TTT

Interviewee: James Robinson Session #10

Interviewer: Sheila Michaels

Date: March 25, 1999

Q: I'm with James Robinson. This is tape eleven. This is March 25th, 1999.

We were going to talk about the people in the office and also what conflicts came up.

Robinson: Yes. The office was an extremely pleasant place for a while. First of all, it was very small. When I went there, I was alone.

Barbara Robinson: That's very pleasant.

Q: Yes, that's what I was thinking, that's very pleasant, yes.

Robinson: Yes. I was alone for a couple of weeks and then McCain was there, but Lula Farmer was often in the office to do the finances and Jim Peck was in the office for mailing out literature and for doing the ~~*Correlator*~~ CORElator, etc., etc. So that it was small and we were rebuilding CORE. It had fallen apart as far as large numbers of participants were concerned. We were in touch with Charles Oldham and we had a couple of people in New York, Tom Roberts and George Houser, and occasionally Jim Farmer, who came to sort of planning meetings that we had. It was almost by default that decisions were really being

made by the staff and the small committee in New York in touch with the St. Louis people. The other groups were kind of on the outside at that point.

In 1958, Gordon Carey came on staff and then he and McCain were--they weren't in the office very often. Gordon got married in '59, so he was living in New York. He was based in New York, whereas McCain was really based in Sumter, so that I saw a great deal more of Carey. Carey was extremely bright and he wrote well and he was on fire about CORE and CORE activities. So he and I got along very well for quite a period of time and also, of course, with both Lula and Jim Peck. One of my favorite people was Tom Roberts, but he was a lawyer, a black lawyer, and was not always available for these meetings, so he'd been very important at one of the earlier conventions before this time, but he was less important. Roy Carter, who had worked as a field secretary, also came around to some of these meetings for a while. So those things were really quite pleasant.

On the other hand, between trying to build up the fundraising and setting up the councils and the conventions and correspondence with the local groups, it was very busy and there was--but I was often in the office alone. It was kind of endless, and the other--just answering correspondence took a lot of time. Answering telephones did not take a lot of time, because we really couldn't afford to talk on the phone. So that's one of the reasons so much is written down, I think.

But it went along well until the student sit-ins made it too busy, and also the student sit-ins gave everyone the sense that CORE could be important. So you get ego and power involvements as soon as you get that kind of importance, and we all had it to some extent or another.

But I think the things began to fall apart with Leonard Holt after he appeared on *Open End*, and when he was a field secretary, and he kind of caused irritations in the field, and was annoyed because he didn't feel he got full support, which I didn't think he deserved, and at the same time I couldn't give support to the people who were criticizing him either, and I really didn't quite know what was happening in these college towns. He was not that communicative, and if I heard from the college administration I couldn't really take what they had to say, because they were in the pay of the state, and therefore under the influence of people who wanted to maintain segregation. But there was irritation about that.

Q: What would you have defined as full support or what would he have defined as full support?

Robinson: I think he felt that he should have some *carte blanche* to do what he wanted, and sometimes you didn't know where he was or what he was doing either, and I thought that was important, so I wanted to get rid of him and we did get rid of him. I didn't do it by indirection, which I think Marvin Rich would have done, by indirection. He really thought it was kind of precipitous, I think.

Anyhow, that happened and so there was some irritation then at the 1960 convention in St. Louis about the field workers, but it wasn't really very serious.

Q: I'm sorry I'm cutting your narrative short, but who was objecting to what?

Robinson: Well, Leonard Holt's friend, Ulysses--no. What was his name? A young student who had come on this field staff was a protégé, really, of Leonard Holt's. So he was at the convention, and I can't remember whether Holt was or whether he wasn't, but there were questions about the way that the field staff was treated. Now, the field staff was not well treated, and nobody claimed that they were well treated. There wasn't enough money to treat them very well, and I did press them to make financial reports and to get--you know, be sure that they had receipts and things to back up their expense reports. That, incidentally, continued when I wasn't handling them anymore after Gordon became field director. There was always, I think thereafter, there was always some trouble about the field people. They were doing the most important work and they were not at the center where policies were determined.

