

Voices of Freedom

Virginia Civil Rights Movement Video Initiative

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Transcript - Dr. W. Ferguson Reid (2003-03-21)

CARRINGTON: May I have your name, sir, and what you do?

REID: Okay. I am William Ferguson Reid. Presently, I am employed as a medical review officer. This is an occupation that didn't exist 15 years ago, but now that companies require pre-employment and post-accident drug testing, all of the positive drug tests have to be reviewed by a physician who is trained in that particular field, and this is what we do for about three or four thousand different companies.

CARRINGTON: Where did you grow up?

REID: I grew up in Richmond, Virginia. I went to Richmond public schools, Virginia Union University, then I went to Howard University to get a medical degree. After that I went to St. Louis Missouri. I was an intern and surgical resident at Homer G. Phillips Hospital, which no

long exists. After that, I did a couple of years in the military. One year in Korea with the 1st Marine Division and another year at the United States Naval Hospital at Bethesda.

After that, I opened a private practice of surgery here in Richmond, Virginia. That was in 1955. Practiced surgery here for 27 years -- 22 years, I think, and then went with the Department of State as one of their regional medical officers. They have mandatory retirement at 65, so I was kicked out of the nest. And then I was interested in addictive diseases, and I've been certified as an addictionologist, so I heard about this job with the present company, I applied for that, and I was accepted, and I've been there for about eight and a half years.

CARRINGTON: Now, you grew up in Richmond during the time of Massive Resistance, segregation, Jim Crow. What's your definition, your personal definition of what segregation is?

REID: Well, to me it meant separating people by race in order for one race to be dominant over the other. It limited the opportunities that were available to everybody else but were not available to us. It was an obstacle to achieving whatever you wanted to achieve. This was done intentionally and as a result of it, it was very difficult to break out of that segregated area.

CARRINGTON: What were some of your first experiences with segregation?

REID: Well, we always knew that there are certain things you could do and certain things you could not do. We always knew that you couldn't drink out of a white fountain, you couldn't go into a bathroom that was marked white. You couldn't eat out at a lunch counter. You couldn't try on clothes in department stores. You couldn't eat lunch in a department store even though lunch was available to everybody else. If you ate it, you had to carry it out. You couldn't sit down at the counter. You couldn't go to Miller & Rhodes Tea Room, or the Thalhimer's room that they had for people to relax in.

Also, as far as education was concerned, there were obstacles there. We had to go to segregated schools. There were no black principals at that time. All of the principals were white. There was a glass ceiling for the teachers and principals. There were different pay scales. Men, white, got more money than the female white teachers, and the black male teachers got less money than the white female teachers and the black female teachers got less money, so there was a standard of segregation all up the line. These were some of the obstacles.

After I finished Virginia Union, I knew that I couldn't apply to the Medical College of Virginia because that had not been broken down, and even though Medical College was within walking distance of my house, I had to go up to Washington. I said I was bussed to Washington to keep from going to medical school here close to my home, which was an extra expense to my family had to pay for room and board in addition to, you know, the tuition so that was a handicap along that line.

When finishing medical school there were only about five or six hospitals in the United States that accepted blacks as interns, and so most -- all of them except one or two were predominantly black hospitals, so the educational opportunities even after finishing med school were limited.

Coming back to Richmond, which was not unique, many of the cities had the same -- we had the same problem. The medical society would not accept anybody other than white, not Asians, not -- not Asians or people of different ethnic backgrounds, which was in their charter. And because -- in order to be on the staff of the various hospitals, you had to be a member of the medical society, so you are caught in a bind there. You can't get on the staff if you are not in the medical society.

As a result of that I found out I was probably three or four years older than my white counterparts who were achieving what I was achieving. They achieved it at an earlier age than I did. An example of that is that in the surgical world there is -- after training to be a surgeon, you have to get certified by a board, which was not any problem because that was open to everybody who was qualified to take the board, so that's an examination.

After that, then there's an honorary society, American College of Surgeons, and in order to join that you have to be recommended by five local surgeons, and being the only black surgeon in Richmond, not practicing on -- in the other hospitals, I didn't get a chance to make any type of

contacts with the five people that would be necessary to recommend me to become a member of the American College of Surgeons.

Incidentally, that was not always integrated. There was a suit while I was in medical school by a black surgeon who wanted to get in, he had to sue to get into the American College of Surgeons, so it hasn't been easy, and as a result of that the other surgeons that were in Richmond were able to get into that society at an earlier age than I did. Eventually, after the hospitals opened up, then I was able to make contacts and get the recommendations.

