

TRANSCRIPT: RICK TUTTLE

Interviewee: Rick Tuttle
Interviewer: David Cline
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START OF INTERVIEW

David Cline: Okay, this is David Cline meeting with Rick Tuttle on April 15, 2010, and Mr. Tuttle if you could introduce yourself and tell us when and where you were born?

Rick Tuttle: I was born in New Haven, Connecticut, January of 1940.

DC: Which would make you how old now?

RT: I'm seventy, and at this point three months and about ten days.

DC: Can you tell us a little bit about your family and your upbringing and if you see connections to where you ended up later in life?

RT: Looking back at it I see some I don't think I saw at the time. My mother's side of the family was from Arkansas most immediately--she was raised there and so was her mother and father--but the family came to the tidewater before the Mayflower and then went down to upcountry South Carolina and then up to Georgia. My grandmother's father was a little boy, a sort of medical orderly, in the Battle of Atlanta, so I got a pretty good dose of the white Southern point of view in terms of the Civil War and Reconstruction and so on and so forth, and race relations, as a little kid. I was five or six

and lived in Arkansas during the second war. Dad went in the Marine Corps at age thirty-six and so Mom moved the family back down to Arkansas, so I lived there a couple of years. I got a pretty good look at what segregation meant. I didn't like it as a little boy.

Then on my father's side, my grandmother--. And both grandmothers were important in my life. My mother was ill so both ladies at different times took care of us and then later lived in our home. And they in turn were the child or grandchildren respectively of people who went through the Civil War and Reconstruction. You may have seen the movie, "Glory," and the Massachusetts 54th. That day on those assault waves was the great Connecticut 6th, and my grandmother's grandfather, in a well known family story, Monroe Gillette took a bullet on that day of those assault waves and he later died on the Petersburg Front. The two ladies when they would get together around the Sunday table for dinner after church simply could not agree on what to call "it", be it the Civil War or the War Between the States, the War of Northern Aggression, the War of Southern Rebellion. I got interested in that, lived in the North and chose the Northern side. That's some of the family background. We were pretty sensitive to history, and in fact you'll probably find a lot of people involved in the Civil Rights Movement who wound up in the academy, wound up being historians.

DC: So making that segue can you tell me a bit about involvement in the Movement and when you first became aware of the Movement, attraction to it?

RT: Well there is a kind of pre-history, at least in some parts of the country, up in the northeast. I went to a little college in Middletown, Connecticut, Wesleyan University. At that time we were about eight hundred and thirty-seven young men when

I enrolled, and we stayed about that size and almost everyone in one way or another lived in a fraternity. I was part of one of the three fraternities on the campus which broke from its national because of white-Christian-only clauses, one of which was public and the other of which was a hidden clause, and we basically fired our national. Now it didn't take a lot of courage to fight for civil rights in the middle of a little Ivy League college in the middle of the Connecticut River Valley, but we learned the vocabulary of civil rights and we also learned about taking on fairly established tradition and to some degree social power at a time when everyone in liberal circles was concerned about the silent generation, the conformity. There was a lot of concern in the McCarthy and post-McCarthy 1950s and so we, au contraire, we took that on. In fact a companion to this weekend I'm getting together is next weekend a lot of us in that particular fraternity for the second time in fifty years are going to be getting together. We're bound together by that shared commitment to, as we saw it, human rights and civil rights.

DC: And were there public expressions of that that you were involved in, in Middletown?

RT: Well our break from the national was a major campus issue, put the university administration on the spot and put them in a tough spot in terms of alumni. There were two other houses that also broke but we were very much out there in that battle. Then came the sit-ins in the North--excuse me, the sit-ins in the South--and there were marches at Woolworths and so on in Middletown. I cannot remember if I actually walked the line at the Woolworth store in either Plattsburg, New York, my hometown, or in Middletown, Connecticut. I just don't remember. I remember thinking about it but without any documentation, without any artifact or pictures of myself I just can't

remember. I did imagine [it to be] but I'm so trained as a historian I don't say what I don't--.

DC: Right.

RT: --remember. I don't guess. In any event, then what happened is in 1961, to me what was a precipitating action, were the Freedom Rides. There is a very lovely, well known moment in the history of the Freedom Rides, a small part of the history of the Freedom Rides and a rather large part of the history of Wesleyan at the time, which was the first ride went to Anniston [Alabama] and was burned, and probably every high school textbook in the country has pictures of the bus burning in Anniston. The Deep South at that point had never been broken; that is to say segregation had never been broken, and I was aware of that. Autherine Lucy who had attended as a college student and had been driven out of the University of Alabama, and Mr. Meredith, James Meredith, had yet to try Ole Miss. Little Rock had been tough but it wasn't quite the Deep South, as my mother kept saying to me. Now when the Freedom Ride took place there was a well known phone call from William Sloane Coffin at Yale to John Maguire, who was a teacher of divinity in a seminary, or, excuse me, a Yale Divinity School classmate or acquaintance of Sloane Coffin and also once had roomed with Dr. King and had expressed his views on these matters, a call of conscience. There had to be another bus to go down and to carry on and go through the South. And also there was a pincer movement and the pincer movement actually figured into my thinking, and also buses organized in '61, the late spring and summer coming from the West Coast, come in a pincer movement and Jackson being kind of the center of attention, Jackson, Mississippi.

Dr. Maguire, a very well respected teacher at the college, marched into Dean

Swift's office, a dour, tough, sort of--every college has to have someone who's the chief operating officer and, you know, the disciplinarian, high standards--and said, "I know this could cost me my job, I'm in my first year here," said John Maguire, retired president now of Claremont College out in California. This story spread like wildfire, by the way, so I knew it contemporarily. He said, "But I must go on and answer this call of conscience even though I have final exams coming up." [Laughs] He had his final classes to teach. Remember it was in May of '61 and Wesleyan finished up in late May, early June. Swift looked at him and with sort of a dour expression picked up the phone and called his wife and said, "There's some young fool who's going on this Freedom Ride. I'd better go with him," and they went together, so when they went, Wesleyan went.