So when you had a convention or a National Action Committee meeting, the complaints would come up. Now, we didn't have a lot of that at that first convention we had, after that 1960 convention. We had some, but it wasn't a lot. It wasn't anything like what it was later after I wasn't really there anymore. But as CORE became more and more important, the involvement of people's egos became more and more difficult, I think, too.

Q: Also, from my own experience as a field secretary, a feeling that they weren't listening and they weren't supplying what you needed, and you were really out there making your own decisions.

Robinson: Yes. Well, you see, that started with McCain and Carey. That was really the only way it could be. I went down to South Carolina so that I knew something of what was going on, but McCain really wanted to do what he wanted to do anyway, and Carey was an

old-line pacifist whose views of what should be done were similar to mine anyway. And he and McCain generally got along well, so that things went quite well.

Along came the student sit-ins and suddenly CORE was more important. CORE--we had the feeling that CORE could spread the sit-ins and we also wanted to get permanent CORE groups out of it. We wanted to expand beyond the campus and into the communities and so on and so forth, most of which didn't happen. Some of it did, but most of it did not happen.

So there was so much going on that it couldn't be carefully planned and controlled, and we had students up here for helping with fundraising. We had Bayard Rustin running the Martin Luther King Defense Committee and he had given some help to CORE. He also wanted to make a little bit of profit on our students, and I remember we went to Harry Belafonte's apartment when the students were here, and ~~Lethia~~ Randolph was there, etc., which certainly helped Bayard's stock a little bit. But Belafonte did write appeal letters for us, I mean signed appeal letters. So that was going on. And the use of the students who came from Florida here was pretty well done in New York. It was meetings with the unions and so on and so forth. A lot of that was set up by Marvin.

Then there was a trip or two, and it's in this CORE book, where they went outside the city—students--and those trips were not well organized and there was a lot of complaint about those. Now, that was not something that I considered my responsibility, and I was skeptical of having a lot of big public meetings about what was going on, which were not going to build up some sort of a local group.

It's interesting that when I go back to the ~~Correlators~~, we had been doing dime store sit-ins for two years, at least, in various places, including the upper South, before the student sit-ins started spontaneously. So in a way they started spontaneously just about the time that we had reissued *Erasing the Color Line* ~~and had updated it and [unclear] the color line with~~ color and design. And Dr. Simpkins was on our mailing list and had one of those.

But all of that was going on. There were dissatisfactions by the students who had traveled across the country, and there were some dissatisfactions by people in local areas. We didn't really know that so-and-so was coming through until the last minute, so things weren't--it was sloppy, ~~and~~ I thought we really shouldn't be spending money in that particular way.

Q: And how did the students feel about making these fundraising runs, going from one place to another? I think I'm not creating the question that I want. Being a sort of display and people who were not committed to the Civil Rights Movement already, they were talking to--they wanted to--I think you wanted to widen the range of people that you could attract to the movement and be involved, but at the same time you were talking to people who hadn't shown an interest before.

Robinson: Right.

Q: And so the students weren't--some of them, I got the impression, were feeling that they were in a zoo.

Robinson: I think that was true. Then they were sent on trips, and if there was supposed to be a meeting and ten people showed up, that didn't seem to make sense. If you were

trying to organize a new CORE group and ten people showed up, that was all right because you could build something. But if you're having a public meeting and it wasn't planned in advance, etc. So you had that kind of thing going on. We had the students who came to New York were well utilized, and I think they were satisfied with what happened. Then they were back for the Eleanor Roosevelt luncheon, and that went well and they reenacted sit-in stuff at the luncheon, and all of that was very good.

But we had fundraising going on; we had labor union stuff going on; we had extra issues of the ~~Correlator~~ CORE later to keep people informed; we were exchanging mailing lists; we were planning the Christmas card stuff; and we were getting phone calls all hours of the day and night, and it was exhausting. So I think people got cross.

