Civil Rights History Project
Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program
under contract to the
Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
and the Library of Congress, 2011

Interviewee:	Ms. Kathleen Neal Cleaver, Esq.
Interview Date:	September 16, 2011
Location:	Living room of her home, Atlanta, Georgia
Interviewer:	Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D.
Videographer:	John Bishop
Length:	2:03:09
Special notes:	Mr. Henry Gaddis, a friend of Ms. Cleaver, and Ms. Rondee Gaines, her graduate student, were also present as observers.

John Bishop: We're rolling.

Joe Mosnier: Okay.

Kathleen Cleaver: Okay.

JM: Today is Friday, September 16, 2011. My name is Joe Mosnier of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am with videographer John Bishop, and we are in Atlanta, Georgia, to do an oral history interview for the Civil Rights History Project, which is a joint undertaking of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress.

Let me just make a quick note we are not recording to XD cards. That's correct, John, yeah?

JB: That's correct.

JM: And, um, we're delighted, and it's a real privilege and honor to be with Ms. Kathleen Neal Cleaver today. Um, and let me note for the tape that we have two other persons who are, uh, sort of auditing, uh, our interview today, Ms. Rondee Gaines and Mr. Henry Gaddis. Uh, Ms. Cleaver, what a privilege and pleasure to be with you.

KC: Well, thank you. Thank you for coming.

JM: It's really nice to be here. Thanks for the warm welcome. Um, let me start – we mentioned before we kicked off the recording that there's an awful lot of history that we could talk about here. And let's – why don't we pick up the story about 1954, obviously with *Brown* [*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954] and Vietnam, and move on from there?

KC: I like that, because 1954 is a turning point in Vietnam, it's a turning point in the United States, because of the *Brown* decision, and it's also a turning point in my life. I was nine years old.

Now, why was Vietnam in '54 a turning point? Because the world of imperialism came crashing down in 1954. French imperialism was destroyed in Vietnam by the Vietnamese, and that inspired African colonies to understand that it was possible to defeat the French army. So, it set in motion a wave of anti-colonial liberation movements.

1954 in the United States was the profound transformation in the consciousness of black people when they saw the United States Supreme Court throw out the principle of "separate but equal." And even though the case said "separate but equal" – "separate but equal" was valid in education – it said that it *can't* be. It has to be thrown out. The decision was about education. However, the way that decision was interpreted by the black community was that segregation was against the Constitution, and it unleashed all types of popular uprisings. You can't have segregated libraries – a protest, a protest at the swimming pool, a protest at the bus, a protest at

this, so that all around the country where black people were segregated, it inspired protests spontaneously and enthusiastic upheaval in our community.

But it also simultaneously inspired hatred and viciousness in the segregationist community, particularly when you look at a place like Mississippi and the murder of Emmett Till, who was one of those children who would be affected by the end of segregation in education, which they had a horror – this was like a horror to segregationists.

And so, being nine years old –

JM: Forgive me. May I stop you for one moment?

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay, we're back.

JM: We're back.

KC: So, being a child, being nine years old in 1954, of course, I was impressionable and I was aware that my parents were involved in some civil rights activity. We were, I was aware of the excitement. But we left Alabama. My father was on the faculty at Tuskegee Institute, and my mother worked at the Institute, and it's a very cohesive, small, uh, community around the campus.

I left all that with my parents, because we – my father, uh, was hired to work in the Foreign Aid program in India. And the reason he was selected in India had to do with his training in community development and his work with rural farmers in Alabama. The United States Point Four Program that [President Harry S.] Truman implemented after World War II had this position of, uh, "We will help resist Communism." The notion that India may have a powerful Communist, um, Movement was something the United States was anxious to, anxious to, uh –

JM: Forestall?

KC: Prevent. And they developed a community development program to be run in villages [5:00] to help the villagers, and my father was hired as a technical director in this kind of work. So, we moved from Tuskegee Institute – uh, John Patterson, I believe, was the governor of Alabama; it was, you know, it was a little bit before "segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever," but it was still that mindset – into a place where Nehru was president; uh, it's a land of Gandhi; it's a land of independence. I came into a society that was moving from being dominated and directed by British imperial rulers to being ruled by representatives of the Indian people. And so, they were changing the names of the streets. They were, they were moving into an Indian society away from a British colonial society.

So, I saw all that. And I saw a government that had lots of dark-skinned people. I saw all sorts of things. And so, I was so young I'm not – the upshot is that it became very obvious to me that there's no coherent way that someone could say people can't vote or can't govern themselves because of their color, because of, they're dark. So, I mean, so all the propaganda of white supremacy, which probably wasn't going to get to me anyway because of my parents, was just blown out of the water.

So, after two years living in India, my father was transferred to the Philippines, which was another society in Asia that had been colonized, but this one had been colonized by the United States. But it was also independent. So, as the Vietnam War is unfurling and colonial movements are developing in – anti-colonial movements are developing in Africa and in Asia, you know, I'm just growing up in this atmosphere. And the work that my father is doing is highly political. Even though I probably didn't even know the meaning of the word "political," I

was in a highly political environment and I was very influenced. These are my norms – you know, eliminate segregation, eliminate colonialism – from a child.

And so, we come back briefly to visit the United States, back and forth, up until I went to high school in 1961 at a Quaker boarding school. My parents stayed in Africa, I mean, stayed living abroad, but I came to go to this high school. It just so happened I went to the same high school as Julian Bond, although he had already graduated. And so, my –

JM: The George School near Philadelphia?

KC: Yes. So, I have this, [sighs] you know, very unique understanding of the potential of people of color to rule themselves, to govern themselves, and then I come to a Quaker school, which had been and at least I was under the impression that they were advocates of nonviolent peaceful change. So, I enrolled in '61.

About the time I was about to graduate, May of '63, this is when Birmingham is blowing up. And this is when the students in Birmingham are demonstrating, and [Birmingham Commissioner of Public Safety Eugene] "Bull" Connor is bringing out the police dogs, and Martin Luther King is in jail, and the SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] students are down in Albany [Georgia] on the barricades. They're going to jail, uh, demonstrating. It was a "jail no bail" campaign in Albany, and they're all demonstrating.

And I saw in the Philadelphia newspaper a photograph on the front page. It was a photograph of a paddy wagon from the back, and there were these girls, high school girls, in the back, and they were all singing. And they were being carted off to jail. And I was just so intrigued. I said, "These are girls. They're high school girls. I'm a high school girl. These are people in Georgia challenging segregation and going to jail." And I was just extraordinarily impressed. I mean, it was more than impressed. I wanted to be like them.

And we had a program at my high school called Assembly. So, I decided that [clears throat] I wanted to say something about what was going on in Albany. Now, there's a trigger. It's a boarding school, so you have a dining hall. And there was a note put up out at the dining hall outside that said, um, "I suggest that we have a fast in the dining hall in support of the students in Albany who are praying and fasting in jail." And so, I said, "Okay, that's nice."

The next day there's another note outside the dining hall, and a boy in my class said that he thought that [10:00] that was not a good idea. He said something more critical. And that there should be a more cooperative solution than fasting and, uh, nonviolent protest. So, I looked at that note. I said, "What is wrong with him?" I was so impressed that these girls are going up against these vicious racists in Georgia! So, I just said, "Well, who in the world is he to know what somebody in Georgia should do?"

So, I wanted to defend the students but I didn't really know enough. So, I went to Philadelphia. Quaker schools have something called Work Camp. You have to do Work Camp before you graduate. And our Work Camp was in Philadelphia, and they took us to different social activist centers, and one of them was called Fellowship House. And when I had gone to Fellowship House, I met a woman named, or I heard about a woman named Prathia Hall who was an activist in SNCC. And so, I said, "Well, I'm going to go talk to Prathia, and she's going to explain to me what this nonviolent movement is, so I can defend it."

So, I got on the train and I went to Fellowship House. And I said, "I would like to see Prathia Hall." And they said, "Well, she's not here. She's left. She's gone to, uh, Georgia." So, whoever it was, it was a tall painter who lived there. Um, and I said, "Well, you're here. I want you to explain [laughing] nonviolence to me, because it's very important for me to understand this." He said, "Well, I'll do the best I can, but Prathia –." I said, "No, no, you have to do it."

So, he sat me down and gave me his interpretation – Bunch, Bunky, Bunche? [Ralph J. Bunche] He was an artist, and we became friends for a long time. And he articulated the central principle of transformation and how you engage in love and compassion and, um, you are supposed to win over your enemies by loving them and not retaliate when they attack you. And I think I was about seventeen years old, and this was very appealing to me. I was just very intrigued that this was their philosophy, that what they were doing had a meaning, and it made me see them as even braver than I understood from reading about them in the newspaper.

So, I was very impressed and I wrote out this little speech that I was going to make to get this guy who said it was, "we should find a more collaborative way of doing things." And I went to the painting teacher, who I knew well because I had taken her classes, and she was in charge of Assembly on Thursday. So, I said, "Can I make a presentation on Thursday?" She said, "Oh, yes, Kathleen." And she didn't ask me what it was about, [clears throat] and I didn't tell her.

So, [laughs] we have our Thursday Assembly, and they say she would like to make a presentation. So, I get up, and I have my speech, and I read it, and I tell them to protest against the students, and I think that's wrong, that they should be understood, that these are their reasons for doing it, and those who don't agree with them should at least respect them, because they are doing something about racial injustice under very difficult circumstances. So, I thought that Quakers, um, agreed with nonviolent protest, that they taught nonviolent protest – at least that's what I thought.

Now, I have to tell you something about the racial dynamics of the school. It's about four hundred students, uh, in grades nine through twelve. And of the four hundred students, four of them were black. And of the four black ones, me and another student were from Tuskegee, and one student was a day student, and one student was an African foreign student. So,

basically, I'm talking to an entirely middle America, Quaker, white audience of students and teachers. They were not enthusiastic. In fact, they were very upset! [Laughs]

And they started calling me a radical and they said this and they said – and so, I said, "Well, we have to have more discussion!" So, I went back to Friendship [Fellowship] House and got the person. And I said, "You have to come to George School! They want to discuss this. I don't know anymore. So, come!" So, I brought him, and we had discussions. And so, that's what happened at the end of high school for me while the protest was going on in Birmingham. On my campus, the protest was around my attitude and my discussion of Albany. So, I would say from then, that was, uh, the summer of, uh, '63, I was very [15:00] focused on civil rights activism. I wanted to do that. I wanted to be like those students. I wanted to go on those, um, protests that they were on.