CARRINGTON: How did you work with the medical society to change?

REID: Well, when I came back in 1955, several other doctors, Dr. William Forrest and Dr. William Calloway had already tried to apply, and they were refused admission because they had to get the charter changed. And the medical society in Richmond was controlled by several different groups. At that particular time there were several factions or rivals -- rivalry groups. Most of the hospitals were private hospitals except for the Medical College of Virginia. And usually the hospital was built by a particular individual, non-profit, and by -- usually by a surgeon. And he would have persons on the staff that could feed other types of patients to him. In other words, they may have a lot of general practitioners, two or three internists, maybe a urologist, maybe two or three pediatricians and they would have this group practice around the hospital, and it was a closed staff. In order to get in the staff they had to accept you, and they didn't accept any blacks and very few whites even, so, you know, it was a closed, competitive

group by one hospital, then another group set up their own hospital, a third group set up their own hospital, so there were clusters of private hospitals which it was very difficult to break into.

When the Hill Burton Act came into effect the Richmond Memorial Hospital, which was a community hospital and financed by public financing and some federal financing, in order to get Hill Burton funds it was necessary for them to have an open staff, and I think this was one of the first hospitals to have an open staff, and this was followed by St. Mary's Hospital, which was a Catholic hospital, they had an open staff. And eventually the other hospitals in order to compete opened up also.

CARRINGTON: Tell us what the Hill Burton Act was.

REID: That was an act that the federal government financed the building of community hospitals throughout the whole United States, particularly in the rural areas, so that you could have adequate medical care without having to travel long distances to some metropolitan area in order to get good hospital care. As a result of this many of the rural communities were able to build hospitals and in turn attract qualified physicians to come into these rural areas which heretofore the qualified physicians, you know, didn't have any incentive to go to.

CARRINGTON: For black doctors and surgeons, where were they practicing medicine, what hospitals were available to them?

REID: Here, the only one was Richmond Community Hospital, which was a very small, private hospital. Had about 26 beds. It was located on Overbrook near Virginia Union. Since then, they have expanded and they have been taken over by the same sisters who run St. Mary's so, but at that time that was the only hospital we could practice in.

CARRINGTON: And as a surgeon, what were some of the experiences that drove you to try and open up the Medical College?

REID: Well, we knew the medical society was the obstacle to all of the integration of medicine here in Richmond, and in order to get involved into the medical education and medical system we had to be members of the medical society. In order to be a member of the American -- AMA, American Medical Association, you had to be a member of the local, and then you had to be a member of the state, and then you had to be a member of the AMA. So in order break into the whole medical system you had to be a member of the local medical society.

There are certain benefits that go along with that. For instance, malpractice insurance and other types of insurance which are available to groups was not available to us as individuals. I think the main resistance that they thought it was more of a social organization than a political, and their big hang-up was that they would have to socialize with us and they just didn't want to have that because they always said, well, we're more of a social organization than a medical organization, which is not true, you know.

And eventually when these old groups got older and younger doctors came into Medical College of Virginia, which attracted a lot of physicians from outside of Richmond, and you had a little inbreeding, it began to get enough members of the Richmond medical society to vote to change the charter. It wasn't done by the old guard. It was done by the younger guys that came in, younger ladies and men that came in.

CARRINGTON: Now, you had your medical profession that you were working on, you were a surgeon, it is not the easiest thing in the world.

REID: Right.

CARRINGTON: Somehow, how did you get into the political side, what drew you into the whole political realm in the City of Richmond?

REID: Well, I don't know exactly how it started, but when I was in Korea I was the only black surgeon in the group, in the medical unit that we were in. And most of the guys were from Georgia and so forth, and I could feel, I could still feel I wasn't fully accepted. And we were over there when the Supreme Court decision came down, the Brown decision, and I was the only one who was happy. All of the rest were -- felt that the world was going to end, but being naive I thought that if the Supreme Court spoke, you know, everybody would obey the law, and that that

was it, you know, that integration would go ahead and take place without any problem because we are all law-abiding citizens and we want to uphold the law even though we might not like it.

But when I got back to Richmond, the big hassle at that time was whether or not to keep the schools open. And there was a group called Save Our Schools, and that was made up of all blacks and a few moderate thinking whites, and they had a referendum soon after I got here, and the referendum was whether or not we should obey the Supreme Court ruling or not. And naturally, they decided they were going to fight it. And this started a massive resistance.