Q: One of the things that I remember was that some people came back from the Freedom Rides and needed jobs and you had to find jobs for them, not necessarily office jobs somewhere, but people who were unskilled or semi-skilled, and who had joined the Freedom Rides. But, you know, I remember one person feeling very, very bad because he had wound up pushing racks in the garment center.

Robinson: Well, that was later, a little later, you see.

Q: Okay.

Robinson: The good thing about the student sit-ins was that they were mostly college students, so they were--and college students were still elite. You know, it was before a lot of people went to college. So there were a lot of plus values.

But anyway, we were leading up to the Miami Action Institute. In the meantime, it was that same year that Barbara and I got married. We took a honeymoon, and then after the Institute we went to Europe, so I met her people, etc. During these years from '57 through '59, I'd had practically no vacation, so I had a lot of vacation time and I used it in that way.

But among other things, at the time of the student demonstrations, the National Student Association and various other groups all wanted to help "coordinate"--quote, unquote--and I remember going to some meeting, and that was not my cup of tea. I don't know that I expressed myself particularly to that effect, but I did feel that if we had different organizations all pushing more or less in the same direction, we would have more creativity than we would if we tried to coordinate the whole thing. In other words, if we had the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which had come into existence, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and CORE, and they were operating, they were in touch with each other, but they were operating independently, we would get more done than we would if we tried to put it together.

Q: Herding chickens.

Robinson: Yes. Because we were different cups of tea, and CORE was most important as far as Northern support for the Southern Movement. CORE was instrumental in the dime store boycotts and all of that, and the dime store boycotts enabled us to organize ~~two~~ new groups, many of which, or some of which, did not survive the boycott when it began to die down. But the idea--and it did sometimes work--was to get people excited about one thing,

then you could get them to do something about their own--the situation in their own community.

The North was a lot more important than I think most people then or now give it credit for. In the North, in the long run, we weren't as successful as we were in the South, but CORE had a lot more to do with the North than the other groups. The other groups used the North for fundraising primarily.

Anyway, all this was going on, and I was beginning to feel that we couldn't possibly finance everything, you know. I was interested in financing the press releases and all of that kind of thing, but I was not interested in financing public meetings across the country or anything like that, because we weren't making money on that. So all of these things were going on in the office, but the other thing, I think, was that there was a feeling that I was not a good representative for a black organization. Of course, it was not a black organization, but it is true that I'm not and never have been primarily a public speaker. I had had a lot of the ideas for some of the things that happened in CORE, the original Fellowship House, and many of the other things, but there was that feeling, too, that it could get bigger and have a bigger public image with somebody else, which it could.

So after this vacation in Europe, there was trouble about, and it was at that time that I was being removed, really, from what I was doing, and they wanted me to continue to do the fundraising, so I became membership director. Our first child arrived in February of '61. By that time, I was membership director. I had to have something, you know, I had to have a job, because now I had a wife and a child, and so that was something I had to do, but I did not feel pleasant any longer about the people in the office. I notice in the ~~Correlator~~ CORElator there's

a picture of me with the others on something to do with Woolworth's, and it occurred before the Freedom Rides, but in that period.

Also, of course, I was not enthusiastic about the Freedom Ride before it happened. I had not been very enthusiastic about the Journey of Reconciliation in 1947. My feeling was that you needed field staff and you needed fundraising and you needed to get local groups that attacked discrimination locally more than you needed to do national projects. Now, that wasn't really right. The Journey of Reconciliation had been a great experiment, but it hadn't built things. CORE was very--after the Journey in 1947, they adopted a bigger budget and they hired Bill Worthy, and they had enough money to keep him three months and all that. But ~~they~~ CORE never even paid ~~their~~ its own share of the expenses, the Fellowship of Reconciliation ~~thing~~, for most of that journey.

Hosted the Bill

Q: Wait a second. The Journey of Reconciliation wasn't CORE.