But I had to go where my parents took me. That summer was the March on Washington. My parents came back. We had family in Baltimore and we were visiting our family in Baltimore in August of 1963. So, I wanted my parents to take me to the March on Washington. Well, "Oh, no," they said, "You cannot go to that. There will be violence. It's going to be violent," which is what was the word in Washington. This was to prevent people from coming. So, I was just very upset that I could be so close, but I couldn't go.

And so, in the fall, I went to Oberlin.

JM: So you didn't, you did not go?

KC: Oh, my – no. I didn't have the, uh, capacity at seventeen or eighteen to be able to do things that my parents wouldn't allow. So, um –

JM: This all will soon change. [Laughs]

KC: Um, I didn't understand their opposition! I really didn't! And it wasn't violent, but the propaganda that had gone out in Washington, and my father was working in Washington, and he was a government, uh, he was a Foreign Service officer. So, part of that was his caution. But the other part was I think they did believe – I mean, my mother and father both had been active. So, my father had been involved in the, uh, effort to desegregate the white primary in Texas back in the '30s. And my mother had been involved in the, uh, Southern Negro Youth Congress, which, uh, protested education segregation, and she was the beneficiary of a, of a consent decree between the NAACP and the state of Virginia to be able to go to school in, graduate school in Michigan, because you could have segregated elementary, high school, and college, but there was no graduate school for blacks. So, for her to go to graduate school, she benefited from a, uh, agreement that the state of Virginia would pay tuition for anyone who was accepted, and so she went to Michigan. And so, it wasn't that they weren't for civil rights. It was that that was the attitude of, uh, 1963.

And, um, so I went away to college to Oberlin. My parents had picked out Oberlin. They thought this was a fine college, and I should go. Oberlin happened to be a hotbed of civil rights, which I didn't really know. But also I didn't really know much about colleges, because from the time I was – what – nine, I was living away from the United States. We had come back in the late '50s. I had gone to high school in Baltimore for a year.

JM: After your brother died?

KC: My brother died in '58, and, uh, '59 I went to, uh, Baltimore public school. And then we went back and lived in Africa. And so, then I came back and went to boarding school and finished. So, I didn't really have a lot of exposure. I didn't really know a lot about colleges. And I had been geared to go to Oberlin. I applied and got in and I went there. And there were

some friends from Tuskegee there, and there was an active civil rights group who were both black and white. I mean, there weren't enough – there weren't that many black students there, but probably more than at some of the other schools.

And so, I was influenced – I shouldn't say influenced. I was in an atmosphere that was very conducive. Carey McWilliams was one of the faculty there. There was a Japanese professor, uh, named – I'm not remembering his name right now – uh, who was quite, uh, radical. And there was this, um, um, there were a lot of speakers who were coming to Oberlin and talking about different protests. The one I remember in particular was about Danville [Virginia]. There was a huge protest against segregation in Danville, Virginia, and there were lots and lots of, uh, I guess you'd say marches, and there was police brutality, and there was a documentary about it. So that was like very eye-opening: Are these the things that are happening? And the Mississippi Summer Project was being planned for the summer of '64, when I would be, you know, the end of my freshman year. But the beginning of the freshman year was when the children were killed in the, uh, Sixteenth Street Baptist Church [in Birmingham, Alabama]. That was in September.

JM: September.

KC: And then, in a few months, the President of the United States [John F. Kennedy] was killed [20:00] in Texas, you know. And so, it, the – I remember that the group that I, my friends, we were all quite upset and didn't know what the civil rights struggle was going to be like, because we thought then that President Kennedy was supportive. And when he was killed, and Lyndon Johnson, with his southern drawl, became the President, it, it didn't look good. [Laughs] It didn't sound right. You know, no one in 1963 ever, ever expected – none of the

young people ever expected President Johnson to, uh, be an advocate of civil rights, because he had voted against everything. He was a representative of Texas, so he represented Texas views.

So, uh, I wanted to go to Mississippi, but I actually couldn't quite manage to do it. Um, I didn't, I didn't think I was, um, sturdy enough, or smart enough, or, you know, college freshmen – it takes a while to get a sense of who you are. So, I didn't go to the Mississippi Summer Project. I didn't sign up for it. And, um, I actually quit college and, um, went to stay in Washington and had a few jobs. I really didn't – I actually didn't like college. I was so disappointed. I thought it was going to be exciting and stimulating and dramatic. Oh, I had this very exaggerated view of what [laughs] college was going to be, and it wasn't all that. So, um, I just went and got a job working in various agencies, government agencies.

JM: One of those jobs, I think – I just want to ask, because I wonder how you think about it in retrospect – was, I think, the Community Relations Service.

KC: Yes.

JM: And one of your chores, as I understand, was to type up certain reports that –

KC: When I got the job at the Peace Corps, my job was to – it was something very low, like a GS-7, and I think I had to put little flyers in racks and sign out the Peace Corps film. And a man who worked there, uh, Richard Thornell, said he was going to go work over at the Human – um, at the CRS, Community Relations Service, which was a brand new agency set up under the '64 Civil Rights Act. And he wanted me to come and work as his secretary. He said, "You could do more than this." So, I agreed and I got a raise and I got to be his secretary. And my job was to type reports in triplicate, working for the government.

And so, he would go – the one I remember most vividly was Cleveland. He went to Cleveland [clears throat] after riots, because the Community Relations Service sent teams into –

teams would be one or two people, uh, and a secretary maybe – teams into areas of conflict. And then, they would, uh, make a report to the Community Relations Service about the conflict. And so, I would type up all the things he said about the Hough area and Cleveland and the economics.

I mean, it's almost – when you read the reports that – something is going to blow up. I mean, it's not, it's not an unpredictable situation in the ghetto environment that they described that this – you know, conflagrations, riots, rebellions – would happen. So, I did that over and over and over. And I believe, um, in February Malcolm X was murdered. Now, I hadn't actually gotten to hear him in person, but I was aware of him. I would have liked to have gone to hear him in person. Um [clears throat] –

JB: Could we pause for just a second?

JM: Sure.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay, we're back.

KC: [Clears throat] I'm sorry for laughing, um, when I said [laughing] I would have liked to have heard Malcolm X in person. When I was in – it was either Baltimore or Washington. There was a flyer out, and it said, "Come hear Malcolm X debate James Baldwin."

JM: I think that happened at Howard [University].

KC: I don't know where it was.

JM: Howard University, yeah.

KC: Well, this was not the one that I – the one that I tried to go to [clears throat] was at a mosque, one of these, uh, Muslim mosques. And, uh, I did get my father to take me. I'm not sure if my mother came. [25:00] Anyway, we went to this – I think it was in Baltimore – we went to this, um, address. And my father is fairly light-skinned, and, um, I think my hair was

straightened at the time, and we get there. [Laughs] The Muslims at the door look at us very, very – actually my mother did come. My mother and father and me, we all went. They look at us very, very carefully.

And they finally decided it was okay for my mother to come and was probably okay – but I could not come in. They would not let me come in because they thought I was white. So, I said, "Well, my father's – this is my father. This is my mother. How could they come in, and I can't come in?" And they just – finally, I guess we just wouldn't leave, and they let us in. But it wasn't any Malcolm X and James Baldwin. It was a movie. I mean, it was like a TV tape of a debate between Malcolm X and James Baldwin. So, uh, and then – you know.

So, to be my age and aware of the things I was aware of, and to see, you know, President Kennedy is assassinated, and Martin Luther King is sent to jail, and Malcolm X is being killed, this is not – this country is not going in the right direction. So, um – let's take a break.

JM: Sure, let's take a break.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay, we're rolling.

JM: Okay, we're back. And we're going to pick up the story in 1965. And let me just make a note we're going to take out the prior little clip.

KC: Okay.

JB: Which we think is 1967 – 167.

JM: We think is track 167. Okay.

KC: Well, you can imagine my parents were quite distressed when I told them I wasn't going to go back to college. So, I spent that year working in D.C. I was working with the CRS [Community Relations Service]. I had a really good experience, because the director – not the

director – the deputy director was Roger Wilkins, who was an attorney and a civil rights attorney and a very good person. I think the director was some – uh, it was in the Department of Commerce. It was someone else. But to be with Richard Thornell and with Roger Wilkins, and to have that as a job and to be – just to hear the kinds of things they said. And Roger Wilkins actually knew my father.

Um, and, um – how did I meet this person? Yes, my father had a position in Sierra Leone. He was the representative of the, uh – he was the representative of the United States in Sierra Leone when he was first sent there, because it was a British colony, so the United States couldn't actually have an ambassador. So, we lived in Freetown for, um, a while in '61. And I met, um, one of the Crossroads Africa students who came there, also with Peace Corps, that my father – because he was the American representative, he had a party to bring these people who had come to Africa. And one of them I met, who ended up – his name was James Thomas. He ended up being a law student who was working for CRS.

So, um, here I'm meeting people who are interested in law and civil rights and justice in ways that I wasn't particularly exposed to. But I'm meeting them in ways in which I actually get to know them and hear what they are, um, about. In fact, James Thomas, who was a law student, I had, uh, been invited I think when I was in high school to come up to Yale Law School by him. I was in high school, he was in law school, but he invited me to come to his moot court, uh, you know, your first trial. And I met, of all people, because it was Yale Law School, because it was 1962 or whatever year it was, '62 or '63, I met, uh, Marian Wright, who was a law student in his class, who later became Marian Wright Edelman. I also met, um, um, um – I'm blanking on her name. Who is the D.C. Representative?

JM: Oh, Eleanor Holmes Norton?

KC: Eleanor Holmes! She wasn't Norton.

JM: Yep.

KC: Marian Wright and Eleanor Holmes, who were in his class at law school, or they may have been a bit ahead of him. So, this is, this is the atmosphere of inspiration and education [30:00] that was – I wasn't – I don't think I encountered any types of people close to me that were against civil rights or against the Movement, so everything was encouraging. [Sound of sirens in background] It was all, all things going in the same direction – except my parents were quite unhappy that I wasn't in college, and they wanted me to go back. And I really was having a great time and didn't want to go back.