Well, we realized that even though you might have the laws on your side, if you don't have the judges and the elected officials willing to follow the law, you haven't won the battle, and the battle is down in the trenches, and you have to elect people that are going to represent you and going to obey the law. Because the black vote was so dismal, and the white vote as well on that particular referendum, a few of the blacks that were involved, Johnny Brooks and Bill Thornton, decided that they wanted to put on a massive education program to get more blacks elected.

Bill and Johnny were members of the NAACP voter registration committee. Some of the other key members were Earl Davis, and his wife, Kay Davis, Slade, several others. But they couldn't operate because the NAACP was also under attack by the Virginia General Assembly. They were trying to get the membership list of the NAACP because they knew most of the members were

rural people who depended on a livelihood of whites, if they could get the membership list they could put pressure on the members not to participate, threaten to fire them and so forth.

So the NAACP was fighting that battle in the courts as well as in the General Assembly to keep the membership list closed -- without disclosing it, so it was decided that for us to be more -- the most effective we should separate from the NAACP and operate under a different name, and it came about that we were named the Crusade for Voters, and the main effort would be to register voters and educate them on politics.

So the approach that we used was that we knew that there were 60 precincts in Richmond, 27 of them were predominantly black, and so we said we're going to put all our effort on these 27 precincts. And the way we planned it, we said, let's go into each precinct, set up an individual civic group to give them some type of identity on their own so that they can have some political clout, so we went into -- we said we would start with the precincts we lived in because we if can't do it in our precincts, there's no need of us trying it in other precincts, so we picked -- each one of us decided we would spearhead in our precinct. And then we picked up -- so we tried the three largest precincts and we would gradually work our way down so that we would have all 27 organized.

It would take a long time to tell you how big a problem that was and how much time it took but we did do that. And as a result of that the idea was that each precinct organization, civic

organization would send two members to the Crusade For Voters as their representatives and we would have each one of those precincts to be autonomous, but we would be the coordinating group along that line.

It didn't work out that way. They were still autonomous, but most of them -- everybody wanted to come to the Crusade meeting, so the meetings were held at Slaughter's Hotel and they gradually increased in size, and we had the meeting every month to mark out -- to develop strategy. If a precinct had a particular problem in that area, we would tell them how to approach it and we would back them up as a political organization.

We knew that politicians like to be elected and they like to get re-elected, and they also like to be elected with a large number of votes, and once they get in there and hooked on the political scene it doesn't matter where the votes come from, and they are flexible. And one of the politicians that was quick to see what we were doing, we would ask him, well, George, how do you feel about this? And he would say, well, I'm fluid on that. So most of them are fluid, and they are fluid, and they will respond to the vote. We found that even though in developing our strategy to vote for people, and I won't go into the details, that often times we picked up people that we knew that were opposed to our ideals just to give them -- we knew they were going to win anyway, so it didn't hurt to load up on them because it didn't hurt the candidates we were trying to get elected, and once they got our vote, then they also got our voice and would listen to us, because, again, if you lead a ticket, you know, that gives you a certain amount of prestige and you say, well, where

did I get all these votes from, then you say, well, we voted for you. Look at the votes. You know, this is what we we want to you do.

It takes time, and you can't do it over night, and I think one of the problems now in politics, a lot of people want instant results, and they think that all I need is a lot of money, and with good publicity, and television time, and key strategies and political consultants and all of these things I can win, but you still have to have the votes. And I think the last election showed it, that both of the presidential candidates had all the money they needed, they had all the political consultants. Where did they come in? 50/50. And so they did need those extra votes. And so the money does not automatically make you win. You have seen candidates that spend millions of dollars and still no win, so you have to have that basic foundation and the basics precincts.

CARRINGTON: You ran for office. What office did you win? How did you get elected? Why and how id you get elected?

REID: Well, as we were getting more and more involved, we were getting candidates to run for city council, we were able to get candidates elected to city council, and so the natural progression is to move on up, city council, state legislature, congress, president, you know. So a couple of us, even though the Crusade was non-partisan, a couple of us, Tinsley Spraggins and I were Democrats, but the Democratic Party was really the Byrd Machine at that time, and it did not really try to attract blacks at all. They did have a few blacks but they were strictly Byrd Machine blacks.

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And along that time there were some liberal movement in the white community among the younger Democrats, so Boots and I contacted some of the younger white Democrats, and they in turn became more influential in the Democratic Party and as a result of that they broke down some of the barriers in the Richmond Democratic Party against blacks and became more and more integrated.

We had been instrumental in helping whites to get elected, but it was -- except on the city council level, there was no reciprocation, so we were able to get the Democrats to say we will support a black candidate as a candidate for the House of Delegates. There were eight seats at-large from Richmond and Henrico. And the reason that they ran at-large was a form of gerrymandering to diminish the power of the black vote.