Robinson: But it was both together. It was a joint project of CORE and the FOR. in 1947, and it had been originally scheduled to go as far as New Orleans. They had said they were only going to test seating in interstate transportation; they were not going to test any of the eating facilities or anything else. So the new Freedom Ride idea was going to test the eating facilities and the whole bit. I don't know if I could have gone on that if I'd wanted to, because I had ~~raised~~ to raise money, but I didn't want to. It seems to me that when you take very dangerous projects--and that was potentially very dangerous--then people with responsibilities to small children ought to think about their responsibilities first and then that. So there was no question of my ever going on it.

And I think there was no anticipation, really, that anything as bad as happened would happen. But what happened, because it was so bad and so flamboyant, really built the whole thing up ~~to a stage where~~ during the student sit-ins of 1960, the public perception of CORE was that we were bigger and stronger than we really were, and I said that at the convention in 1960 and people did not like it. [Laughs] But it was true. Well, after the Freedom Rides it was even more true. Now, I think it's true that if public perception is bigger, you're more important, but then what you deliver tends to be less than what is expected.

Q: Deliver to what?

Robinson: I mean, how fast and furiously you advance integration or break down segregation, etc. We got letters into the office about situations here and there where there were no CORE groups. I used to say, without a group, unless you're willing to do something with a group, you can't do anything from the office in New York; it just doesn't work.

So all of these things were going on and, as I say, by the end of 1960 I was out, really.

Q: Okay. But to go back to it, then they needed somebody to come and help them form a group, which meant that you needed more staff.

Robinson: Oh, yes. Right. We had had a lot of field staff after the sit-ins, and we were so desperate for field staff that we were not as careful as we might have been. We had Darwin Bolden in New York, we had Joe Perkins, who was extremely dedicated, and we had Thomas Gaither, who was also extremely dedicated. We had Leonard Holt, who was not so

dedicated. Terribly, terribly attractive. If you could ever get that *Open End* program, you'd be really impressed with him, because he was impressive. He was, later on, on the fringes of civil rights, after.

Q: I think he was in charge of something in SNCC during the summer of '64.

Robinson: He may have been, right.

Q: Because he put together a book about that summer, a book--I have it. *The Summer That Never Ended* or something like that. But my impression of him and it kind of--I should get in touch with him myself at some point, but my impression of him is that he was, from certainly what Val Coleman has said, was that he was deep, subtle, tricky, and completely out--a Lenny Bruce, a wild man.

Robinson: Yes.

Q: Okay. That's the impression I've gotten from the couple of stories I've heard. If anybody who ever listens to this will know who Lenny Bruce is. [Laughs]

[Jon Holt]

Robinson: I thought he was irresponsible, which was a pity, because he was terribly talented.

So beginning in 1961, I was in the office, but I was not in close contact with most of the people in the office most of the time.

Q: Well, that sounds lonely.

Robinson: What?

Q: That sounds very lonely.

Robinson: Well, it was. Of course, I was still active in New York CORE and I remained active in New York CORE, and I got along with some people in the office, but I didn't have much to do with some of the people. I had a lot to do with Lula Farmer and Carey. I got along well enough with McCain. I never really knew McCain. I don't know who did, but I really didn't, but he was solid.

So that was 1961, and it was during that winter, I think, that there was another fundraiser with Eleanor Roosevelt. Both of these fundraisers--the first one we had at the Plaza in 1960, I had quite a lot to do with that one, but I don't think I did the nuts and bolts of putting it together. I had something to do with the program. I had a lot to do with the actual day we did it, and I remember that the printed program, I think we were proofreading it at ten o'clock in the morning before lunch, but it all went well.

In the fall, at the other fundraiser with Eleanor Roosevelt, I don't remember other people from the office being there. There must have been some. I was there, but I don't think I set it all up.

On the other hand, I find from the ~~Correlator~~ that there are things that I did that I'd forgotten about. At the Easter conference where SNCC was set up, we got there and the

students were picketing the dime stores, and apparently they asked people, a couple of people who were coming down, to help, including somebody from Colgate Rochester Divinity School, who was white, and me. And we went on that picket line. The other man was beaten up a little bit on the line, and so he went off to the hospital. I was on the line, and as I said in the ~~*Correlator*~~ article, some people were then sympathetic, but the people who were hanging around and wanted to beat up, apparently that was it. I was the only white person left on the line. I was never threatened at all after that.