But I did want to go to New York. So, um, I applied to a college in New York called Barnard [College] and was accepted. And they advertised [laughs] the fact that Barnard is in New York: This is where you learn, by being in New York. I said [laughing], "Oh, I like that idea. I want to go to New York." So, they were happy. I was happy. I went to New York. After about I'd say three weeks at Barnard, I said, "This is dumb." I was at Oberlin and actually worked and studied and went to class and got okay grades. But when I got to Barnard, the classes weren't that interesting, and after a while, I just stopped going.

And I had met that summer [clears throat] a man named George Ware, who was in SNCC. He had been in SNCC in Atlanta and he had actually – I'm sorry, he had been affiliated with SNCC from the Tuskegee Student Movement. He was the director of something called, or he was a leader – I don't know if he was the director – of something called TIAL, Tuskegee Institute Advancement League. And, um, [clears throat] they were engaged in the big huge protest in, um, Selma. But the Selma to Montgomery March was one aspect, and the Tuskegee

to Montgomery March was another aspect. So, I was meeting someone who was, like, one of the actual SNCC leaders. I was very excited.

And the important thing about meeting George – there was a graduate student who lived in Washington, whose mother had been a teacher in Tuskegee and knew my mother. And he found out I was there that summer and came to visit, and we ended up dating. And George Ware was his best friend, so that's how I met George. And long story short, George ultimately hired me as his assistant in the campus program in SNCC.

But before he did that, [clears throat] I had this very transformative conversa – like, not a conversation. Because I'd never met him before, uh, when we first met, he started recounting what had happened in Tuskegee and the demonstrations and how they built up the, uh, student energy and how they had decided they were going to challenge the – it wasn't just racism they were challenging. What they wanted to challenge was the manner in which the civil rights protest in Alabama, in general, and Tuskegee, in particular, was being geared to a – he thought it was too collaborative.

He said, "These people think they can work together. You know, that there's a City Council; they want to get people to register to vote and to hold office." Let's say they were. Let's say there were nine seats. Macon County was [sighs] eighty-eight percent [laughs] black. Um, Tuskegee is the county seat. So, if the representation in voting even mildly reflected the demographics of the county, they could have an entirely black Council. But the TCA, Tuskegee Civic Association, wanted to not be assertive, but they wanted to participate, so they only ran two candidates. And George thought that was horrible.

And George said, "Look, we've got to break this up. These people, they just – they essentially want to get along, want this," and he said, "I know what we can do. We'll have a –"

not exactly a demonstration. But he said, "We will go integrate their church in the white side of town." And he said, "And then you'll see the parents come out," because the citizens had come out with guns and attacked the children. So, [clears throat] so, they consciously, consciously had demonstrations at the white churches, and they got very, very upset. Everyone got very upset.

Uh, then SNCC was also very engaged in voter registration. And he was telling me all about the SNCC activities in Tuskegee, but it was – you know, it was like – I was in Tuskegee when I was a little child. It was very stable, and nobody was challenging – they were challenging, like, segregation. They were challenging the denial of the right to vote. But they weren't challenging themselves or their methods. But that's what TIAL was doing. And what actually ended up happening in Tuskegee was that Dr. [Charles] Gomillion and TCA [Tuskegee Civic Association] backed down. They said, "All right. You want to do things differently. Go ahead," which is very interesting. It's a very interesting transition.

So, George was telling me all this, and I'm not giving you the best description.

JB: Can we pause?

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Sorry about that.

JM: Okay, we're back.

KC: So, the, listening that evening to George Ware talk about Tuskegee and talk about TIAL was just transformative. I saw Tuskegee in a light that I'd never seen it before. But I [35:00] also saw the power of black political action that I'd never seen before. And George became a mentor to me, in terms of politics and understanding. He was a chemist, so he was very analytical. But he never talked about chemistry. He talked about the activism, and he was from Alabama, I mean, from rural Alabama. And he had gone to the graduate school at

Tuskegee. He was brilliant. And his friend, um, who I was dating, was a student at the vet school, and he was an activist. I think he had gotten kicked out for starting a black newspaper.

So, um, I went on – that summer, I went on to Barnard, enrolled at Columbia [University, at which Barnard is a college]. And George had a job in New York. No, he had a job in New Jersey with a chemist, chemistry company, Hoffman-LaRoche [Corporation]. And Ernest [likely Stevens] had a fellowship with a, uh – uh, he was a veterinary student, so he worked in some lab downtown in NYU. It just so happened that they rented an apartment on the Columbia campus that was across the street from Barnard.

So, we were very close, and I spent a lot of my time after the first three weeks of realizing [clears throat] these classes are going to be really dull, and the teachers weren't that smart, and the material isn't that interesting. And I had a comparison. You see, I had already been a freshman, so, I had, I knew, you know, [laughs] I'm a sophomore now. I had a comparison: "This is not a good school. This is a waste of time." And, um, I'm learning more hanging out with George and Ernest, which was true. I met Stokely Carmichael at their apartment. I met Ivanhoe Donaldson at a party at their house.

And that summer I met Ivanhoe Donaldson he had come from – he was a project director in Mississippi during the '64 Summer Project and he met me – he had gone to Michigan State, and Ernest had gone to Michigan State, and they kind of knew each other. So, I felt in a very friendly environment. And Ivanhoe asked me, "Well, what are you doing?" And I said, "Well, I'm out of school for the summer. I'm looking for a job." And he said, "Well, I'm looking for a secretary. How would like to work at SNCC?"

And I said, "Oh, my God! I've been wanting to work for SNCC ever since I heard about the demonstrations in Albany!" You know, "What time do I need to come?!" He said, "Well,

here," and he wrote a little note and told me to come such-and-such time. So, I ran down – what was it – 100 Fifth Avenue, I think it was, rickety stairs. I ran down there. I was, it was like I'd gone to heaven! "I'm working at SNCC!" Oh, I had a job at SNCC, so I was so excited!

And what that job, that summer job was – I think I sat in the front of the building, in front of his office at a desk, and so I saw everyone who would come in, and they'd have to stop and ask me what they wanted or whatever. So, um, [clears throat] I got to see – New York was the place that activists from the South would come for R&R. So, if you needed to go to the dentist, they'd come out of Mississippi [laughs] and go to dentists in New York. Or you just needed a break. Or some people were just so burned out they were through. They were through with SNCC. They'd come and they were going to go back to school or they were doing whatever. But they'd all come through the New York SNCC office. And this New York office was the fundraising office, so they had the benefits and they had the money.

And this was 1966. This is the summer of 1966. And the day, the month that I get the, um, job to work in, um, the SNCC office in New York, I think it was probably about two weeks after the call for Black Power [40:00] in, uh, Greenville, Mississippi. And so, SNCC has already asked the executives, any people in the leadership position, that are white have been asked to leave, and there are no longer any white leaders. But there's people who are in the organization, uh, who work, like there's a bookkeeper in New York, but there's very few. The numbers of people who are white are diminishing.

The director of the New York office was a Chicano. Actually, her name was Elizabeth Southerland [later Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez], and at the time people didn't identify as Mexican. So, we didn't – I never just thought what she was. She was just a dark-haired woman. I guess we knew she wasn't black, but she was something. She had brown skin. So, um, but she

was being replaced by Ivanhoe, so there was a woman who was not a black person being replaced by a black activist out of Mississippi.

So, I come into the mix, and it's this tremendous turmoil, because Black Power has been articulated. "Black Power" is the – an ideological or an activist call that's replaced "Freedom Now" in the wake of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. And it's also changed the dynamic of the leadership in SNCC, because the executive committee and the program committee and the chairman are now all part of the – I used to call them the "Black Power faction." Everybody in SNCC is not onboard for Black Power.

JM: Can I ask about this?

KC: Of course.

JM: In March – March? Was it March of '66 that, um, Stokely Carmichael ousts John Lewis?

KC: That would have been at a staff meeting –

JM: Yeah.

KC: At midnight of –

JM: A retreat.

KC: Yes, but he didn't oust him, just oust him. There was an election that, uh – you have to understand that in SNCC the role of chairman didn't really mean much. It meant the person who talked to the press or if you could send somebody to answer a question. So, nobody really minded whether John Lewis was the chairman. That was just his job. He would answer the questions: "Oh, ask John." However, Stokely and his crew thought the chairman should be more active. And they weren't pleased with his reelection and they re – they had another vote!

John Lewis went to sleep, thinking he was the chairman. And he woke up and found out he was not the chairman, that Stokely was the chairman.

JM: Were those stories that you heard through George and Ernest when you were – across that spring? I don't know if it matters, but –

KC: I probably heard them after I got into SNCC.

JM: Yeah, okay.

KC: Because when I was in New York – but George, I have to say George and Stokely were good friends.

JM: Yeah.

KC: So, I'm sure everything I heard – I might have, I probably heard it from George. Everything I heard about Stokely was in Stokely's favor.

JM: Yeah.

KC: I never heard it from the perspective of John.

JM: Yeah. Let me ask you one other thing, too, before –

KC: Sure.

JM: Because you're now in the summer of '66. But in January of '66, someone you knew as a child is murdered in Tuskegee, and I just wanted to –

KC: I think, yeah, let me get back to that –

JM: Yeah.

KC: Because this goes, this – [clears throat] okay, um, while I was in New York, um – hold on. Let me stop.

JM: Sure.

KC: I want to get –

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're back.

JM: We're back after a short break.

KC: I was a friend and in the same class with Sammy Younge [Samuel L. Younge Jr.] in Tuskegee. We had a lot of the same friends, but he was Catholic and he didn't go to the same school I went to. But everyone in the same group – we all knew each other. And he got involved in SNCC in Tuskegee after coming back from, uh, the Navy, which is sort of unusual. I don't think any of my classmates signed up for the military that early. But Sammy joined the Navy; he got out, came back to Tuskegee, and enrolled to go to college. And [clears throat] he was extraordinarily active. And George was one of the people who told me all about what Sammy was doing, because he was very – sort of like with me, he was very nurturing and, uh, he was developing these activists. And Sammy was one.

