear that. Still, the general consensus among white people today, according to what Beth Roy found out, is that they think that affirmative action is bad; they think that *Brown v. Board* has ruined education; they've got this whole list of excuses to excuse themselves. They see themselves as victims of all this. That's nonsense. Somehow this is the conventional wisdom of where they go to drink beer or to church, among their family members. They don't hear or see it portrayed. They never really understand what the civil rights movement was about. They don't understand what it really represented, or what life was like at that time. It's like almost everybody said, they would say something about the movement, like it's not just about the people rights. As long as there is this discrimination, they've got chains too. It's difficult to get that message across.

LM: It is. Too many, so many of them are teaching some of these sort of wrongheaded values to their children.

PD: The children, according to this book that Beth Roy did, these people who were at Little Rock, some were on the sidelines and weren't really vicious or actively involved in anything, but they still have these sort of things about victims, being victims. She asked about their children. What do your children think? They said our children are really racists. Where did they get it from? They honestly say they are confused, but they don't understand why their children are racist. Maybe they don't. That's depressing, what she found out there. That's not the way. Somehow, it's passed on or regenerated, or constructed; it goes on. It does go on. But what is the mechanism of that transfer. If the parents were confused, and they sounded like they were confused, why their kids were more segregationist and racist-minded than they were. Where does it come from?

LM: It really starts in their home. Obviously, it's reinforced when you get around your peers. It depends on where you go to school. If you send your kids to some of these segregation academies or some of these suburban places where it's all white and you don't see the diversity in the population. So it gives them a sort of unrealistic picture of what America is. We are becoming more diverse racially and ethnically every day. And we aren't going back the other way.

PD: What has always amazes me, and I came from a little town that was segregated, and I always thought we were a backwater. I always wanted to meet other people. I was fascinated. There were Chinese people in Raleigh. I still feel that way. The more people you get to know the better.

LM: Of course it is.

PD: I didn't grow up in a culture that was interested in that. Strangers were to be suspected here. They didn't have a curiosity about other people, or other cultures, or to learn anything about them. They were self-satisfied with their little universe. Sitting at the gas station every night telling lies.

LM: Well, the world is changing.