Barbara Robinson: He isn't just threatening enough. [Laughs]

Robinson: Well, I don't know.

Q: Oh, dear.

Robinson: Well, I was lucky a number of times like that. But as I say, I had forgotten all about that.

Anyhow, the situation in the office was not friendly. They really wanted me out of the office at that point and I wanted out of the office, too, after the--I went to the 1961 convention in Washington, and because I was not playing a very important role at the convention, at the time I went to an after-hours club [unclear]. There were lots of people there, including Lillian Smith was one, and unlike the old ones that used to be a smaller number of people at a camp where everybody ate together, etc., it was diffuse. It was in a hotel. I don't think we had our meals together or anything else particularly.

Q: No, that just changes it quite a bit, yes.

Robinson: Right. Yes, so the whole flavor of it was different. After the Freedom Ride, the burning of the bus and the beating ups, and the beatings in Birmingham, and SNCC picking up the slack for the next Freedom Ride, that seemed necessary, because, as they said, you couldn't let violence defeat nonviolence. So the things that came right after that seemed to me to be justified.

CORE later

And the doctor--what was it? Was it Bergman? What was the name of the man who was injured? Anyhow, when I read in the CORE book that he was brain-damaged by that beating, I thought, well, why didn't I know that at the time of the beating? And now I know from the ~~*Correlator*~~, because it wasn't evident right away. He was sent to help with the Freedom Riders in New Orleans, and then he was sick and hospitalized, and he was never well afterward. But I was glad that I wasn't associated with that.

Q: Do you want to talk about what that meant that the planning of the Freedom Rides stopped short, that the Freedom Rides were discontinued by CORE when the bus was burned and people were beaten up?

Robinson: Yes.

Q: I mean, should CORE have been able to continue to do Freedom Rides, or was it just that they expected that they would get through and that that would be a demonstration project?

Robinson: Well, I think when they discontinued it after the burning of the bus in Anniston and the beatings in Birmingham, there was no way with that shell-shocked group to expect them to carry it on to New Orleans. It seemed to me perfectly logical for them to discontinue it. I don't remember anybody in the office thinking otherwise at the time.

On the other hand, I think so much had happened and so much was going on, that no one in the office, as far as I know, was thinking of picking up the pieces and doing something right away. It took SNCC to do that, and I think that was a very important thing to do.

Then the people going on a Freedom Ride and ending up in Jackson and going to jail, as far as I was concerned, a limited amount of that was enough. If they could have restricted it to people who would go to jail to stay there, it would be that much more effective, but there was a tendency then to have these Freedom Rides going right, left, and center.

I was kind of out of it. At the same time, I was feeling that the collectivity wasn't enough and, of course, I was feeling that no matter how much money we raised, we were not going to have enough. But we did raise a lot. I did a letter that showed CORE as kind of a little baby being run through a wringer by the State of Mississippi with the bail bonds, etc. And there was money coming from the Andrew Norman Fund, bail fund, and that kind of thing, but I was really doing fundraising and that was more or less it.

But I had to have money. So what happened was I was offered a job at the American Committee on Africa doing fundraising. I was earning less at CORE than some other people. I started the American Committee on Africa at an increased salary and I had a

contract that raised my salary every six months or two years. So I was certainly looking out for number one.

Q: And junior. And number one, junior, yes.

Robinson: So in the fall--I think it was in the fall, October, November, somewhere along in there, I went to the American Committee on Africa, and was back, of course, with George Houser and Catherine Raymond, who'd been active with CORE for such a long time. They needed me, needed somebody to do fundraising. They had been with the Oram Organization, and Gil Jones had done fundraising for them.