And Sammy was actually very important, because he was going back and forth between Alabama and Mississippi, and looking at the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party operation and how that was problematic, and then helping figure out how in Alabama they could have a black political party, not a party that's going to try and unseat Democrats, but an independent black party that was started in Lowndes County. So, Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown, and Sammy Younge, and George Ware were all working [45:00] kind of together in Lowndes County. So, George plugged me into this.

And midway through the school year, I think it was January, we heard on the radio that Sammy Younge was murdered. He was shot in the back at a, at a, uh, gas station, by this, uh, gas station attendant whose name was Marvin Segrest. And it was devastating. It was devastating to SNCC. Uh, James Forman talked about how he had "gone to too many funerals."

[Kitchen sounds going on in background]

And it was Sammy's murder in Tuskegee – and when I say he was murdered, what he was doing was registering blacks to vote, going out in the county. When I talked about the eighty-eight percent and the demographics, if Sammy Younge had had his wishes, he would have registered every black person in Macon County. And the Klan could see what he was doing, and there were death threats all the time. He had Deacons for Defense protecting his house.

So, when Sammy was murdered, um, the students kind of blew up. There were protests; there were demonstrations. George Ware felt – he felt guilty. He felt that he was the one who had inspired and led and encouraged Sammy to take all these risks to do what he was doing, and when Sammy was killed, he was in New York. So, George made the decision to quit Hoffman-LaRoche and go back into the Movement. And he left New York and moved to Atlanta and took over the campus program in Atlanta, I think, in – very shortly after – which was a big decision for someone who had master's degree in chemistry. But he rededicated himself to the Movement.

And it was – SNCC – because Sammy was a veteran – Sammy had been in the Navy. Because he was a veteran, when Sammy was killed, SNCC took, um, a position against the Vietnam War. And they said, "How can, how can we actually support this war and ask men to register to fight when we have a veteran here who was just murdered in cold blood and unarmed?"

And that led – Sammy's death led to, uh, Julian Bond, uh, being asked – and he had just won an election for the state legislature here in, um, Atlanta – he was asked did he support SNCC's position against the Vietnam War? I don't think he had actually read it, the actual statement, but he knew about it. And he said, "Yes," he did support it. If SNCC took this

position against the war, he would support it, even though he was actually no longer in SNCC and had just won office in the state legislature. And so, the news media in Georgia went berserk, and he was denied his ability to take his seat in the Georgia legislature because he didn't support the Vietnam War. And this went on and on, and then it went up to the Supreme Court before – he won another election, he won again, before he could even take his seat.

So, it was a big, big deal in the Movement that – the transformations that happened in response to Sammy's death, and the transformation in George. And I had joined the, um, New York office, you know, a few months after, a few weeks after Black Power and was in those changes. And when George got to, um, George got to, um, Atlanta, he said he actually wanted me to come down and work for him. So, at the end of, um – I think at the end of January of '67, I left New York and went to Atlanta, and I was working constantly. I have never, ever in my life, before or since, spent so much time at meetings and taking notes.

I think the first meeting I went to was Jim Forman and a few other people – because SNCC was in bad shape. It was, uh, financially in trouble. So many people had burnt out. Projects were being eliminated. Direct action wasn't the policy any longer. It was Black Power, and, uh, Stokely was, uh, disturbing some of the fundraisers – I shouldn't say – some of the people who were giving money to SNCC.

JM: Had the Palestine statement yet been made by the time you arrived in Atlanta?

KC: All those things were in play.

JM: Yeah.

KC: Um, the research, the research [50:00] for the, uh, newsletter that was published by SNCC that criticized the Stern Gang and Moshe Dayan and the Israeli techniques of, uh, warfare that were very injurious to children – they were – something that I remember about little cluster

bombs that looked like toys. And all this research had been done by a man named Jack Minnis, and it was written up in a newsletter by a woman named, um, [clears throat] Ethel Minor, and it was published.

And Stokely was an advocate in the '67 war [Six-Day War] of the support of Egypt and not supporting Israel. And so, he was very public about this. And many of the financial donors and supporters of SNCC were Jewish, and some of the whites that had worked in SNCC were Jewish, and they were horrified, uh, at this development. And I was told – I don't know if it's accurate – that Harry Belafonte said he was going to smash the organization because they were – you know, that was not permissible in his mind, uh, to take that position.

Um, and we went on our merry way. So, by the time I got to SNCC, it was in sort of a crisis. I didn't understand that this was the crisis of the crisis. But all the elements of crisis – people leaving, drama, long meetings – I think the report that came out of this two- or three-day meeting was called "Rock Bottom." And, um, we sat – you know, I was just taking notes. That was my job, to take notes. Taking notes – the meeting went on for about fourteen hours. And they sort of – I was exhausted. But I learned – you know, I couldn't stop! It was amazing to hear, to be in the room.

James Forman was my most – oh, how would I put it? The person I had admired the most of the civil rights leaders that I had seen at a distance. When I was in high school, there was a photograph of James Forman in *JET* magazine, and it was taken in Mississippi, and it was riveting and unforgettable. It was a picture taken in Mississippi, and on one side was this sheriff, Mississippi sheriff, your typical southern sheriff. And then, on the other side, facing toe to toe, was Jim Forman in his overalls and his bushy hair, and they were looking at each other. And he

had an expression in his eyes that was so intense, it was like all the passion and anger and intelligence that he could muster to stop this man from doing what he was going to do.

And I was just amazed. This is extraordinary. It's an extraordinary man. It's an extraordinary time. And he inspired this kind of devotion and attraction, and people – people wanted to give their life for Jim Forman. They'd do anything for Jim Forman. So, yes, and I'd stay up for three days and take notes for Jim Forman. [Laughs] And, uh, it was, I was, I felt – and I had asked my father to help me.

When school was over, I went to work at SNCC for the summer. And then, he said to me – um, I said, I wrote to him and I said, "This is so much more educational. I can't –" how did I put it? I think I said, "You're wasting your money paying tuition at Barnard. What I want you to do is give me the money that you would give to Barnard, and I will get a much better education in SNCC than in Barnard."

And he agreed. He said he'd do it for a year. So, uh, you must understand tuition back then was about eight hundred dollars a semester. So, he would send me – I think he would send me checks every month. I don't remember getting a lump sum. I can't imagine my father even giving me [laughs] a lump sum. But, um, so I went to SNCC in, um, in Atlanta. Uh, after starting in the summer, I stayed through to January.

JM: Yeah.

KC: And, um, came down to Atlanta. And it really did feel like I was in the midst of a revolution, because SNCC was in chaos, although I wasn't sure it was chaos. I was just learning so much. But, you know, the phones were getting cut off. And then, we didn't have any more money to buy gas. And then, the cars couldn't get repaired so to get to work we had to [55:00] hitchhike. And all this – um, I think I cut my hair in an Afro in New York, or I got someone to

cut it. And when we got down to Atlanta, they weren't that popular here in '67, and they called them "baby haircuts." [Laughs]

So, we would hitchhike. We would hitchhike to work, because there were no cars, there was no money. Uh, George Ware had an apartment that was actually, belonged to Stokely, and he lived there, Ernest Stevens lived there, Simuel Schutz lived there, and I moved in there. So, we had – our whole little campus program lived in one apartment, and the money my father sent me paid our rent, because SNCC didn't have any money for salaries. So, we were a cadre.

And, um, the project that George was working on when I came, after the "Rock Bottom" report, was a conference called *Liberation Will Come from a Black Thing*. Uh, we were going to invite the student groups that had supported SNCC to a conference. This was very early in this issue, this notion of "black" students. There were "Negro" student organizations, "Negro" student associations, in various colleges. But what the Black Power Movement had stimulated was a change in consciousness, and there was beginning, like out in California, the San Francisco State Negro Student Association became the Black Student Union, one of the earliest. And so, this idea of black students was fairly radical at this time.

So, we were having, we planned this conference at Fisk [University], because there was a student support group at Tennessee State and there was a group at Fisk that were very strong. And they had good programs; they had good leaders; they were, you know, raised money; they worked closely with the people in SNCC. So, they were a good home for the conference. They got the buildings. We sent out the notices, we sent out the letters, we invited the students and we invited our speakers.

Now, we invited lots of speakers: uh, Amiri Baraka – I think he was LeRoi Jones at the time. We invited a writer from, um, Mississippi. Uh, oh, she was a famous writer at the time,

Margaret Walker? Is that her name? I'll have to look it up for you. Uh, she had written a novel about the South. We invited people from – we invited Eldridge Cleaver, who had published in *Ramparts*, and other activist-scholars, Charles Hamilton from Columbia, a political scientist. These are the names I remember. I was the one who was sending out the invitations.

So, there was a program that was going to take place two weeks after our SNCC conference at Vanderbilt [University], which is the same city, but it's a white school. Vanderbilt had a program called IMPACT that the students controlled. And for their IMPACT symposium, they had four people they invited: Strom Thurmond, uh, Allen Ginsberg, Martin Luther King, and Stokely Carmichael, and they were going to come at separate times.

So, Stokely was the chairman of SNCC, but our conference was two weeks earlier, and Stokely wasn't actually coming to the SNCC, uh, it was called *Liberation Is Coming from a Black Thing*. But the newspapers in Nashville went stark raving mad. This was a time when Stokely Carmichael was being attacked as a – he needed to be retroactively, his mother should take retroactive birth control, or he should be this, or can we deport him, because he was a native of Trinidad. So, uh, all this hostility about the IMPACT symposium that he generated, the state legislature wanted the students not to invite him, and they refused.

But Fisk, a black school, decided that they would kick us out, that we couldn't have any rooms on their campus because our organization was an organization that Stokely Carmichael was the chairman of. So, I was at Nashville with George Ware and Ernest and other students who were preparing the conference [laughs] when they decided we couldn't have the rooms. So, here we are. We have all the people coming and no place. And the other problem was that there was a blizzard. It was Easter weekend of '67. There was a blizzard that shut down all the airports in the East Coast.

JM: Can I, can I ask something? Right up –

JB: [interjects]

JM: Uh, we're –

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're back. [1:00:00]

JM: You're about to get to that, to those days in Nashville. And I want to ask this, as best you can recall, if you can conjure this from this distance. What would have been, in say these months in early '67, what would have been your, broadly speaking, kind of where your mind was, your frame of mind about the struggle about the nature of American society as you were continuing to examine and think about it?