As the black vote got more influential there was a movement on to dissipate the vote by enlarging the electoral area. In other words, you add more whites to the area that you have to vote for. So at one time the Richmond had separate delegates from Henrico, but as the black vote in Richmond expanded there were five from Richmond, three from Henrico. It was decided in the General Assembly to make that an at-large, Richmond and Henrico at-large. Even though it doesn't make any political sense, it enabled them to perpetuate segregation. The eight members had to run at-large from Richmond and Henrico.

So we were able to get the Democrats to say that, you know, they would support a black, and we agreed on a particular individual that everybody could support, and we would run as a team, seven whites and one black on a straight Democratic ticket in the primary, you had to run in the primary, and you also had to run in the general election. So the individual that we all agreed on decided at the last moment he did not want to run, so they said, well, Fergie, you have to run, you talked us into it, you and Boots talked us into it, you will have to go ahead and run.

I said, well, I'll go ahead. So I did. But on that first time around the seven whites got elected in the primary and I lost by 40 some votes in the primary. But the -- they found in a recount they found the precincts -- all of the votes in one of the precincts missing and so I was declared the winner, but the fight is never over, so the person I defeated in the primary had a large group of segregationists, and these were the groups that were fighting integration to put him on the ticket as a write-in, and needless to say he won on the general election.

So we did a postmortem on the election to find out what happened and why we didn't get the 43 votes that I needed in the primary, redoubled our efforts and got our system down to working, you know, in a more professional manner. We put all the voters on the cards, and we had the telephone numbers and identified all the black voters, and on election day we were able to mobilize them and get them out on election day. Well, I was able to win the next time around, and --

CARRINGTON: During the election process, there were times when the seven people were invited places.

REID: Right.

CARRINGTON: What were some of the things that happened to exclude you?

REID: Well, we were all supposed to be -- go to a party, I guess you call it a coffee, at one of the individual's homes, and it was in an all-white neighborhood, one of the West End areas. And the day before, the morning of the event I got dis-invited, I got a call, they said they would rather that I not come, that it would be embarrassing to them, the host and hostess, and they would not feel comfortable if I came. So I said, well, okay, you know. I'm sure there are other things that I didn't know of that they eliminated that problem by not inviting me and I not knowing about it.

CARRINGTON: Were there times when you did go to parties in predominantly white neighborhoods where people learned something of your welcome?

REID: Well, yes. Most of them that I got invited to, I was the only black there. And most of the people were very nice, you know, and I'm sure that those that didn't come even if they were invited didn't come because they didn't want to be there with me, but I would never know about that, but I'm sure that there were some people that asked, if Fergie going to be there, I would rather not come. I'm sure that went on, but I was never exposed to that. I would not know that.

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But there are enough people out there with a liberal inclination so that I did get elected, and so I think that helped to break down that I wasn't anything to fear, you know, that I was a human being, and that I responded to issues just like everybody else responded to them.

CARRINGTON: Now, as a city council person, what were some of the things that you did?

REID: I was not on the city council.

CARRINGTON: You were --

REID: I was in the House of Delegates.

CARRINGTON: I'm sorry. House of Delegates. I'm sorry. What were some of the policies that you fought to eliminate, Jim Crow --

REID: Well, there are a lot of issues that automatically the code had to be purged of a lot of those racial things that were in the code about separation of races and so forth, and even though the federal Supreme Court had outruled inter-racial marriages and so forth, a lot of those things were on the books, and all of those had to be eliminated from the code, so there were a lot of bills like that. But the one that was most significant I think was the Open Housing Bill, because I feel the reason that you have forced bussing is because you have segregated housing. Once you integrate

the housing, you don't have separate neighborhoods, and if you live in the neighborhood, most school districts are neighborhood defined, and if you had an integrated neighborhood you would have a mix of individuals in that neighborhood, and all of them would be on the same school bus, and this is one of the areas that we thought that if we could get that changed, that open housing is the thing in Virginia that it would help resolve the problem of this forced bussing because water seeks its own level, and people in the same economic level will seek housing in the same economic level, and so you are going to get open housing and you'll get blacks moving not into a ghetto but throughout the whole community and the suburbs, purchasing homes that they can afford. And by doing this you would integrate the schools without the problems of forced bussing.

CARRINGTON: How does education play into a person's ability to do that?

REID: Well, during segregation we always got the hand-me-downs. In other words, the textbooks that I got had been used at John Marshall for maybe five or six years and had been -- the stamp in there, we could see the name of all the individuals who used the book before we got it, and the city books were outdated, you know, and not up to date. They were raggedy. We didn't, even in the schools, we didn't have the laboratory equipment that the white high schools had.