I missed that ride, and so did my roommate. We wanted to go too; we had felt the same pull. We would not have [met] Wesleyan going but we by then understood the issues and what we understood was the genius of the Freedom Ride, namely this was clear-cut interstate commerce. No way you can claim local ordinances trump that. It's interstate. We got that; you just had to be willing to test it. So two years later--.

DC: Now how are you following this news, or how are you getting news of what was going on? Is it spreading through student sources or newspapers?

RT: We're hearing contemporarily but also we were pretty steeped in the *New York Times* and the *Herald Tribune*. We read it regularly and we also--. And I was part of this group of fellows who in the previous three or four years--. I was now in my junior year, as it turned out, and I had taken a little time off college. I was originally in the class of '61 and wound up in the class of '62. What a time to take off, 1960. I was reading Camus, [Laughs] I mean everything I could read in English, not bad at all, you know, and

I think there was probably some correspondence with C. Wright Mills just as he was dying. I had written him. In other words I had taken some time off. I had busted my ham playing basketball and, dare I say it, I think one reason I keep playing basketball at age seventy is because I was always the ninth man on a team that used eight and the eighth man on a team that used seven so I'm still trying to cross over.

DC: So did you play at Wesleyan?

RT: I was the ninth man on a team that used eight, the eighth man on a team that used seven. [Laughs] And I played at Plattsburg High School, but I don't want to get into all that. I was a pretty good high school player at a small high school. But the-- [Laughs] I could go on and on on the subject. But we saw the-- Oh, a very important point, our fraternity-- Wesleyan had very few black students but the black students there were, with about one or two exceptions--we're talking about very small numbers, maybe two handfuls--except for a couple the rest were in our fraternity. I was a scholarship boy, as were some of these lads, and I washed a lot of dishes and waited tables. This was not *Les Misérables*; it was a job. Most of us have done this to get through school, and so did these fellows, so we were very, very well acquainted. Furthermore, without being in any way unduly inappropriately modest about it, I was not terribly socially adept so I had a lot of time on weekends. I was the favorite of all the professors' spouses on campus because I was always available for Saturday-night babysitting. I was very popular with junior faculty who lived near the campus. So I didn't date much, eager though I was to. I couldn't find any willing subjects of my attention. These fellows, who were all-state Iowa in sports, double eight hundreds, president of their class, things like that, couldn't

get dates at Smith, Mt. Holyoke, other places. There was a story where we stormed out because the girls wouldn't dance with those guys. We all made a scene and stormed out.

So they were out too. And they weren't going to go--. They wanted to date the same kind of young ladies we dated. Last scene in "Chariots of Fire," Abrahams: "I'm an Englishman." And these were Wesleyan men. These were Brown men. These were Yale men. They date Mt. Holyoke and Smith and Vassar, and they couldn't get dates. They were turned down and turned down and turned down, or at least had been turned down a few times or couldn't do it. So we spent a lot of time together. So I saw the Civil Rights Movement to some part through that prism and also in part through the prism of my dad and mom and grandparents in Connecticut and in the North, having come from the Southern experience.

In any event, what happened is I then went to graduate school and there were some roads not taken, didn't go here or there or the other place to grad school, but I wound up coming out to UCLA to do graduate work in 1962, and John Poppy wrote an article, it's an important article, which appeared in either *Colliers* or *Look*, probably *Colliers*, a magazine that used to be around, on the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and voter registration. It was about Sam Block and Charles McLaurin, and Willie Peacock may have been in the article, about them registering voters in Mississippi. And the basic data is remarkable, [a] potential voting base much, much larger than the twenty-five thousand Negroes who were registered to vote at the time and not just the literacy test but the terror, and so on and so forth.

I saw the article and got into conversations with people about "this is outrageous; we ought to be able to do something about this." Voter registration, for God's sake. Also

I'd seen here and there in the paper Tom Hayden, Bob Zellner or others getting pushed around, you know, knocked down, the famous picture of Tom, you know, and at least one of the fellows, maybe two brothers, I think, were at Trinity College, and that kind of clicked. Wesleyan and Trinity are near each other and rivals in sports and so on and so forth, and some identification there. So the fire hoses, Birmingham, and I saw that as a--.

By then I had been out a year in college and I had lined up a teaching assistantship in history--I took my doctorate in history at UCLA--lined up a teaching assistantship for the next fall and I had a house advisor, they called it, sort of a junior fellow in a residence hall at UCLA, so I was double covered. So here I am: I'm single; I have no debt; obviously based on what I said earlier no children or any prospects thereof; and I turned to someone whom I admired and whose advice I took seriously and I said to the fellow--.

I was working as kind of a nanny and taking care of the children. He was a very busy guy, terrific fellow, and I turned to Norm [Rescon] and I said--. He'd been a World War II hero, I mean had bailed out over Germany, fought his way out, came back, one of these war heroes of that generation, tremendous guy, and he and his wife just lovely to me, and so on. He's now deceased. I said, "What would you do if you were my age?" and he said, "Oh, I'd do it." He talked about it for a little bit and I thought about it and I said, "boy, if I'm ever going to get involved in this, I don't have debt, I don't have"--you know, so on and so forth.