KC: Can I finish?

JM: Oh, I'm sorry. Please, of course. Please, please.

KC: No, what I'm saying I'll give you this narrative, and then I can do that very easily.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

KC: Um, because it was all in flux. But, um – okay, um, so let's start back.

JM: Fisk disinvited.

JB: Yeah, they had just taken your rooms away.

JM: They had taken your rooms away.

KC: So, here we are with all the students on their way, and our conference is collapsing, because now our speakers aren't going to come, because they can't. They're gonna – not fly in. And we have one speaker, Eldridge Cleaver, who can come because he arrives from California. And, um, the students there were well-organized, and they were able to get Father Woodruff, who was the pastor of an Episcopal church that was right on the edge of the campus. It wasn't

controlled by the campus. He said we could have our conference at his church. So, we had a site. Eldridge Cleaver was coming; we had a speaker. And so, we were okay.

I was sitting there, retyping the agenda, [laughing] changing all the rooms, changing the speakers, when Eldridge Cleaver was brought into the room where I was typing. And he was our savior. He was wonderful. We had a speaker. We were having a conference. And, from what he said, he took one look at me, and it was love at first sight. But it wasn't love at first sight for me. I saw this giant standing in a doorway, all the way to the top. And he had been out of prison about three months. And he had this very, sort of masklike expression, no expression. He was just sort of standing there. And I would say he looked pretty – well, I don't want to say intimidating, but he could have been intimidating.

So, um, he kept asking me things about could I get him a room, could I get him a typewriter, could I do this, could I do that? Like, he kept trying to engage me. And I didn't know that he was trying to get my attention. It never occurred to me that he was trying – Eldridge Cleaver? [Laughs] Anyway, uh, eventually, it became clear that's what he was trying to do [laughs] after the conference was all over. And he didn't leave, because he said he was doing a story about Stokely Carmichael, so he said he was going to stay and write about IMPACT.

JM: For *Ramparts*.

KC: And, um, I was going to stay and organize a fundraiser when Stokely came. And, um, so he helped, he helped me, because I didn't know how to drive and didn't have a car, he helped me pull together all these details. By then, I figured out he was trying to get my attention. He said it took him longer to get my attention than any woman in his life, [laughing] so, but, um, so then we – I noticed that he was very attracted to me and I was very impressed.

And we went to, came back to Atlanta and we sat down and played a game of chess. And I beat him. I don't know whether he let me beat him, or if he just thought I didn't know how to play, but George had taught me how to play chess, so I was – thought I was good. Anyway. And then we fell in love, and the rest of history. [Laughs]

But, um, in terms of how I was thinking, Eldridge had, the, the, um, distinction of being a – what we called at that time black nationalist. I think that's probably somewhat misleading, but we used that term in a specific way, which meant an advocate of empowering the black community, repudiating racism, challenging all forms of injustice, and analogizing ourselves – this came a little later, but analogizing ourselves to colonized people. I'm on that path.

But in Nashville, in Nashville a huge riot erupted after I left to go to be in a wedding, uh, April sixth, I believe, was the wedding. And the conference had been like March 27th, 28th, or 29th, something like that. So, within a week of the conference, there was this huge uprising. And because the Tennessee [1:05:00] legislature had been predicting violence – if Stokely Carmichael came, there was going to be violence – they got Michigan state helmets and training in riot control for their Nashville police, and they were so ready for this violence that they started the riot before [laughs] Stokely Carmichael got there. I think it was some kind of little, um, a fight, a fight or a conflict at a bar sparked it, and then it went on for days.

And so, the sense that we would fight, we would have to fight, we'd have to defend ourselves, we'd have to be armed, we'd have to learn about guerilla tactics – all that was coming into play. But it wasn't – it hadn't crystallized. This was '67. Uh, I'd say by the time Martin Luther King was murdered in '68, it – that attitude had crystallized already among the black revolutionaries. And I'm – I would say that when I first went to Barnard, '67, no, '66, in January, not January, September of '66, I don't think I would have called myself a revolutionary.

But then, I would also not have – I would not have been able to tell you that in January of ’66, when I was a sophomore at Barnard, that I had all the preparation to become a revolutionary. It was sort of, it was just a matter of a few more pieces of experience, a few more pieces of information, which, once I met Eldridge Cleaver, who *was* a revolutionary, who was actually Marxist, although he kind of kept that to himself, but he *was* a Marxist and he had ideas of revolution and organization that were more, um, more radical in some senses than SNCC, uh, given he was with a more, um, um, basically, a revolutionary Marxist model. That was what was in his head. Um, and he saw the potential in the Movement in the South, and he was originally a Southerner.

So, but he and I fell in love, and he wanted to, um – what did he say? He wanted me to, uh, come and visit him, because, once he was in Nashville during this riot, and he was a person who had just been released from prison on parole, his parole officer made him come back immediately and said he couldn’t go anywhere outside the city limits of San Francisco. [Laughs] That was his restriction. So, in order for us to have a relationship physically, I would have to actually enter into the city limits of San Francisco [laughs], which I did later in July, after our summer – the conference was in March.

We had all these student groups come, and it was an amazing collection of groups. One of the groups was the, um, student union from Cornell, the ones who became famous with those photographs coming outside of Straight Hall with the guns, that student group from – I think it was African American Student Organization. I’m not sure of their actual name, but the black student group at Cornell was there. There was a black student group from Berkeley. There was groups from Roosevelt University.

It was a very, um, self-selected group of radical students that came there. This was not like the popular thing. This was the radical thing. This was – actually it was dangerous. I never really thought of the Movement as dangerous. I guess if you commit to the Movement, you accept that danger. That's part of the price. But the danger is just because you are challenging a tremendously powerful and injust society.

So, in terms of the broader, the broader range, SNCC was like a debating society, or like an ideological institute, as well as an activist group, as well as like a family, as well as, uh, civil rights organization. So, to think of SNCC as a civil rights group is not adequate; it's inadequate. And also it was a phenomenon. It calls itself an organization, but it was right: It was "committee." There's a difference between a committee and an organization. It was a committee, and the personnel would fluctuate, and you would have different emphases.

So, by the time I came into SNCC, which is '67, it was a Black Power organization in transition to, probably, a revolutionary movement, but it was not going to be in that movement as an intact organization. And I didn't understand that, [1:10:00] but I was in the midst of all of that. So, I was absorbing so much. I was learning all about the thinking behind Black Power and the argument that – the first argument that I got was Stokely's letter, uh, not letter, the article he wrote, "What We Want." You know, um, during that time of the Civil Rights Era, leading up to the mid '60s, that was always the public question: "What do you want? What do you people want? What is it that you want? What is it you want?" So, when Stokely started saying, "We want Black Power," you know what? They stopped asking. [Laughter] Nobody asked anymore.

[Laughs] Um, and he wrote an article. It was called "What We Want," [laughs] and he articulated the view that – he said that, um, "The issue – integration does not deal with the issue of poverty. It only deals with the issue of color. But the problem that the black community faces

is the absence of power and the absence of institutions." And he said, "You cannot have a legitimate social change when you say, 'In order to have a good school, blacks have to go to a white school. In order to have a good – be in a good neighborhood, blacks have to go to a white neighborhood.'" He said, "Integration is disintegration."

And it was very clear. I mean, now people can look back and say, "Oh, yes. He was right." But at the time, that wasn't obvious. I mean, so, now integration is almost never mentioned. I mean, there's something that's no longer segregation, but certainly this is not an integrated society. It's a society that has eliminated official segregation. Um, at least in practice, in practical things, they haven't been able, in my view, to eliminate the intellectual or emotional underpinnings of segregation in people's minds, either black or white. I mean, and so, that's probably because it was instituted too long.

And, um, so, [sighs] being in SNCC was a precursor to becoming a revolutionary and being able to come into the Black Panther Party – I didn't come into the Black Panther Party because I decided I wanted to be in the Black Panther Party. I went out in July to visit Eldridge Cleaver and, um, [laughs] when I got there, he said, "How long can you stay?" And I said, "Oh, maybe a week, ten days, or whatever." He said, "They're going to have to send Willie Ricks out here to get you back." [Laughs] And so, I ended up staying there, basically, through August.

And, um, there was a little light, small riot in San Francisco that summer. Maybe it lasted like a half a day. And, um, that kind of rattled Eldridge. He just didn't want to be on parole. He didn't – he felt constrained. He wanted to go to Cuba. And so, I had met the Black Panthers that he was not supposed to be visiting because he was – not only was he on parole. He couldn't associate with people who were armed, and the Panthers were an armed organization. But also their office was in Oakland, and he was instructed not to leave the confines of San

Francisco. So, as soon as I got there, he drove me over to Oakland [laughs] to meet the Panthers, um, and the Panthers a lot of times would come to his house. And, um, it was the Summer of Love. That was 1967.

And so, what I'm getting at is that notions of revolution hadn't really crystallized as much as they did later by '68, after King's death, and into '69. And by then, there wasn't really any SNCC, and people had stopped talking about civil rights, uh, because the Civil Rights Act had passed, uh, and they were – there was this interest in electoral politics that attracted a certain group of, uh, of activists. But then, this interest in organizing the community, the urban community, that was the movement that SNCC inspired but didn't, um, it didn't, um – how would I put – it couldn't implement because it had, because it was a committee. [1:15:00]

So, it put out ideas. It put out people. I think, for example, Bobby Rush, who was one of the Black Panthers' leaders, and Bob Brown, another one of the leaders, in Chicago had been in SNCC. I had been in SNCC. Uh, I think Joudon Ford, one of the leaders of the Black Panther Party, early leader in New York, had been in SNCC. And, in Chicago, not Chicago – in Boston, the first, uh, chairman for the, deputy chairman for the Panther office there, Panther Party there, was Chico Neblett, who was a Freedom Singer. So, you see this gravitation through the vehicle of Black Power into what we later called "Black Liberation," or "Liberation Movement," in that era of '68, '69, '67, '70.

And that was when I was most involved in the Black Panther Party, and left the country in '69. And so, the process of my involvement in, direct involvement, in what was going on in the United States, was somewhat altered by Eldridge's decision, once he was arrested in a shootout after the Oakland police – it was a shootout with Oakland police, in which one Panther

was killed and I think about eight were arrested, including Eldridge. And he was the only ex-convict in the group. So, he was put back in prison. His parole was revoked.