After I got there, Catharine, particularly, was very critical of Gil Jones, and the amount of money that they had charged for what they did, but it seemed to me that they had really done a pretty good job. We did have a list of contributors that I was able to work with and to build up with more exchanges, etc. So I wasn't coming into something where there wasn't any--at CORE I really built it up from four hundred people. Here there was already something there.

Q: Who was contributing to the American Committee on Africa?

Robinson: Well, there were people who had been contributing to CORE and there was the beginnings of a love affair with Africa along then, which I think started because of what was going on in South Africa. And the South African situation was analogous enough to what was going on in this country so that the Africans from South Africa were easy for people from this country to communicate with.

But the American Committee on Africa was also involved with the independence movement going on elsewhere. But you were asking what--there was the Africa-America Institute, I think, was doing scholarships and stuff. Anyhow, there were--

[Begin Tape 11, Side B]

Robinson: --was replaced. I wanted to go back to that. While I was in Europe, there was discussion of that, and apparently they approached Martin Luther King, who wouldn't do it, which is a good thing, because Martin Luther King was the icon of the movement, and remains to this day that, and he had enough trouble dealing with the powers-that-be in the SCLC without trying to deal with what became a more and more diverse group at CORE.

Then they decided on Farmer. I think that the idea there was to provide a black front that could actually be operated by Carey and Rich. I think that at least that was part of the idea in the background, and it didn't work. It didn't work because Farmer, who didn't quickly make decisions anyway, still insisted on making them. He was not a well-organized person. He was somebody who talked a lot and he could think quite a bit, but he was not a nuts-and-bolts person. He could be used at a fundraising function or something of that sort, but he wasn't going to raise the money himself.

The only thing that kept CORE going there, as far as money was concerned, after I left, was Marvin. It wasn't Gordon either; it was Marvin. So he really contributed a great deal to CORE during those difficult periods, and was kind of in the background most of the time anyway. Gordon, as far as I can gather--and I was out by this time--just kept on the good side of Farmer, but got criticized a lot. Of course, he was directing the field people, and no

matter who did that, there was going to be trouble. But he had quite a lot of trouble, and then I think McCain did it and so on and so forth.

But at any rate, it was, I think, a kind of a misfortune that we did not have someone who could travel around the country and represent CORE in the way that Walter White had done at the NAACP, while [Roy] Wilkins was really running the organization in New York, but what we had was somebody who did run around the country and was ostensibly in charge, and really, as far as I can gather, was very slow on making his decisions, and was a politician who kind of decided which way the wind would blow and then went along in those directions, instead of really standing for something in the way--Martin King really did stand for things. And of course, it was always important for Farmer to be important. His ego was his first responsibility, and I think that's why later on when he was being forced out of CORE he was available to be window-dressing for Nixon.

But the idea--the revival--the idea of the Freedom Ride went from the Journey of Reconciliation, and kept coming up in CORE when Billie Ames was coordinator, she was trying to do it, and then he revived it and this time it went off and really blew up and blew the whole organizational structure into--we went up like that. And it did, it certainly speeded up the movement.

At the same time, movements that speed up that way disintegrate pretty fast, too, because it went beautifully until about '62 or '63 and then it quickly went downhill. I was involved in things that were helping it to go downhill, I think, like the stall-in here in New York.

On the other hand, we had gotten to the point where we wanted things to move fast, and here in New York City what you got was a "yes, yes" to your face, and then it was a "no, no"

when it came down to brass tacks. So that if you wanted the construction jobs to be opened, you really weren't as important as the construction unions. You had to do something desperate to try to get it across, and climb the cranes and all of that business. But that was getting too close to home and it really didn't appeal to the broader public in New York, I think.

I think we became something that was a minority, and we felt that with things like the stall-in we could force things, and it didn't work. I think we also had lost the part of nonviolence which emphasizes conversion and patience and all of that, which is really essential, as I knew, to the success, but was something that I think I forgot, too.