So the next day I bumped into Steve McNichols, whose back had been broken in a Freedom Ride coming--. Remember the pincer movement? I'd run into him and had some early conversations with him about what his experience was because he had--. He and a whole group from the West Coast were mirror images of what happened in the East

Coast Freedom Rides with John Maguire and all that. I got acquainted with him and I bumped into him after talking to Norm [Rescon]. I went to sleep and got up the next morning and went into campus and sure enough I bump into Steve McNichols. I'll leave it to others to conclude whether it's the Jungian collective unconscious or gods at work or whatever. I'll leave that for others that are more learned than I to figure out, but I bump into him, and I said, "I'm interested in going down to help register voters with SNCC," and I alluded to the article. He said, "Well by the way Sam Block is going to be in town tonight with Charles McLaurin." They were up raising funds in the Bay area. Steve would be the natural person to know that. He later became the head of the civil rights division of the National Student Association, played some role in breaking open the CIA, the control of NSA, but in any event the international division. He said they're going to be in town tonight and I said to myself, well--a Baptist term came to mind--it's time to come to Jesus. [Laughs] I thought I'm either going to do this or not. I said well, yeah, I want to do it, so--

DC: Now you're currently enrolled in school?

RT: I'm a graduate student.

DC: Right.

RT: End of my first year of grad school.

DC: Right.

RT: My academic work is in hand.

DC: This is what time of the year?

RT: It's as Birmingham is rolling along, so we date it from that. I don't have documentation on this particularly but I would say it's certainly after May 15 or 16 and as

I recall before June 1. But my work was in hand. By then I'm a grad student, second semester, and so my work was in. I had turned in my papers. [Laughs] [I worked too much.] So they arranged for me to meet Sam Block and Charles McLaurin.

I remember I called my folks, not to ask their permission. I'm twenty-three at the time. I'm not nineteen or something. I'm the age of men who command men in combat, you know, and I called up and I said, "Mom, Dad,"-- Mom took the call--"I'm going to Mississippi to register voters." [Laughs] My mother said, "Honey, I'm from Arkansas, not Mississippi. [Laughs] Please don't go to Mississippi." And of course the old joke about Arkansans, what Arkansans always say, Arkansas's a very poor state; thank God for Mississippi. But that's not what she was talking about. It was tough down there and in parts of Arkansas too. But I went. We drove down, and that starts some of the story--. I can keep on talking, but that begins the story, the narrative, about--. I was in Mississippi and then I went on to--. Some interesting things happened.

DC: Before we get there let me ask you, in that conversation with your mom, did she understand why you felt you had to go?

RT: Well, she understood that--. I'm not sure. She knew her son had grown up, and--what's that term we use? My late wife and I are parents of a twenty-eight-year-old so if my daughter ever pulls a stunt like that I may--. Of course I said to my daughter, "Be careful, be careful," as she went off to college. She went to college in northern California and I live in Los Angeles. She said, "I will Dad, I will," and when she was about twenty-three, as a matter of fact, the young lady went sky diving, so I don't know. I mean, Jesus.

But they were apprehensive about their son and his safety, afraid I'd get myself badly hurt. I was pretty clear in my own mind what part of my assignment was. I'm going down in '63, this is before the '64 business, and I was pretty sure that part of my job was to draw some fire. I understood that. I knew--. Oh, my dad by then was the--. My dad had been the dean of the college, basically the number two or three person, at SUNY Plattsburg, State University of New York up at Plattsburg, but by then my dad was education program director for NASA, and NASA was NASA in those days. I knew what would happen if they came for me. I had a good idea of the attention that would not be drawn from people who were local, particularly if they're black, and so on and so forth. And I'm coming from a somewhat different experience than some of the other young people who were white. They had other types of experiences and their families did in this country. But in any event I grasped that. I understood that. I had enough sense of history. I had enough sense of the likelihood.

My dad--you asked about my mother--my dad was also apprehensive. There's a very important formative story, which gets into this, which is that when I was a little boy coming back out from Arkansas I was on a train. I was just turning six. Coming out of Memphis the trains were jammed. The war was over. They even had deserters in handcuffs, they had POWs they're moving, the whole country--. The joke was the kids on the West Coast, Oregon, Washington, California, fought the war in Europe and the young men on the East Coast fought the war in Asia. Everything was all screwed up. It was sort of like that. The great switching areas were Memphis and Cincinnati. Anyway the rolling stock was old. We hadn't built trains in the '30s and '40s. The train broke down outside of Memphis and so we knew we were being delayed, we were trying to get

in, there were no rooms, and here we were a family of three, my mother pregnant, my brother had a burn on his arm and deaf and we didn't know what was wrong, with my dad in uniform, and my mother. We got off the train in Cincinnati, a delayed train, and we could see the New York train over there starting to leave and moving in the big Cincinnati train station. It's very relevant to all this, but Dad turned to the conductor and said, "Can you help us?" [Now this family--] it's about four tracks away. He said, "I'm sorry sir, I can't." Dad turned to the sleeping car porter, stepped over to him, and said, "Can you help me?" and handed him something, some card of some sort, just handed him something. [Claps hands] The train stopped. I've never seen anything like it. Bam! Bam! Bam! Hand signals. He stopped it. The New York train stopped and we got off. I said, "Dad, what did you show him?" My dad showed him his NAACP card. And at that moment I learned something about organization. [He pulled Randolph's name.] I didn't know about him, Randolph.

DC: Right.

RT: So in any event, so Dad's reaction--. After all I'm the great-grandson and he's the grandson of--. Well his mother--and he lived in his mother's home. He was the eldest and a beloved child. She was thirty-four when he came along, a very beloved welcome addition to her life, and it was her granddaddy who is the Monroe Gillette I mentioned and all the rest of it. So in any event the--.

DC: So do you know the story of how he came to join the NAACP?