He was able to get out in June of 1968 on a *habeas* petition, which was unbelievable. It was just totally unbelievable how that happened. But it did happen. He got out. He was nominated, uh, the presidential candidate of the Peace and Freedom Party, uh, although he wasn't old enough to have his name on the ballot, [laughs] um, and *Soul on Ice* came out earlier that year. So, his – sort of his start was very big in the notion of challenge, Black Power, revolution, and those things seemed to be extraordinarily threatening to the larger society, which enabled the FBI and the government to demonize us, and it was okay to put us under attack.

So, that was the, the direction I was heading into, and in terms of our broader world outlook, it was very heavily influenced by what was happening in the Vietnam War. Uh, that was the proof: That was the evidence of the United States as an imperial power. We could see it. We could see them sending troops to a foreign soil to shore up a government that, that was a puppet and to stop the Communists, who had won, and prevent them from – so we were in this world that's similar to what's here now.

But it was – you know, a lot of deception, lies, confusion, hiding the ball, not telling the truth – but the media, the press, the newspapers, in terms of the Vietnam War, were more able than currently to give the story, because they had actual physical reporters physically going into the battlefield with the soldiers and filing reports. And we could see TV, we could the war, we could see the massacres, we could see horrible, horrible things. My daughter was telling me – my daughter is now forty-one years old, but at the time she was in elementary school, and she said, "That was traumatic! We would see this stuff on the news! It was horrifying!"

So, you know, maybe it was horrifying to her, but to us it was evidence. It was evidence that the United States was an imperialist power, the United States was reckless, the United States would disregard human rights. It was proof that the things they were doing to us they do outside. But the other part of that, and this is the important thing for us, the revolutionaries, is that the Vietnamese showed they could be defeated. And they weren't rich and they weren't powerful. They were organized. In fact, I heard a comment that General [Võ Nguyên] Giáp was reported to have made to, uh, an American during the negotiations at the end of the war. And he was told, "But we won every battle," and he said, "And it didn't matter."

Because the Vietnamese understood the politics of liberation and they understood the dynamics [1:20:00] of the use of knowledge, of propaganda, of organization – they presented themselves in a way that, essentially, most countries supported Vietnam. Even if they weren't pro-Communist, they supported the Vietnamese claim for independence over the American claim to dominate. So, we were in that mode – which, even, even Martin Luther King came out and denounced the Vietnam War. So, we were in a mode in which an anti-imperialist upheaval was triggered by Vietnam, sort of right as the Black Power Movement exploded.

JM: Can we pause here for a minute?

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We are rolling.

JM: We are back after a short break. [JB coughs] Ms. Cleaver, I wanted to – um, you mentioned that you want to come at a further part of our conversation by, by, around the notion of community revolution.

KC: The way the Movement has been taught has been problematic from my perspective, uh, particularly in the way certain terms are used. Let's, for example, talk about integration.

Um, the effort to put an end to the segregation of schools was not, as far as black communities were involved, a move to integration. It was a move to eliminate segregation, to stop the oppressive exclusion. Now, you could stop the oppressive exclusion several ways: stop being oppressive, stop being exclusive, fund the black schools wherever to the height, which is one of the choices.

But integration, like merging these very separate societies, was a – seemed to be a government idea, but it did not come from the black community. It did not come from the black movement, you know. Ending racist terrorism, ending racist exclusion, is not necessarily integration. So, there was a problem there, the thinking of how we were going to go about our struggle. And now, in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and in the areas that it worked, they were dealing with local people, local communities. And in many cases, the communities weren't terribly well educated or weren't that wealthy. And so, you rarely ever heard this word, "integration," in those communities.

But what was going on, in reality, was all over the United States, poor people who were black, and largely a lot of black people were able to pull together after a long period of small steps that exploded up with the success of the bus boycott in Montgomery that stimulated all over the country people to take action, not people whose names we know, but people who lived in this town, who had helped in some other program, churches. There was a groundswell of activism going on across the United States, a process that I like to define as "community revolution." It was done by communities in communities, and these communities could connect.

And I say that because the way in which the Civil Rights Movement is, has been – I don't know if it's still – has been presented academically as a good movement until King died, and then a bad movement afterwards. And why is it bad? Because it's black, it's not for integration,

it's calling itself Black Power, and that's anti-white. And so, [sighs] you know, this effort to protect what is white is really problematic, because the real issue that we have been struggling with is the profound hatred, resistance, rejection, and destruction of black people and black communities. That's anti-*black*. That's anti-*life*. That's antisocial. That's – that's horrible!

So, the black communities who under segregation – and the whole country was segregated, not just the South – the black communities under segregation developed mechanisms of survival and communication and how to manage. And there were leaders who evolved in all these communities, and many times the leaders were women. And when [1:25:00] the *Brown* decision happened, and there were so many organized efforts to change these horrendous practices, the people who were willing to take steps into the Movement began to become predominant. Because before, I'll tell you, when – early '60s, late '50s, a lot of black people referred to the Movement as That Mess: "You don't want to get involved with That Mess."

And so, as younger people in the communities, who were *willing to do it*, got older and then a few more people got bolder, you saw, as the '60s progressed, more and more sort of standing up and challenges, and you saw a plethora of organizations. You couldn't go to community that had black, a significant black community, population, without finding a lot of organizations, except perhaps maybe in a place like Oakland.

You go to Oakland, there weren't many organizations. There were some. There was an NAACP maybe. There was one, but there were – it was just not a well-organized community. It didn't have the structure of churches. It didn't have the structure of black colleges. And so, it had an openness. It had an openness that – I loved it! When I saw this, it was like, "No one's organized here."

And so, there was this enthusiastic group of people who were young, who had been watching television, and they'd heard about the Movement, and they were willing to do something, and those were the young people who flocked into the Black Panther Party in Oakland. Some of them told me, "Oh, that was the thing to do," to go to the demonstrations. It became popular to be a Black Panther, and people wanted to be Panthers – young people wanted to be Panthers. They wanted to come to the rallies. They wanted to learn this. And, you know, some of them actually joined the Movement, and some of them were just influenced by it.

But what I wanted to say is it was a process by which communities that were working class predominantly, not highly educated but educated to some extent, and aware, and knew that [laughs] the country was talking about them. And then, those were the communities whose children were being shuttled off to fight in Vietnam. I mean, all the – not all, but the vast majority of soldiers were teenagers taken out of high schools out of poor neighborhoods. Very, very few college kids went, because they could get exemptions. And so, that destabilized a lot of communities. And then, the return to communities of heroin-addicted soldiers and people who had horrendous traumatic stress issues and who weren't victorious heroes, um, was devastating in a lot of ways – when I say "devastating," I meant the way it harmed the community.

So, the – to talk about civil rights as if it's separate to Black Power is a mistake, in my mind, that the issue was how do poor people, black people, excluded people organize themselves so they can empower and gain recognition, gain political voice. That's kind of what we were doing. SNCC people were doing it in one way. SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] was doing it a different way. The NAACP – the NAACP is actually doing something else, because it's elitist, in the sense of elitist legal action, the NAACP Legal Defense

Fund, whereas the NAACP was more of a membership organization, but they had very distinct limits as to what they would and wouldn't do.

So, we have a spectrum of organizations, and you'll see – for example, one of the most powerful, dramatic, inspiring leaders the Black Panther Party ever produced was Fred Hampton. Fred Hampton was in the Youth Council of the NAACP. He was a leader there. I found out that Fred Hampton was a leader when he was in elementary school. Fred Hampton found out that there were kids in his elementary school who didn't get any breakfast. He invited them to his house. He fixed breakfast for them! I said, "That's amazing!" [Laughing] This is a man that later joins an organization that actually has something called "Free Breakfast for Children," but he was thinking that way before he ever heard of the Black Panthers.

So, we have this upsurge of energy, of ideas, of possibility in this world in which colonialism is being repudiated in Africa, it's being repudiated in Asia, uh, there's movements, uprisings in Mexico, in Brazil. Now, they're not all successful. In fact, most of these [1:30:00] uprisings aren't successful. But China –

JM: Yeah.

KC: That revolution was a success. Cuba – that was a success. So, the sense that it was possible for ordinary people to make a fundamental difference in their life – we had proof that that could happen, we had opportunity to make it happen, and we had an energized group of young people and some middle-aged people and even some old people. In the Black Panther Party we had, like, one member who was, like, in his fifties – just one. [Laughter]

But what I'm saying is that there was this energy circulating through the community. Sometimes it's called Civil Rights. Black Power was more confrontational. And just because a person didn't go to the Black Power rallies or didn't wear African headdresses or didn't say

"Soul brother," that didn't mean that that didn't affect them. So, we're having a cultural process, an educational process that was influencing our community.

And I think, by consequence, it was influencing the way the larger white community perceived the black community. Now, the more friendly types, they perceived this as probably a good thing, but that's the minority. The vast majority of whites just know about black people from what they read in the papers, and the papers were slanted. The FBI was writing all kinds of horrible things about the Panthers, or not the FBI was writing – the FBI had reporters on the major papers who would write slant stories and they would plant stories and they used – this is a term that's called black propaganda, you know, use the media to demonize people improperly.

And so, um, the fact that the Black Panther Party, which was started – I'm talking about the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, which was started in Oakland in, um, October of 1967 [JM: 1966?] – no, I'm sorry, October of 1966. It was started on October 21st, because that was Bobby Seale's birthday. He said he remembered coming home after writing up – he and Huey [Newton] had written up their Ten-Point Platform and Program, and he went home, and his brother said, "Surprise!" [Laughs] It was his birthday! So, and the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense took that name, "Black Panther," from the Lowndes County group.

The Lowndes County group called itself the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, LCFO, but the logo was this panther, and the media called it the Black Panther Party. And so, then they started calling it the Black Panther Party and said, "Pull the lever for the Black Panthers." So, what I want you to see is here are people in Alabama have a Black Panther Party, and people in Oakland have a Black Panther Party, and they are in communication, even though they are not trying to do it the same way. And there were other Black Panther parties, and this name "Black Panther" became part of the symbol for Black Power.