But I can remember way back in Chicago when we were doing sit-ins, we went one day and we were impatient, kind of impatient, and irritated that we weren't being served, and the whole thing, I know at the end of it when we got out, I thought, you know, this isn't really a success. Other times it's been a success because we've come out still feeling open to the people who are discriminating against us, and you have to be forgiving and you have to recognize that the opponent and the agitator are both human beings and that you've got-- the human connection has to be there or the whole thing doesn't work, and I think we lost a lot of that. And certainly in the internecine wars in national CORE, a lot of that was lost. It was lost completely in some of the locals. But anyway, as far as I was concerned--

Q: The internecine wars forgot that--the locals forgot that the people that they were struggling with were also members of CORE, or they forgot that the people that they were struggling against were also human?

Robinson: That's right.

Q: Both.

Robinson: Both. Yes, both.

Q: Which is from the same source.

Robinson: Yes, it is.

Q: Okay.

Robinson: I think that happened to most of the people who were in CORE as late as I was. So as far as I was concerned, I was terribly hurt and resentful about what happened to me, but then I was busy at the American Committee on Africa, and James was a little baby, and then the next thing I knew Barbara was pregnant again.

So the transition--I probably was resentful, and still active in New York CORE. I got less active because New York CORE got bigger, but I was in New York CORE at the time of the Blyden Jackson business, as I've been over that before, and was in the Marshall England-Gladys Harrington camp and we won it. I think I didn't even realize at the time that the people who were trying to use Blyden Jackson were really also plotting to get Bayard Rustin to run CORE in place of Jim Farmer. And whether that's really true or not, I think it's likely. Of course, Rustin had been very much in favor of nonviolent direct action, but he thought it had had it and he wanted to go into politics.

Q: Really?

Robinson: Well, he wanted things to be much more political.

Q: CORE?

Robinson: Right.

Q: CORE to be more political, rather than himself.

Robinson: Yes. Well, the movement to be more political. He never said CORE, but he was getting on where he needed--he'd done these dramatic things without ever having--he never had a real platform after the race relations division of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. When he was at the War Resisters League, that was a pacifist organization and they gave him leaves of absence to do things like the March on Washington, etc.

But I think he was looking for a place to nest for the rest of his life, which he finally got in the A. Philip Randolph Institute, but that was totally supported by the labor movement, and he was kind of--he was in a fiefdom in a way. It isn't that some of the things they did were not--because some of the things they did were excellent, but I couldn't imagine--I thought he looked ridiculous with [Albert] Shanker when he appeared with Shanker down at City Hall. He was on--

Q: The dandy and the sort of mussed-up thing, that way of looking ridiculous?

Robinson: Well, it seemed to me, of course, to support the teachers union [United Federation of Teachers] as against the decentralists, they were both wrong.

Q: I wondered about that.

[Interruption]

Robinson: Yes, go back on to it. My feeling about decentralization was that what you needed in decentralization was school by school and limited to the parents who had children in that school and parents who had children who could have gone to that school, whether they went to a parochial school or a private school. And if you had that kind of group doing something about that local school and picking a delegate to something bigger, that you would get decentralization that was based on educational values, but what you got instead was political contests. It spent a lot of money, but it didn't achieve what it was out for.

Q: So this was in direct contrast to nonviolent direct action.

Robinson: Yes.

Q: Which should have been trying to appeal to people?

Robinson: Well, I guess so. I wasn't even thinking about nonviolent direct action in that regard. I was just feeling that--I felt that both the black and white people who had been in the integration movement were opposed to what the teachers union was standing for, and

for Bayard to side with Shanker was a wrong thing to do. On the other hand, some of the things that were going on were not good either, but that was later.

But I think what I need to say is that in spite of all the bitterness, etc., that I was really fortunate to be out of it at that stage, because even in my days in Chicago I always felt that a revolution had to be based on families and you could do a lot of agitation and so on and so forth, but if you couldn't sustain families, you couldn't sustain the basis for nonviolence, which really is learning to love other people, and we do that, or most of us do it. It comes from the time we're born and how you're brought up, etc. That's a terrible thing about what happens in the ghettos these days, is so many people are brought up without any kind of emotional support. So I was lucky in that I wasn't in a cauldron for three years; I was in a cauldron from 1960 to '61, and then I was out of it.