So education is the key, and we -- if you have integrated education you are not going to get one group getting second-hand equipment or no equipment, and the other group getting the first-hand

or the best equipment. The only way to get a quality education is to have equal, and you cannot have it with separate and equal. So education is the key, because if you start the kids off at a same level in kindergarten, I believe that they are going to progress on their ability regardless of the color. You are going to have slow learners and fast learners but it won't be based on their color. It will be based on their intellect.

CARRINGTON: How did you as a young man going through the Richmond public school system get to become a surgeon? If there was that disparity in education what helped drive you, or how did the teachers motivate you? What was in those segregated schools that offered you the opportunity to reach that potential that you had?

REID: Well, I can't compare with the school I had with the white counterpart because I don't know, you know, what they were doing, but I do say, well, first, my parents at my home motivated me and other members of my family. It was just expected that we would go through college and do something else after college.

All of the teachers were very good, and I can't understand now when the teachers that we had, they would finish high school, and they would go to a normal school, which was Armstrong Normal School, and that was a two-year teachers school. And the normal school, they learned how to teach, and they would spend maybe -- then the last year would do practice teaching and they would come into classes as a practice teacher, and all of those teachers were very good, and the basics were reading, writing and arithmetic. And I think we had very dedicated teachers, and

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they would prepare you, we got a good background, even though it was segregated, even though they were paid less than their white counterparts.

Then I went to Virginia Union, which was a very -- is a very good school, and it was small. We only had about five or six hundred students at that time, or less than a thousand, so all the teachers were good, and the classrooms were small, and were able to get a pretty good on-hands teaching, and they were motivators, and all of them had -- were very well qualified, they had doctorate degrees in science or whatever they were teaching, so they were well trained, also.

So with that, and then going into medical school, again, because it was a segregated society, our teachers there, most of them had M.D. degrees, and plus a doctorate degree in some particular field of medicine, physiology, pharmacology, so they did not stop with just their medical degree, they went on to get a graduate degree in whatever field they were teaching, so they were all very good and well-trained teachers. So we felt that we could compete on equal footing in spite of those handicaps which made it harder for us to get there.

So I think the whole educational system was geared to make sure we could compete whenever integration came or whenever we were thrust into an integrated society that did exist.

CARRINGTON: I'm going to shift gears a little bit. John Mitchell, who is John Mitchell and what was his influence on you?

REID: There are several John Mitchells, but the original John Mitchell was the founder of the Planet; is that the one you are talking about?

CARRINGTON: Yes.

REID: I did not know as much about him as I knew about the Planet because my father was very active with the Planet at that time, and I did not know John Mitchell personally. I think he was two generations ahead of me, so I would know the generation of Mitchells that were, you know, my father's age and who were active in the Planet at that time.

During the thirties there were several activists in the black community and John Mitchell was one of them. My father was one of them. Jimmy West was one of them. And they were the ones that broke open the white primary, lilly white primaries. They were the ones that fought getting the Democratic primaries open to blacks. They were the ones that were involved when prohibition was ended getting the state to employ blacks. And the first blacks that were employed were in ABC [Alcoholic Beverage Control] stores, and -- but they were all black stores, and each area had their black ABC store. And I think they were the first state employees above the maintenance level that got integrated into the state, and they were active at that particular time.

They were active with the NAACP and their legal fight to do away with restrictive covenants on housing and things like that. So that -- I only know him by reputation.

CARRINGTON: There were also other things in Virginia that kept black people from voting, poll tax, literacy tests... Describe, or give us a definition of the other things and how the black community broke through those barriers.

REID: Okay, 1902 there was a state constitutional convention which was called by Carter Glass who was the pro-runner of the Byrd Machine, and at that time the specific reason for having a convention was to keep black people and poor white people from voting, to make it as difficult as possible. And they instituted the poll tax. Poll tax was a tax that you had to pay in order to be qualified to vote. You had to pay it six months prior to an election or primary, it was a dollar and a half at that time, and you had to have paid it for the three preceding years, so if you are a first-time voter you would have to pay the four dollars and a half to get up to snuff and you would have to have paid it six months prior to the election. So that was an obstacle. A dollar and a half was a lot of money, when you would buy a newspaper for 3 cents, you could buy a Coke-Cola for 5 cents, could you buy a pack of cigarettes for 15 cents, so a dollar and a half went quite a distance. I think a loaf of bread was 10 cents or less. So a dollar and a half meant a lot of money when people were making 40 cents an hour or less, not even that.