[Sound of sirens in background]

But then, there were other groups. For example, in Kansas City, a group was consolidated that joined with the Black Panther Party, and Pete O'Neal was the chairman of this group. And then, um, there was some dispute, which I don't know the details of, some dispute between Pete O'Neal and Oakland Panthers, so he pulled his group out and said, "We're going to call ourselves the Sons of Malcolm." And so, you see these formations all over the country in urban areas that involve black men and black women. You also see the Nation of Islam, which was much more conservative. You see black elected officials, gaining.

So, there's a ferment. There's a ferment going on. And then, also, there's young white activists with the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], a huge student organization, and the anti-war movement. Now, the anti-war movement kind of consolidates all this, because they're – well, it's actually the anti-draft movement, but they called it the Anti-War Movement, [laughs] mobilization against the war. Um, that was being inspired, in part, by what was happening in the black community. And, of course, there's tensions, and at the time, it didn't seem that it was so effective.

But the FBI and the intelligence agencies were – they were going crazy. And part of the reason they were going crazy, in my opinion, is because the United States during that period was also at war. So, that's a different intelligence national security issue. What was happening, they were at war with Communists. [Sound of sirens in background] And all of these groups, like Stokely Carmichael, who's the chairman of SNCC, he goes to visit the Communist Castro, and the Black Panthers go to Canada and have meetings [1:35:00] with these Communist Vietnamese. You know, so like the United States has genuine enemies. And they are sort of using their attitude toward their enemies to paint the Panthers, who are too radical for them.

And also, they want to get – I'll give you an example. I was, "lackeys" was what I was going to use, but what they want is *their* advocate. So, a good case of what I'm talking about is when Malcolm X goes to visit Africa. He makes a visit to the Organization of African Unity, and he speaks there, and he visits several heads of state in Africa. And that's written about, and we read about it and we're very proud of Malcolm X. And he comes back and he talks about Africa. He talked about the interests; he talked about colonialism.

So, what does the United States government do? They find James Farmer, who was the head of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality], and they send *him* to Africa, because they don't like the fact of what Malcolm was doing in Africa. They don't like the alignments that Malcolm is making, so they want to have their own version. And so, we see that. Like, they'll have – they want a counter. So, if SNCC becomes exceptionally radical, they'll find ways, "Well, how can we fund this or arrange this so we have a counter?" So, these are the kinds of things that were going on, and that's understandable politically.

Then there was another secret level of what was going on with the intelligence agencies, with the FBI and the, um, DIA, Defense Intelligence Agency, and the National Security Agency. One of the things that they were worried about was any potential alliances between black, what they called black militants, African revolutionaries – African and Arab revolutionaries. This was something they were very worried about, because that, sort of like, then it's like not containable. So, they wanted to be sure that didn't happen. So, I happened to be married to Eldridge Cleaver, who went to Cuba and then to Algeria, and we set up an international section of the Black Panther Party in Algeria, with the support of the government there. And what we were doing, we were meeting the African [laughing] and the Arab revolutionaries and, you know, organizing – so we were going completely counter.

Now, for the FBI and the CIA and these intelligence agencies, we have become, um, well, enemies, but it's worse than that. It's, it's – [sighs] how did they call it? "Key extremists" – they had lists of "key extremists." They had a whole counter intelligence operation targeted to *every form* of activism that they disagreed with. So, there was a COINTELPRO for feminism. There was a COINTELPRO for New Left students, a COINTELPRO for the Socialists, a COINTELPRO – it started out back in the '50s with the Communist Party, which got to the point it was a joke in my household. Every third person in the Communist Party was working for the FBI. [Laughs] You know, *they're* the ones that fill up the meetings! So.

Um, and so, the Black Party – the Black Panther Party came into existence in 1966. COINTELPRO Domestic, the FBI's COINTELPRO against non- you know, something more than the Communist Party, came into existence in 1967, I believe. And they – one of their key objectives was to prevent what they said, "the rise of a black messiah that could unify the black masses." So, this means that they're looking at what's going on in our community revolution, in our civil rights, in our Black Power – they're looking at it as a political problem and they're singling out the people who they think would be the most problem.

Now, who they listed at the beginning was, uh – oh, they said there's, uh, Elijah Muhammad, but he's a little old. Now, Malcolm X is already dead, so Elijah Muhammad, but he's old. There was Max Stanford, who was the head of Revolutionary Action Movement, which was the underground group in, based in Philadelphia. There was Stokely Carmichael, head of SNCC. And, uh, there was Martin Luther King, who they were really, really, really worried about because, well, King didn't alienate anyone, and he drew millions and millions of people, and he had a Nobel Prize. He had, uh, much more worldwide admiration than any of these other people on their list.

And then, there's – they didn't even have the Black Panthers in there, in part because the Black Panther [1:40:00] Party was collective in the sense that we didn't ever have just one leader. We'd have a whole committee of leaders. And then, every group that was organized, every chapter, would have, you know, like a deputy minister of defense, deputy minister of information, communication secretary, education secretary, minister of culture, and, you know, and then captains. And so, it was a structured group that – this structure, this leadership structure would be duplicated.

And what the government found out in their first efforts – because usually they see black organizations that are confrontational and radical and say, "Oh, we'll just get rid of you." And the way they're going to do it is scare you or kill you. [Someone coughs] So, they tried. They tried killing Huey Newton, and he just got wounded and ended up in a shootout, and a policeman ended up dead. So, they said, "Okay, we'll convict him of murder. That'll do it. He'll go to the gas chamber. That'll be the end of Huey Newton." So, when he was arrested and charged with murder, this was in 1967. It was in October, I believe, toward the end of October. It was a few weeks after Che Guervara was found killed and murdered in Bolivia.

And, um, what we did – and when I say "we," it was a small handful of people, maybe eight of us, decided that, um, at my suggestion, that we have to have demonstrations at the courthouse. This was not something the small group of Black Panthers – they weren't into demonstrations. That wasn't their thing. But I said that, well, I understood that demonstrations are a way to protect you against violence and also to help build, uh, support, to bring support into the organization. [Sound of sirens in background] So, now they're faced with a need to protect Huey Newton from what might happen, and we organized and participated – we started out with

about eight people and ended up with an international movement, uh, by the time his case went to trial.

Um, and that is the kind of activity that frightened the government. That was the part I think I didn't understand: that the government was frightened; the police were frightened; the FBI was frightened. They had never encountered agitated, armed, angry, intelligent, articulate black people standing up and telling them what they would and wouldn't do. That's not an experience they knew what to do with. They had that experience. Colonial regimes had that experience. And, as I've studied other movements, I see, you know, like, there's the early phase, the people who are the most like the colonialists, and they want the, you know, legal rights. And then ultimately it goes to a mass movement, and then ultimately it goes to guerilla warfare, and then it goes to independence. And then, it goes to neocolonialism, [laughs] unfortunately.

But, but, what I'm saying it was a world process that – the FBI and the intelligence agencies and their counter intelligence programs *put us in that warfare context* that they had been dealing with that we didn't know about. I should have known a little bit, but I didn't, because my father was in the government. But I wasn't – I mean, I was a kid – I wasn't paying any attention to what he was doing until much later, and then I said, "Oh, my God! He was doing all these things." This was very political. I mean, he was helping the United States government put an end to Communist uprisings in the Philippines and do community development. And so, I guess, we were –

JM: [Sneezes] Excuse me.

KC: We were sparks in a movement that was much bigger than what we actually understood. And it was – to us, it was the most extraordinary, exciting, and wonderful thing that we could do. And we also knew we were risking our lives, but we did it – we wanted to do it.

We wanted to make sure that these conditions had to come to an end, and we were going to put an end to them or we were going to die trying. And that's an attitude that is, uh, frightening to people in authority.

JM: Yeah.

JB: Let's take a pause here.

JM: Okay.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay.

JM: I want to ask a couple of things, and you've spoken to them in some measure already, but, but maybe if you can focus in and just illustrate in one or two examples. I'm so struck when I think about your arrival in late '67 in Oakland, and you've mentioned, obviously, that, uh, Huey Newton's arrested already and, and on a capital charge. Um, all of what will happen there in what really are not too many months before –

KC: Gosh, very fast.

JM: Yeah. Um, there's a swirl of things happening. The ideology of the party is going to move through [1:45:00] these nuanced but very significant transitions, if you stop and think about –

KC: Yes.

JM: Their implications. Um, it's quickly internationalized in its focus. Um, the pressure from law enforcement through COINTELPRO, it's just, it's just ever-present and massive. Um, uh, and you're a very young person who becomes in many ways part of the apparatus to explain all of this –

KC: Um-hmm.

JM: To report all of this, to speak all of this.

KC: Well, you said I was very young. To the Panthers, I was older. One friend of mine said – she was in high school. Most of the Panthers were high school age. And she came from Chicago to Oakland, and I think she was seventeen. And she said, "Oh, Kathleen, she was twenty-two. She could be a leader."

JM: I'm interested in how, um, if you can illustrate, the – that climate. And you've spoken to this already, but I'm thinking particularly the difficulties of trying to carry forward a broad progressive political program through the locus of the Black Panther Party at a time when the police pressure, the criminal police pressure, basically, is just smashing down upon you.

KC: [Sighs] Now, you want me to articulate that process, how we were doing it, and what it was like?

JM: Kind of how to ma – you said earlier, another time, you just, you just pressed forward.

KC: Yeah.

JM: But I –

KC: Okay, let me, let me –

JM: This wasn't the –

KC: Let me think about this, because what the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense – it started with a small group of maybe four – well, it actually started with *two*, two guys, and then another one joined, and then a girl joined. So, it started very small. It was local. It was only in Oakland. *But* the concepts it began with were for the entire black community: We want power to determine the destiny of our own community.

And when you look at the Ten-Point Platform and Program, it's essentially a reform. And it's analogous to all the other sets of demands – if you look at the points that they raised in the Atlanta Student Movement: We want an end to police brutality. We want them to employ us. We want them to stop not letting us try on clothes in department stores. I mean, the different – when you look at colonial statements of the independence desires, when you go back to the colored people's conventions at the end of the Civil War, you'll see – "Well, what do you want?" "We want to be treated the same as whites. We want to be able to own land."