RT: Well, my dad was probably the greatest track coach in the history of New England, at least up until I left New England in 1962, ten out of eleven state championships, and my father also was on the Yale team that won the national title,

which was the Penn Relays in those days, in 1928, so Dad competed--. The way Otis Chandler, the great publisher of the *L.A. Times*, you know he was a tremendous [26:35]. Chandler said he learned a lot about men who were black that he wouldn't have otherwise met with a Stanford background through track and field, people like Mal Whitfield, Harrison Dillard, these were great track men of the time. Dad was constantly in the mix both competitively and so on and also was teaching. His teaching assignments were at Eaton School in New Haven, [which is a major school there], very much involved in the community in sports, and in teaching, and in education, and so on and so forth.

Our first hero was--. There are two heroes: Jackie Robinson was a big deal. Remember I'm born in '40 so I'm old enough to know what's going on at age seven. But Levi Jackson was a big deal, Yale football captain, the first Ivy League--maybe not Ivy League but the first Yale football captain who was African-American, and we were always rooting for Levi Jackson, sitting out on the stoop in New Haven. [27:35] A bunch of white folks all rooting for Jackie Robinson, so that's pretty good from my point of view.

So anyway, off I went.

DC: And did you know where you were heading?

RT: Greenwood, Mississippi, which is where John Poppy's article was grounded, and by then Sam Block had graduated from--he's deceased now. He died in Los Angeles. He and I were in some ways fairly close [in one respect that he moved out there], but we drove across the country to 708 Avenue Inn in Greenwood, Mississippi, and Bob Moses, who ran the office, was away. Mr. Moses was somewhere other than--. I think he was up North, Northeast, a variety of--. One thing that's interesting about a

conference like this, you pick up pieces of where people were just from--. You put the pieces together from parts of their own narrative, or people speaking of them.

DC: So that was the office address, or was that--?

RT: That was--. SNCC was doing a lot of--. That's the office address in Greenwood, Mississippi of the Council of Federated Organizations, COFO.

DC: Right.

RT: Which as you probably know is the combined SNCC, NAACP. They can all have their differences in New York or Washington but [Laughs] in the Delta you better-- even Atlanta--you'd better pool resources, and there was a CORE and SNCC presence. So the idea was I'd be doing, well in my own mind, voter registration, but I was quite prepared to do direct action, sit-ins and so on, if they wanted me to. Basically as long as it was applicable, and I never had reason to think it would be, I was prepared to do what I was asked to do and told to do. I wasn't there to give orders or give instruction; I was there to basically do what I was asked, and I did. I literally was in--.

After I was there a few days we had a close call in Canton, Mississippi. We were down at a voter registration rally and I remember we were over on the third base side and one of the, I think it was probably Willie Peacock, walked up to me and said, "Time to go." That's all he said. He said, "Just walk slowly," so we just walked slowly, and he said, "Don't look back." Well, as we turned towards the cars, as we walked over to the cars to get in, I could see what they were doing, because over on the right field side you could see the cars with the boys, the Confederate flag flying, carloads coming, and everyone just walking away, the crowd dispersing. We drove along, and a white driving

a black in that context is very dangerous. They had me sort of slouch down in the car. I remember that. It was getting dark and we just moved out of there and what not.

We were talking about religion earlier. One of those other ventures, we went to a church near Canton, Mississippi, down that way. Where the incident happened was a baseball field in Canton. Went down, and I still remember, Sam Block was not there but Block's great organizational gift is he was very well known in the late '50s, early '60s as a singer. He had a group and he'd go around Mississippi. He was a personality already. He'd also gone to school up north for a little bit and come back down. I don't remember why. Dreadfully sad he's not available to be interviewed, but Willie Peacock, of course, you probably have interviewed, or could interview. He's a legend, at least in my mind and I think a lot of others. But anyway, hearing the singing in the church and the--I'll frame it this way--the Exodus story, you know, "Go Down Moses". [Singing] "Go down, Moses, way down in Egypt land. Tell old pharaoh, 'Let my people go,'" and so on, and they just--. Oh, it was powerful stuff, very deeply informed, and people [who'd pray to God] got their heads cracked, but informed by these metaphors and by this song and so on and so forth.

And I was there for a few days and then word reached us--. One morning I was literally sleeping in the same bed with Lawrence Guyot. We were all bunched into a kind of Freedom House, a house behind a house, a little hard to find, and he got up that morning--we had literally sort of nestled in with each other--and he said, "I've got to go out. I just got word Mrs. [Fannie Lou] Hamer's been arrested," with I think he said four young ladies, [Annelle] Ponder, June Johnson, and a couple of others. "I've going to go bail them out." So he drove over there, got up on a Sunday morning and drove over to

bail them out, or as I remember it was a Sunday morning. I'm pretty sure it was Sunday morning. And he drove over to bail them out and didn't come back for awhile. He was running the office at the time with Bob Moses up north, and the story was they took him in front of the Baptist church in broad daylight, took baseball bats, and just beat the hell out of him, smashed his head, expanded his head, doubled the size of his head, of his skull, and took him into custody. So now word was reaching us that Mrs. Hamer and the young ladies were being beaten up and brutalized, and he had been brutalized, and now remember this is Mississippi before the March on Washington. This is Mississippi before this and before that. You're closer to the Mississippi of Emmett Till than you are to the Mississippi post-Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman.

DC: Right. And what town is this, where the arrest was?

RT: Winona.

DC: Winona.