So that did -- that was a big obstacle and that was an obstacle that continued until the Civil Rights Act which eliminated those obstacles.

As we progressed and as our voting became more important and people realized it and people started voting in larger numbers, throughout the south they wouldn't even have a registrar's office open, or the black would not know where the registrar's office was.

In Virginia, they weren't quite that determined. They came up with the blank sheet of paper registration. There were 12 questions that you had to answer on a blank piece of paper, name, address, are you a citizen, so forth, and all of that information. So we encouraged the people to pay the poll taxes. What we did, we started with the people that we knew that could afford it, and fortunately the poll tax list was public knowledge, and they had people listed by blacks and whites, so it made it easier for us to identify the blacks who had paid the poll tax.

So we had that reproduced and we put it in all the barbershops and beauty shops. We had signs made don't talk politics in here if you don't vote. And under that we had the poll tax list so that the barbers would be encouraged to vote and register themselves so that when anybody got in a political discussion the first thing they would do is go to the book to see whether you are qualified to make a statement or not.

Also, we got the Afro [the Richmond Afro-American newspaper] to publish the list of people that had paid the poll tax. And we sent out letters to a lot of people in an open-faced envelope which looked like a bill, and we did not say you had not paid the poll tax, but we said something like if you have no paid the poll tax please do so in order to be a citizen, various gimmicks that way.

On the blank paper registration you also had to have it notarized, so there were not many black notaries at that time, so we encouraged blacks to become notaries so with the understanding they would notarize the papers without charging the blacks, so we flooded the -- city hall with people applying for notaries. When they found out we were becoming notarized, and there were not that many white notaries they did away with that.

Later on after the poll tax was exempted, was eliminated, we became friends with one of the persons who collected the poll tax, and we were telling -- before it was completely eliminated, but in the process, he became a friend of ours, and we were talking about the poll tax and how it was an obstacle.

He said, well, don't worry about it, you know, I have it set up. I know you. I have two cash registers here. He was a treasurer. One, is the date is current with what the current date is, we would run all our transactions through that, but if you have anybody who wants to pay the poll tax, the other cash register, the date on that is the deadline for paying the poll tax. Bring them on down, we will run them through that. We found out he had been doing that for many, many years. It was big joke to us because we knew that we were -- it was soon going out so we didn't make a big issue of it, but there are various ways that the system was defeated that we didn't know about, you know, so it shows that life is not fair, you know.

CARRINGTON: If you had the opportunity to talk to young people today, which you have right now, look in the camera and tell them your advice on how to keep the movement going, how in the 21st century to make sure that equality does actually become a reality in this society and what you would suggest that they do.

REID: Okay. Well, first of all, freedom is not free, and freedom is not eternal. What you are given one day can be taken away from you the next day. I think that the last presidential election showed that in spite of all our progress, all of the gains that we made, that in the time it takes five Supreme Court justices to put a signature on a decree, all of the gains can be taken away from you. Your one vote does count. You have to be ever vigilant. There are always problems. You think that life is fair. It's not fair. In the political world, somebody has to be the winner, and somebody has to be the loser. And in order to be the winner you have to have planned, you have to have a strategy, you have to identify what the problem is, and you have to sit down and decide how you are going to resolve that problem. It cannot be solved in one day or one year. And our problem is that we don't plan ahead far enough, we have to plan five years, particularly in politics. And you have to start at the base of the pyramid. Politics is based on a pyramidal, pyramidal system, and the power comes from the base of the pyramid, and the base of the pyramid is the political precinct. Anything you want to do politically you have to start at the precinct level and build up from that to the city council level, or the school board level, the House of Delegates level, the congressional level, the senatorial level, and then the presidential level. If you don't have a powerful precinct organization it's going to crumble. You can't start at

the top and hope to work down to the bottom to be effective. You have to start at the bottom, build your base and get down to the base as quick as possible and build up from there, not only in politics, but in any endeavor you hope to do you have to start at the base and not at the top.

CARRINGTON: Is there anything else you want to cover while we're here?

REID: Well, yeah. There are always problems. I guess a lot of younger people will say, well, I wasn't born in the civil rights movement, and the reason we had Martin Luthers Kings and other leaders now is because it was of the time. Well, the times still exist. There are problems that we have now that have to be resolved. The federal government is not going to resolve them, so we have to identify the problems that affect us locally and then start, think of, come up with a plan how we are going to resolve those problems, problems not necessarily racial, it is how can we improve our community? How can we improve our educational system? It is better to light a candle than to damn the darkness, and if you have a problem, it is your responsibility to come up with a plan to resolve it.