Essentially, the Black Panther Party was a twentieth-century version of the hopes and demands and desires of an oppressed black community, rearticulated in a new set of words. *And* the young people who joined the Black Panther Party were young people, like me, who had seen civil rights activists being attacked, being beaten, being killed – people the same age as themselves or younger! And so, that had a huge, huge effect. Many people that I met who are older than me told me that what made them join the Civil Rights Movement was the murder of Emmett Till. But that happened in 1955. So, it was the people who were Emmett Till's age, who were fifteen or fourteen in '55, those are the ones who went into – and they went into the Civil Rights Movement because there wasn't any Black Power Movement yet.

So, the kids who came into the Black Panther Party are a little older and they – one of the dynamics that's intriguing to me is that so many of the urban areas, if you talk about, let's say, Philadelphia or New York or Chicago or Los Angeles, the black population, the working class black population in these big cities, has a large number of migrants from the South. So, you have children whose parents left the South, or grandparents left the South, who may have family still in the South. So, when you see these demonstrations, like, people watching what's

happening in Birmingham, that affects them in a way that it doesn't affect, let's say, somebody just watching on television. It's not just news.

It's – first of all, it's traumatizing to see these people being beaten. And I remember Emory Douglas, who grew up in, uh, uh, Michigan when he was young, before his mother moved to California, he said, "I didn't want that to happen to me! [1:50:00] I wouldn't let anybody beat me like that!" And so, you have this edge. You say, "Well, this is what they did to, you know, girls and boys who just went out and protested. You know, they beat them, they chase them, and they sicced dogs on them." So, you have anger to resolve or rectify this kind of violence and also this sense of, "I wouldn't let anybody do that to me! If they come and push me around, I'm fighting back!"

And so, when the Black Panther Party took the position, as in the name, Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, there was automatic response, "That's right! We can defend ourselves. We should be able to defend ourselves." Now, if someone was growing up in Mississippi, first of all, they're not even going to hear about the Black Panther Party. And secondly, this whole idea of being able to defend yourself, everybody knows it but doesn't anybody talk about it. So, you had a generation who sort of threw off the caution of their parents and were thrust into the middle of a county at war, the Vietnam War. And if they were younger, that's why the age – they were too young, in many cases, to get drafted. They were fourteen and fifteen and sixteen. In fact, some of them were thirteen. We didn't really like to have thirteen-year-olds. And then, there were those who lied and said they were older.

But the Black Panthers were largely a youth movement. And youth have several qualities that are distinct. One of them is they believe they are immortal. And so, even though it's [laughs] very, very, very dangerous, what we were doing, it was like, "Okay! I'm going to go

get my gun, and we're going to duke it out!" It's like they didn't really think – and I'm trying to think myself, "Did we really –?" It's sort of like I know people are going to get killed. I know that. I know I might get killed, but that didn't function as a deterrent on us. Now, that does function as a deterrent for most people.

So, what you have with the Black Panthers and a similar group is a radical, committed, dedicated group of young people who are collected. They've collected together, and that's a huge energy. That's that collective communal energy, and they represent adults who aren't going to join the party, but who are going to help them and support them. And they also, because the Panthers ran out there the way they did – [laughs] I'm quoting from, um, a woman who is, Assada Shakur wrote about in her book, uh, her autobiography.

This was when she was being, um, her picture was being circulated all over New York as a person who was wanted for bank robbery. But she didn't know that [laughing] that they were going to put her picture in the paper that day because she had – she wasn't actually the person who robbed the bank. But that's who they were looking for. So, she, um, goes by her apartment and she sees police all over it. So, she says, "I can't go there." And she goes to a friend. She says, "Nobody knows that I have this friend. Her phone number is not in my address book. So, I'm going to go to her house." So, she goes to her house, and the girl says, "So, what took you so long?" [Laughs]

So, that's what I meant, that there are people who are observing this stuff, who will help. They're just not going to let it be publicly known. And then, there are people who can't help but be involved, and those are the people the FBI just messed over, like your parents or your neighbors or your friends – call them up, "Have you seen them? Where are they? What can you tell us?" And that's to alienate those people from you. Uh, I'm trying to think of something –

who was that, a cousin of mine? It's something I just heard recently. They found out that so-and-so was related to me. We're cousins. I think our – my father's side of the family is related, through that. And he had some kind of security clearance in the Navy and he was called in because they found out that he – you know, these are the types of things I don't even know were going on. I discovered my son, Maceo Cleaver – his name is in the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission records! They're spying on my son! I don't think my son has even been in Mississippi.

Well, I don't know – but what I'm saying is that the level of surveillance and – what do you call it? [1:55:00] See, we're getting back now to the nature of a slave society, the society in which – um, how did they put it? A South African, a South African, um, sociologist said, "It practices," and he was describing South Africa, but you can use this for the United States: "It's a society in which there is democracy for the whites and tyranny for the blacks." And so, the political system that black people are subjected to does not have the liberty or the freedom of motion or the freedom of access that the whites do. And then, [sounds like something hits microphone and sound levels change] when they start acting like they do, or that they ought to, it becomes very frightening. So, we were setting off fears that we didn't quite understand.

JM: Yeah.

JB: I think she lost the microphone.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

KC: But we, when, um, when I'm done with this.

JB: Okay.

JM: We're back for a final kind of question. Ms. Cleaver, I want to just invite you to comment on the following. We're at, uh, we're at forty-plus years distance now from the late

’60s. And, um, we’re able to talk about all of this with that much space in time that has passed, and I think that probably in significant ways changes even the moment of explaining it. There’s – I think in this context of things I’ve read that you wrote in those years –

KC: At the time?

JM: At the time.

KC: Um-hmm.

JM: And the immediacy and the rawness of it.

KC: Um-hmm.

JM: And the urgency of it and the ugliness of the things you had to talk about and describe to make known what you were confronting.

KC: Um-hmm.

JM: And at this distance, even when we talk about horrible things that happened to people that we knew, that you knew, there’s just enough remove somehow that I think the emotional character of the telling is a little different. I wonder. So, I want to ask you to reflect on that: If the distance has changed the way we talk about this, and, if it has, what that means for how we try to recover that history. That’s one broad thing.

The other thing, too, is – before we started today, um, we touched on the fact that there is a film now kind of coming into circulation, *The Black Power Mixtape* [*The Black Power Mixtape, 1967-1975*], um, and it’s engaged by different people in different and interesting ways. And so, is it nostalgia? Is it historic interest? Is it – why do these things resonate the way that they do in different audiences?

So, two broad things: What the passage of time has meant to the way we think and talk about these things, and how we – in the specific case of this documentary, how it plays to today's audience?

KC: At the time when these police raids were an everyday occurrence, and Panther offices were getting bombed, and people were being followed and shot and arrested, there's a newspaper cover of one of the issues of the Black Panther newspaper – I think it's a 1970 issue. It's something about "Fascism in America," and you open it up, and there's just page after page after page after page of arrests, records of arrests, who was arrested, what they were charged with, where they were – like Mumia Abu Jamal, one case in point, comes from Philadelphia to Oakland. He's arrested for jaywalking, [laughs] because he's a Black Panther. He's a teenager! He's got a picture – the Philadelphia police have a picture of him, and I think they give it to the FBI – a teenager! A teenager who made a speech at a rally, wearing a black beret, against the Vietnam War – and the FBI's picture, they wrote a number and on the back "dead."

So, the hatred and hostility of the law enforcement community and the FBI, I think, was more exaggerated than maybe the general population, but that was the element that we kept referring to as the – well, Huey Newton called them the "racist dog police" or the "Fascist police" or the "imperialism" – we were engaged with them at the time. They were engaged with us. It was a war. It was what you call low-intensity, counter-insurgency, warfare techniques being targeted toward us.

But we were revolutionaries and we believed that it would come to war and that we will take that risk. And so, I think that has something to do with the tone of how we expressed ourselves, the things that we wrote about in our newspapers, and the attitude, because so many people were going to jail, going to prison, getting arrested. It was, [2:00:00] it was, it was

overwhelming to a certain extent. It wasn't overwhelming when we thought of what we wanted to see happen, our vision for America.

Uh, and in the distance, when you come back now, I think the fact that, um, so many of the people who made that time, who led that time, whose voices, whether they were speakers or whether they were leaders or whether they were artists or whether they were singers, like Miriam Makeba, or maybe, uh, Ossie Davis, or Stokely Carmichael, or Eldridge Cleaver – all these people are gone. They're all passed away. And so, the, the intensity that we had at that time has diminished somewhat because we don't have that collection of powerful, brilliant, artistic, committed people. We don't have that *collection* anymore. I mean, just imagine all those people who were together at the same time!

Suppose – okay, let's talk about people who were killed and suppose they weren't. Let's say, suppose Bobby Kennedy wasn't killed. Suppose Malcolm X wasn't killed. Suppose Martin Luther King wasn't killed. Suppose Fred Hampton wasn't killed. And suppose the organizations that all those people represented flourished. Then, we'd be talking something – we'd have a different outcome, and we'd be talking in a different way, and we'd be a different country. So, they were killed, so we aren't going to be that different country.

And I think that's – probably has something to do with why that – the images in *Black Power Mixtape* are appealing to people, because I think, you know, the opportunity to be that country is gone. However, when you watch *Black Power Mixtape*, it looks like [laughing] it's still a – it's still possible! And everyone is young, and Angela [Davis] is so smart, and Stokely is so charming. And it's engaging. People were engaging. Even though it's a very threatening and dangerous time, the personalities were engaging, and they were upbeat. Like, almost all the pictures you see of Stokely Carmichael, he's got his gorgeous smile. He's got a beautiful,

beautiful smile. And [laughing] people also were young. They're just young and full of hormones and excitement and, you know, [laughing] we want to have a revolution, but we want to go to a party, too, you know! And we want to get married and we want to have kids! Eldridge used to say, "They're just wasting our time! Let's get this stuff over with, so we can go back [laughs] to enjoying our lives!"

JM: Yeah. What a privilege and an honor to be with you! Thank you so much for –

KC: [Laughing] Okay.

JM: Having us here today. Thank you.

KC: Oh, thank you. Does that work for the black –?

[Recording ends at 2:03:09]

END OF INTERVIEW