RT: W-i-n-o-n-a, Winona, Mississippi. So Willie Peacock, who's now known as Wazir Peacock, he said, well--so we worked together, and it was--. We both at the time, or immediately afterwards, and in retrospect--we happened to see each other a few weeks ago after a long hiatus, years--agreed it was remarkable how two people kind of click. I basically did what he told me to do. I did my best to do it. What they had me do--he remembered this and I did not remember it but I'm beginning to remember. One thing I did was I--remember I have a white voice--I called a clerk at the jail, as he recalls it--he was reminding me of this the other day, and I did do something like this--to basically inquire about people and to get a location of some sort of where they were. I don't remember the details as well as he does. I made a whole series of calls and he made

calls. We were both working. We were about it. Everyone else was eighteen, nineteen years old--these were the ones that were around--or seventeen or fourteen or fifteen. So one of the first things they asked me to do is call Medgar Evers and ask for Mr. Evers's help. He's head of the NAACP in Mississippi. So I called him and I said, "Mr. Evers," and I explained to him who I was and that Willie Peacock from the COFO office had asked me to call. He said, "Mr. Tuttle, I am going to help, but let me call you back." He said, "I'm just out the door to a mass meeting. I will call you as soon as I get back." Or "I'm just out the door to a meeting," I'm not sure he said mass, "to a meeting, I'll call you when I get back." A little later word--. So about the time I was expecting the call somebody called and said--this is later in the evening--that Medgar Evers had been shot; the odds are pretty good that as he fumbled for his keys to go into his own home, thinking, "oh, I'm going to call that fellow back in Greenwood because Mrs. Hamer and the others are in jail."

So then all hell breaks loose in Jackson. That's the famous moment when John Doar walks down the street saying, "I'm John Doar from the Department of Justice," but this was unstructured, tremendous feelings. Medgar Evers was a major figure in the South and a major figure in Mississippi. He was the voice of decency in the Emmett Till business, which was eight years earlier, or a little less than eight years earlier, and so on, and he was dead.

DC: Do you recall how you found out about it?

RT: Well someone phoned. When the phone rang I remember it was late and even in the office, it's a busy office, a phone ringing, and I say, "oh, he's calling me." It turned out it was someone else. I'm not saying it was--. It certainly wasn't someone

from the Evers household calling me, but someone called us and it got to me. Someone else answered the phone and said, "Medgar Evers has been killed," or "Medgar Evers has been shot," and we rather quickly learned that he had been killed.

So meanwhile we are--. All we had in those days was the New York *Times* with Claude Sitton and Carl Fleming at *Newsweek*. There was nothing else. The AP was in the hands of the segregationists, UPI was not on the scene, there was no L.A. *Times* bureau in the South. There was the Greenville *Delta Democrat Times* but that was up in Greenville, it was Hodding Carter's paper, and there was a good paper in Lexington, but what we could do was call Friends of SNCC groups. A lady in Chicago was terrific and called around the country--that's one thing Peacock had me doing--to get phone calls going into the jail to stop the brutality on the prisoners and keep them from getting killed. Our job now, as Peacock said to me recently, was to keep them alive, which we did, and we kept calling.

Meanwhile we had trouble locating, or we thought we were having trouble locating, Guyot, and we weren't sure of where the ladies were, and that's very scary because of course if they start getting moved around--this is what I remember contemporarily being told--if they start moving people around then everyone's responsible and no one's responsible. In front of an all-white jury or even a reasonably decent prosecuting officer who is prepared to go part of the way to justice, maybe a step of the way, there's just no relief because no one knows anything and everyone has some culpability, etcetera, and also they could have been let out in the middle of the night, which is hyper-dangerous in those situations, and so on. We've had civil rights workers shot and badly wounded in broad daylight and so on. As you know De La Beckwith

threw down his rifle and didn't even bother with the prints, but we did not know it was Byron De La Beckwith, from Greenwood, as a matter of fact. So Peacock, Willie, says, "We've got to locate them. Rick, call the governor. You can get through." So we basically scripted me, and so I called the governor, called Governor [Ross] Barnett, and I explained as I called in who I was, you know, I'm a graduate student from UCLA, [Laughs] and so on and so forth, but I'm here in the office, and he came on the line. I said, "Governor," and I told him what Peacock told me to do and explained again to him who I was, and I said, "We can't find them and we're asking for your help to find them, and I want to tell you what will happen if we don't find them. If you don't have the appropriate person call us and tell us where they are by tonight,"--and I gave a time, and I can't remember now what time, but by 9:00 tonight or by 6:00; it was some reasonable time--"I assure you of something. We know you have your hands full in Jackson. All hell's broken loose down there. You've got every fish and game warden, every highway patrol officer, everyone you can lay your hands on down there to keep order. I promise you we'll have large nonviolent demonstrations here in the Delta." That's what Peacock had told me to say. He said, "Son, are you threatening me?" I said, "Governor, I'm new here. I'm reporting to you what I've been told." And he said, "Well let me look into this," and within a reasonably short period of time the Mississippi highway patrol called, which the last time I looked reports to the governor of Mississippi, and said where they were and so on.

So then to get them out: The last person we'd sent had been brutalized and had his head bashed open. In one of the braver acts I've run into in my life, Andrew Young came out. He had been in Birmingham anyway, as I now know. He drove in, drove past

Winona, as I recall, to the Greenwood office, turned around and went back with bail money, and as I recall I remember thinking to myself the twenty-third Psalm, "In the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me. Thy rod and they staff--." And he went and brought them out. That's one of the two or three braver acts I've seen. He tells the story about all that too. I wasn't there.

Well, he came out, and Mrs. Hamer, and so on, and there's a double aspect to this. They had miscalculated because through the agency of some very remarkable people about a year later at the 1964 Democratic national convention it was Mrs. Hamer's testimony before Congresswoman of Oregon Edith Green's credentials committee at the Democratic national convention in Atlantic City where she described in detail what had happened to her. And she was a leader of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and she riveted the attention of the country as she went blow-by-blow through what happened in Winona. She had been kept alive and she broke it wide open, and that convention, as you can recall, was emotionally the convention of President Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy. It was a civil rights [convention.] The northern and western delegations were civil rights delegations. You know, the whole business of the celebration for John F. Kennedy to take place after Mr. Johnson was nominated and so on and so forth, the whole Mississippi challenge, that whole fight.