CARRINGTON: Thank you, sir.

REID: All right.

OFF CAMERA DISCUSSION ABOUT DR. REID'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

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CARRINGTON: So, Dr. Reid, when you were elected, how long were you in office and what was it like to be there...

REID: Well, I was elected in nineteen sixty... -- I ran the first time in 1965. I lost that time. In 1967 I was elected, and I stayed in the General Assembly for three terms until 1973. I was the only black there. The first thing I did was to see that we had a black page appointed. The members of the General Assembly appoint the pages to serve as runners and so forth, and there were no black pages, so the first thing I did was -- with the Henrico delegation was to decide that we wanted to have a black page, and we did appoint one who served in that term. As a result of that the Norfolk delegation came up with a black page. Then the next time we came up with a female page. There were no female pages in the General Assembly at that time.

I served on the General Laws Committee. I worked up to being the chairman of the Labor Committee. The reception was very good. Of course, we had Republicans and Democrats. The Democrats at that time were in majority. The -- all of the Democrats were not liberal Democrats. Most were old Byrd Machine Democrats who had been there for many, many year. The speaker of the house was a moderate and he treated me as he did all the rest of the Democrats. Everything is based on seniority and certainly I was treated as well as the others.

Socially, at that time the Commonwealth Club was the place where most of the social functions were sponsored. All of the lobbyists and various interest groups give at various types of cocktail parties for the members of the House of Delegates and the General Assembly. The Commonwealth Club was still segregated. In one incident, one of the leading political figures in Virginia who every year had a dinner for the members of the General Assembly at the Commonwealth Club had his usual dinner, but he did not invite me. I was the only one that was not invited.

When the word got out, several of the more liberal members did not go to that particular function. They decided they would have a dinner at another place and we'd all meet there instead of the Commonwealth Club. Since that time I understand the Commonwealth Club has black members, and also now the blacks can attend other functions there.

As a whole, the experience was very rewarding and very educational. You find out that as a member of an elected body there are always two opinions, there are people for it and people against it, and both have various reasons for being for it and for being against it. And I think you have to listen to both sides for every action has an equal and opposite reaction, and every law that you pass helps somebody, but it also affects other people in an adverse manner, and you have to listen to both sides and try not be judgmental and come up with what you think is best for the Commonwealth and for most of the people.

CARRINGTON: Now, you referred to Democrats that were in the Byrd Machine.

REID: Yeah.

CARRINGTON: Tell me about those Democrats and what -- where are they now?

REID: Okay.

CARRINGTON: Where did they go --

REID: Okay.

CARRINGTON: -- from there?

REID: In the thirties and forties, fifties and sixties there was a very small Republican Party, very few members of the Republican Party. Republican Party supported Republicans statewide and nationally. The Democratic Party was controlled by the Byrd family, Byrd Machine and Byrd organization. They were the ones that appointed the judges, they were the ones that elected the members to the General Assembly, to the county boards of supervisors, and various elected officials, and as a result of that they controlled the political scene in Virginia.

However, they were not national Democrats, they were state Democrats, but nationally were Democrats for Eisenhower, Democrats for Goldwater, Democrats for whoever the national Republican was. Because of that, the liberal Democrats could never become effective because the local political scene was controlled by the Byrd Machines.

In order to get elected as a Democrat you had to run [in the] primary, and the primary -- the Republicans didn't have that many Republicans so they elected by convention, so if you won the primary, automatically you won, but in order to vote in the primary, vote in what they called the convention, the number of delegates you got to the Democratic convention depended on the number of votes for the Byrd Machine candidate who ran for senate, which was Harry Byrd, Jr., so even though you had the primary it was not that effective because we did not have as many votes. We increased the number of votes that went to the convention and they apportioned the number of delegates to the number of votes that went for Harry Byrd, and none of the blacks voted for Harry Byrd. We always voted for an independent, and if there was a Republican candidate, maybe for the Republican candidate, so we were very ineffective.

But as our vote increased and we became more powerful in the Democratic Party, they all shifted to the Republican Party, and the liberal element that was in the Republican Party was overtaken by the old Byrd Machine that were formerly Democrats.

So really, for instance, a good example of that is Mills Godwin who was the darling of the Byrd

Machine, he ran as the governor as a Democrat. He won. In fact I supported him as a Democrat. The first time I ran I was on the ticket, Democratic ticket, and he was the person who ran for governor at that particular time, and a lot of blacks voted for the straight democratic ticket. But as we became more powerful, he was -- he could only serve one term, but he was resurrected as a Republican, and he ran as a Republican, and all the old Byrd Machine people went on into the Republican Party and voted for him to be governor and he won as a Republican.