The American Committee on Africa was a pleasant place to be. The fundraising worked quite well. After I was there several years, I got all the bills paid and out of debt, and then something else, they decided to do something else, and I thought, well, that will get us into debt again. And I thought, oh dear. After a while it gets difficult to raise money for something that doesn't really achieve that much. CORE had been very difficult to raise money for and then it kind of expanded.

When I went to the American Committee on Africa, Chief [Albert] Luthuli, who'd been head of the African National Congress, and was a devotee of nonviolence, and had been put under house arrest out in the country somewhere, we were still able to reach him by telephone and he signed an appeal, which I sent here, and things like that, we did very well with those. But after the man from northern Rhodesia, [Kenneth] Kaunda, I think he

signed one of our letters, and [Julius K.] Nyerere signed a letter and so on, but it kind of run out after a while, of what you going to do next. Except for the South Africans, I didn't relate so well to the other Africans. I think a lot of people didn't, really. And what nobody, I think, really knew at the time was the depth of the tribalism; it's just like the Balkans in Africa. So independence was something that had to come, but it made so many of those countries much worse, as far as their living standards.

When I took the American Committee on Africa tour, Tanzania was still in quite good condition and Nyerere was certainly a well-intentioned man, but his socialism tried to redistribute the wealth and it was a declining pie, and for people who went there a few years after me, it was not nearly as comfortable a place as it had been, and that was true in so many places. Now the Congo, which should be, next to South Africa, the most thriving place on the continent is just an absolute mess. So many of those people are beautiful people. It's horrible.

Anyway, that's when I decided to look around a little bit, and I went to the Harold Oram Organization and worked for the Legal Defense Fund, and I had been in touch, of course, with the Harold Oram Organization when I was executive secretary of CORE, because I had thought that they might do our fundraising. They were doing the fundraising for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund.

Q: What was the Harold Oram Organization?

Robinson: It was public relations and fundraising, and they--

Q: For nonprofits only?

Robinson: For nonprofits, right. They had clients like the National Wildlife--the World Wildlife Fund. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund was the one that they had the longest. They had had the American Committee on Africa before I went there. They had, at one time, I think, the National Sharecroppers Fund, the International Rescue Committee, and he had done things on nuclear policy with [Albert] Einstein and so on, and ads in the paper. Harold had a lot of interesting ideas, and I had thought that they could do the fundraising for CORE, but this was about '58 or '59, and they declined it. I think they declined it because they had the NAACP Legal Defense Fund then.

But Harold was interested, and he had sent one of his people down to go through our mailing lists and make an analysis of what was good and what was bad, etc. And we'd had all that. He did it without paying anything for it. So I was in touch with them, and the Legal Defense Fund needed more, the fundraising--they needed to raise more money than they were raising. Anna Frank was heading that fundraising and she was trying to do everything, so she was glad to have somebody else come on the staff, because I wasn't going to go there unless she did want somebody on staff. Because Harold could have a brilliant idea, and he did this once in a while, hire somebody and someone else wouldn't want anybody else there. Well, that's not so good. Anyhow, Anna was great to work for. So that's how I went there.

I guess I'm through. I don't think we need any more unless you--go over the tapes and we'll do one more with just--you might even write out questions.

Q: Oh, I should, yes.

Robinson: Yes. So that would keep me focused.

Q: Okay. Okay. Thank you very much.

Robinson: Yes. But I think today went pretty well.

Q: Yes, it did. Great. Thanks. It's still on.

Robinson: Okay. I think it went well and I've had--I think I was very fortunate for CORE and I think CORE was very fortunate for me. And certainly the almost two years that I lived in Harlem was a very good preparation for it, too.

Q: I should say.

Robinson: There was a very interesting column in the paper today. Did you happen to see it?

Q: Should I stop the tape?

Robinson: Yes, stop it. Right.

[END OF INTERVIEW]