The other part of it, of much less importance to the country but of some importance to me, word reached the civil rights people that De La Beckwith had said he was going to kill--. They believed the assassin of Mr. Evers was from Greenwood and word reached the civil rights folks in COFO and SNCC that he was now going to come after the white boy, so they decided I'm the white boy. And he had shown he was a good

shot. So they put me in a car and put me under a blanket and took me to Memphis and flew me to the SNCC office in Atlanta.

DC: This is when?

RT: By now it's--. Well it's after--. [Laughs] It's after Mrs. Hamer's out and it's after Medgar Evers so it's after the 13th, 14th, 15th of June.

DC: Okay.

RT: It's a little later, and I go into Atlanta and I'm there. That's when I meet--. That's where I'm in the SNCC office and after some direct action--. SNCC was stretching the covenant that had been worked out between Dr. King--. I'm a little out of my depth on this exact history, but as I recall it contemporarily, as I experienced it as a contemporary matter, there had been an agreement reached, a tacit agreement reached, that the major civil rights organizations would not do direct action, particularly in Atlanta. Atlanta was doing pretty well in spite of Georgia statewide ordinances, doing fairly well, moderately well, in terms of moderates probably, [they were]--in terms of some desegregation, but not to press too hard against the envelope in the home base of offices in Atlanta, where several of the civil rights groups were. SNCC decided to test that. Off I go into lunch counter sit-ins, and I remember there was a reporter from the *Berkshire Eagle* named John Kifner, who later wound up as a reporter for thirty or forty years with the *New York Times*, and Kifner is standing behind me when a bunch of us were integrating this lunch counter. By the way, a fellow, later governor of the state, Lester Maddox, who had the pickax in front of him, I saw him at a distance. We didn't directly test his restaurant that day but we went to one not too far from it. I still remember this white lady shaking, and her slender arms and muscles, this boiling,

scalding hot water and she was going to pour it on us. She was going to dump it on us, and she was right with me, you know, black, white, black. Her whole--remember I have some sense of the other side of the line--her whole world was threatened, everything. She was just so upset and so troubled and I thought I was going to take a pretty good hit right in the face. There is nothing in nonviolence that says I have to keep my head up. I always figure how fast could I get my head down. [Laughs] But it would have been--I mean it was a really bad moment.

Shortly thereafter, Dickie [Romele], who is here today--I was mentioning this to her; this is one of the things I remember that she doesn't--and a lady named Casey Hayden called Bruce Gordon, Joe Eyre--Bruce is black; Joe's white--and me to say there's a lot going on down in Savannah. Hosea Williams was a SCLC affiliate of the Chatham County Crusade for Voters; Benjamin Van Clark, very charismatic guy. Maybe we could go down there and be of some help and do a SNCC/SCLC thing. So off we go, the three of us, we drive from Atlanta to Savannah. We get there, walk into this--.

DC: Who are the three again? You--.

RT: Rick Tuttle, that's my name, and then Joe Eyre, who was a student at Haverford. It's either E-y-r-e--I think that's it--and he's a notch younger than me. I'm twenty-three, Joe's probably twenty, a very sharp guy, and Bruce Gordon, who I'm ninety-nine percent sure is not the Bruce Gordon who became head of the NAACP. That Bruce Gordon was born in 1946. The Bruce Gordon with whom I was was not seventeen or eighteen. He was a man of twenty-one or twenty-two and had enormous leadership capacity, terrific guy. So, and remember this is in the summer after Birmingham and before the March on Washington. Did you hear Rev. [James] Lawson's speech today?

DC: Unfortunately I didn't.

RT: He talked about the summer of '63 and how work needs to be done on that and that there were a thousand demonstrations that summer. Tom Hayden in at least his first biography--I'm not sure if Tom has a second memoir or not--has a footnote where he took the trouble to--which I recommend to anyone who's looking at the period. At the time I read his book and looked at the footnote the data rang true to me intuitively--or I'll use a double negative; it's not counterintuitive. He had the number of arrests and people who went to jail in this whole Gandhi, Dr. King, nonviolent pursuit of justice in that time period, that '63 summer, so in any event, you know, filled the jails, that kind of thing.

So we're down there in Savannah and, I'll never forget this, walk into this church, Catholic church--well I think it was a Catholic church; there were some Catholic churches involved [or made available to the] civil rights movement--and there was going to be a night march. There was tremendous speaking and then they pass the baskets around, big baskets, and there are sappers and knives and brass knuckles all getting tossed, all this stuff. Savannah's a port town so they have a lot of longshore[men] and people like that, and these night marches meant working men and women could march. So there was a huge line, so off we go on this march, and I'm there and at first it's just incredibly good, I mean tremendous. I've heard good speeches in my life and I have since, but these are individuals who are very at one with what they were saying and doing and targeting and they were basically--. In this case it was not so much voter registration; it was public accommodations and desegregation, the Desoto Hotel, a major hotel in Savannah, and a variety of other such public locations, and these night marches were to

go down and march around the hotel or march around whatever the target was and march back.

DC: These are local folks who are talking?