As a result of that now the Republican Party has become more like the old Byrd Machine, more conservative than the original Republican Party was. They got Linwood Holton in as a Republican. But that faction has now given over to the religious right and the old Byrd Machine, so we have a stumbling Democratic Party because we don't have a leader, and in order to have a strong party or strong movement, you have to have a leader, someone to set the pace, somebody to come up with a plan and somebody who is interested in building a party.

CARRINGTON: Now, the Byrd Machine, what did that represent in Virginia? What were the things that they wanted to make sure evolved?

REID: Okay. They were the old Carter Glass, Carter Glass was the one who wanted to perpetuate segregation, keep the status quo, to have a controlling class and a subservient class. They wanted the haves to keep having it, and the have-not's to keep not having it. So the Byrd Machine was a progression of the Carter Glass machine, and they wanted -- they were the dominant political

party. They wanted to maintain a segregated society. They are not interested in education. They feel that if you educate people you create problems to their existence. They wanted to have the money class. They wanted to make sure that the people who controlled government were the same class, not only state government but city government as well. They wanted to make sure that Main Street right, you know, the Main Street group and suburbia group, they wanted to keep the private clubs private. They wanted to keep the power structure as it is. They didn't want blacks or poor whites involved in any decision making.

CARRINGTON: In the sixties and seventies, during my time I was delivering newspapers to your house, "black power," "black is beautiful," black nationalism, what did those things mean during the sixties and seventies?

REID: Well, I think it did a lot to make people realize that the power comes from the people, and this is one of the things that we are missing now. Not only do we need black power, but we need white power as well. What they did is instilled some sense of being, some sense of power, some sense of worth. If you are segregated all your life and treated as a second-class person, you begin to accept it, and this is a movement which came about to say, no, you are as good as anybody else, and that you should not feel that you are inferior to anybody, that you have the power, you have the ability, you are just as smart, you are just as intelligent as anybody else, and that you are going to have to let everybody else know that, and that you are not going to accept being a second-class citizen any longer.

It does not mean that you have to have militancy. Martin Luther King said let's massive resistance. Let's show that we can achieve what we want to achieve by resisting the movement. If we feel the laws are unjust laws, we are not going to obey them, but we're not going to get into a fight because we you know you have the weapons so there's no need of us trying to fight you. We'll take lessons from Gandhi. He was able to defeat the British by just sitting down and being stubborn, and they were the ones -- by his movement, they were able to get liberty and get the British out of their country. And so this was the theory of the massive resistance -- not massive resistance, but massive disobedience, civil disobedience.

Now, any movement goes too far, you are going to have the militants who want to bomb, you are going to have militants who feel that the only way to beat is to kill. Fortunately, it didn't get to that point in our movement. We had level heads, like people at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the NAACP, the various other movements that were involved in it.

The idea was that in order to beat them, we have to resist these unjust laws, and we have to elect people into elected positions who are going to enforce these laws. So I think the black power movement gave persons who didn't have any hope an idea of self worth, that we can achieve if we work together and not be separated as some of the people want us to be separated.

In order to win, you always have to separate your opposition to get them fighting among themselves so that you can carry out your program, and that's always been in existence and it still exists today. Again, that's why I said we have to be ever vigilant because there are always people who want to have it all, and they don't mind taking it from those who have achieved a little bit. They don't want you to achieve any more and we have to be ever vigilant.

CARRINGTON: How did you see the Black Power movement embraced by the citizens of Richmond?

REID: Well, I think in any movement one of the things -- one of the problems that people have, they think that all blacks are homogeneous, you know, and that there's one black thought. There are several different ways to solve a problem, and I might think your approach is this way, the right approach is this way, you might think the right approach is that way, so that doesn't mean that you have to fight one another. You do what you have to do best if that's the way you think you resolve the problem, fine. This is the way we're going to resolve the problem. Fine. And maybe together we can resolve the problem.

There's always a movement to kill the messenger, and the message might be good, but if the message is good, the idea is you can't defeat the message if you kill the messenger, and this is what I think, you know, the opposition wanted to do, to say, well, that's the wrong way to approach it, you have to approach it this way. But if you have a problem, you have three different

ways to solve it, that's more effective than trying to solve it one way. There were some people were not in power who did not favor it and some people who did. So my feeling about it is that the more people who have solutions to a problem, the quicker you are going to get it solved. My solution might not be the best but I might think it's the best but that means I can't spend my time fighting your approach to the problem.

CARRINGTON: Thank you, sir.

END.