RT: Oh, yeah. Hosea Williams later became a lieutenant of Dr. King, came out of Savannah. He had lived there. He was a chemist with the US federal government and he was on leave but his salary was protected so he was federal, not paid locally. His wife had run and lost a race for some elected position in Chatham County, which is Savannah. The SCLC affiliate is the Chatham County--C-h-a-t-h-a-m--the Chatham County Crusade for Voters, which was a Southern Christian Leadership affiliate, and SNCC had sent me down to be, along with the other two men I mentioned. We were being put up a day or two later in some accommodations and I had come in, and it was upstairs and you had to go up one floor and another floor and another floor, and there were all sorts of young ladies around, here and there a fellow walking by, coming down the stairs or going up,. And I didn't pay much attention for a few days, and then chit-chatting with my two colleagues realized, "wait a minute, this is a house of prostitution." And if you think about it for awhile it gives some sense of the variety of the human soul. On the one end people make a living one way or another, and I would not want to make a living running a house of prostitution. I don't think it would be a nice thing to do or something I wanted to do. To me it's something I view with some considerable distaste, frankly. On the other hand think of the act of political consciousness, to give us free lodging. They were helping in the Movement. They were part of it. Also they put their property up for bail.

DC: Were these white folks or black folks?

RT: Black. They were black. Funeral parlors, places like that were--.

DC: Barbershops.

RT: That kind of thing. But in any event, so this went on for a bit and we were doing these marches. So there I am, as in a sore thumb. There I am, Joe Eyre and me, and all kinds of cameras, click, click, click, and all sorts of law enforcement, press, others, most of it though I think law enforcement, so they say, "all right, Rick, we want you to go undercover." What a damn fool thing that I've ever done because now I'm going to these meetings of these white supremacist groups. I'd been made all over Savannah with pictures and scattered through these meetings--it's a free country; they're perfectly entitled to attend if they want on their own time--is law enforcement. There were all sorts of police officers and deputy chiefs and others who were part of the group there. The world is changing on them and they don't like it and they're concerned about it, things they'd grown up with and their parents had grown up with and their grandparents had grown up with, and so on. So I went to a number of these. They had me take lodgings in Savannah and I went to a variety of meetings on the outskirts of Savannah and so on. I went to one meeting, which was Klan, not a small meeting. It was a large meeting in the evening, and so on, but there were a fair number of weekend meetings where I went, and I'm just lucky I didn't get myself beaten up pretty badly. I don't think I would have been killed but I think I could have been pretty badly roughed up, got my teeth knocked in or something.

But there wasn't much information to get so after awhile it was suggested I come on back in, so I did. So I came back in and meanwhile there were more demonstrations and there was a night, the one night I wasn't in them, I wasn't feeling well and I went to sleep in this house I talked about. All hell broke loose that night in Savannah. Someone

threw a brick, there was trouble in Savannah. Meanwhile the leadership was being arrested and held on a form of preventive detention. Hosea Williams, Ben Clark, and others were being held on a form of preventive detention called good behavior bonds, sometimes called peace bonds, where people say my peace is being--. It's like disturbing the peace except an individual citizen says "this person's bothering me, bothering my peace." They used to be for domestic violence. They're a post-Reconstruction statute. A judge had discovered these and was using them to basically take into custody the leadership of the Movement, which was one reason all hell broke loose, and they had about fifty people in custody they were holding. They picked me up on a John Doe warrant. They came into the office and took me into custody, so in I go.

Now there's an irony to it. I'm there on the phone, they come bursting through the door, I had just been in a conversation in town for a visit with Andy Young, who is Dr. King's number three or number four aide, and Rev. [James] Bevel, who had organized Birmingham. They happened to be there [and] I'm talking with them. I've never seen two individuals get more interested in the floor as those two fellows as they eased away. They were standing about as far away as you were. They come in aiming right at me. The John Doe warrant was for me but they had a bunch of other warrants. These two fellows just kind of moved away and I realized in a flash my assignment was to keep them focused on me.

DC: On you, right.

RT: So I say, in my best--mounting my full civil liberties platform--"I need to see a warrant." They say, "Here, a John Doe warrant," and about this time they're coming around behind me and they put on the cuffs. They had one black officer and the rest were

white. I said, "I don't see my name anywhere," but at the same time I have enough sense to be walking out of there. [Laughs] They take me and miss the number three and four, or I don't know, four and six--. They could have badly crippled the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, so they wound up with me. So I wind up in the Chatham County jail, and as I'm leaving--.

C: We're running out soon.

DC: Okay. So let's just take one break and [Dory's]going to swap out tapes.

RT: Sure.

DC: Okay.

C: I know this is a terrible time to stop.

DC: It's fine. [Break in recording]

DC: Okay, so picking up where we left off, which was--.

RT: So they walk me down, they take me into custody. As I go out the door a UPI reporter is coming up the stairs and he knows me, he'd been around, and I was glad to see a reporter, just for my own safety.

DC: Why was that, because that meant somebody knew that you--?

RT: Yeah. And I saw a look cross his face. He was going to do something with this, and he didn't run a small story. [Laughs] My folks get a call: Your son is in jail. "What?" and that sort of thing. But in any event, [there were] the usual procedures for going in and so [Laughs] I'm in my cell. They put me in isolation and I'm in my cell asleep and there's this light in my eyes and there's this voice, and he keeps saying, in a very measured, soft tone, "I'm not in the Klan. I'm not in the Klan." I'm waking up at this point. "I'm not in the Klan." I had enough sense to sleep completely dressed and so-

-my shoes [weren't] on but I had somewhat less vulnerability than [I would otherwise]. The light's right on me. "I'm not in the Klan." By now he knows I'm awake. "But my brother is." [Laughs] It's the guard, right there. He would say, "Hey, Bubba, I'm not in the Klan." [Laughs] And it happened the Klan was marching in Savannah that night. They were having a march. Now this was Savannah, not a small town in Mississippi, but nonetheless it had my attention and it may have been why I was on this fellow's mind.

So they kept me in there, and rather than go day by day or week by week--I was in for about a month and a half--I'll simply mention two or three vignettes and so on. One is that after a period of time, let's say a week or two, I was moved into the main cell block of the--it's a jail. This was not the state penitentiary; this was a jail. There's a screen and it was segregated, so I'm over on the white side of the cell block. And there are all sorts--showers, there's individual, and I'm in with another white prisoner, and there were downstairs and upstairs. The women are in custody, a lot of our civil rights demonstrators, and I gather there's a third floor where there's a TV and where the so-called trustees--they're called bridge boys--are located. These are people who bring cigarettes, coffee, candy bars, deliver newspapers, and so on. They may even go offsite a little bit. I remember one of them carried himself well and had a kind of roll of the shoulders and athletic. Popeye is his name and he's a quite well known welter-weight prize fighter in the Savannah area, which is a pretty good town for that sort of thing, longshore[men] as I mentioned, so on and so forth.

Anyway, I wondered, contemporarily, no one's jumping me. I was prepared to get jumped. I figured it's probably going to happen and it didn't. I was working out a lot. I was doing pushups and one-arm--. I was in pretty good shape. I was doing one-

arm pushups, not to intimidate, just to be in as good a shape as I could, and so on and so forth. I later learned--and as I tell the story an available emotion is to say, my God, how remarkable--I later learned--Bruce Gordon told me this--that they said to the white prisoners as they brought them in, because the bridge boys were part of the strip them down, search them--they didn't do the internal exam, that was done by other personnel, but they were bringing them along and so on—"you touch this guy we'll beat the hell out of you." Now think about that. They were willing to trade easy time probably for the state pen for me--not for me but for the Movement; not just for me but for the Movement. That's a remarkable act, from my point of view, of decency and of consciousness.

DC: Who was it that was telling them that?

RT: These were the trustees. These were fellows who were in jail, who were favored. In other words these were the--they're called bridge boys but they're the ones who delivered the cigarettes, the newspapers, they have the run of the jail, upstairs, downstairs. They have all the little distribution of things that makes life reasonably agreeable in a place like that when you're in custody for awhile, and from their point of view it was easy time compared to-- I mean it's not as good as being on the outside. They, saying to these white guys, who are often in for car theft, drunk, stealing things, breaking and entering--they were all thrown in there with me; Friday nights was a real time, coming in--they said, "don't touch him or we'll beat the hell out of you," which would then get them into trouble with the authorities.

DC: Sure. And they're black, the bridge boys?

RT: They are. All of them were. It was a remarkable act of consciousness, and I didn't know about it, which in some religious traditions, for example in Judaism, the

tradition of the mitzvah is to do something and for the person who's the recipient of the favor not to be told.

DC: And you found out about it only years later?

RT: No, I learned about it near the end of my stay through Bruce Gordon, who was in custody himself, and he picked it up on their side. They never told me. I just simply wasn't getting touched. The other story was that--. There are a couple of other stories. One of them is that after awhile, you had this screen, and in the--this is Savannah, Georgia--we had among the guys--there were ladies upstairs of similar background--a lot of them were people who just got--. A lot of them were nineteen-year-olds, eighteen and a half, twenty-year-olds, but basically eighteen-and-a-half-year-olds, just out of high school. We had the high school champion in the eight eighty. We had the student body president of the Savannah black high school. Upstairs we had the secretary of the student body. That's who we had in jail. We had that type of youngster there, plus a lot of other kids from other backgrounds, and so Bruce Gordon got a very good idea. He said let's have ourselves a Freedom School. So, remember, we had--. So I taught civics, he taught chemistry, someone else taught algebra, and so on, and you could begin to--. In other words we're not people who did anything wrong and you could see it begin to have an impact on the guards, you could see it, and for that matter on some of the prisoners, the ones who were staying around, who weren't being released after a few days of being held [1:06:01]

DC: Did you actually create a class--

RT: Yeah.

DC: --schedule and that kind of thing?

RT: We had clusters, me through the grate and others in parts of the--. The others were all African-American so they--and I was the white guy but I was able to do the civics thing through the--. Heck, we were working our way up to the Spanish American War before we were all let out. I mean, darn it, we needed to get through the curriculum.

DC: Right. [Laughs]

RT: There are other stories as well but there was an episode where the Atlanta *Constitution* began to develop a storyline, and my dad could see it coming, I could see it coming. It was getting in the paper, or getting in the Savannah paper and began to get in the Atlanta paper, that the Chatham County Crusade for Voters office was in the Mine, Mill, Smelter's office, the union office. The Mine, Mill, Smelters had been one of several CIO unions that had been kicked out of the CIO because it had been communist dominated. In fact the extras for the movie, "Salt of the Earth", which was a Left film, were fellows and women who had been in the Mine, Mill, Smelter union, and their office happened to be--. I don't think anyone had any particular sense of they're a Marxist, Leninist, or anything else, but they were in that office and getting it for a dollar a month or something or for nothing. So they're there and this storyline was developing, and Rick Tuttle from Mississippi, who's now come into SNCC, who's now, you know, the blue work shirt; you could see a storyline beginning to develop. [Laughs] So two things happen: My dad gets in the line who's paying me. Well, dad, they will show that--. I had to basically live off the land. I mean living for free and the food, you could go on, but there had been some support from the Presbyterians, from the University Religious Conference Center of the Episcopalians, the URC at UCLA, and there'd been other denominations that had each kicked in, you know, a lot of ministers [and] priests out of

their discretionary funds. You have to have some discretion, fifteen bucks here fifteen bucks there. In those days fifteen bucks was a fair amount of money. Fifteen bucks, fifteen bucks, fifteen bucks, you were able to--that was a fair amount. Dad got that in, but other than that--. Stanley Mosk was the attorney general of California, and my college roommate's--who almost went with me and didn't do it--father was his campaign chair. He had just gotten reelected. A terrific person; he was later a justice on our state supreme court and so on.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcriber: Deborah Mitchum

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