

Interview with **Stokely Carmichael**

May 5, 1986

Production Team: B

Camera Rolls: 423-427

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Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in *bold italics* was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize*.

00:00:02:00

[camera roll 423]

[sound roll 1361]

[slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: INCOMING.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT I WANT TO DO FIRST IS I—

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —JUST WANT IN YOUR BEST—IN, IN THE BEST WAY YOU CAN DESCRIBE FOR PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW, WHO HAVE NO IDEA ABOUT MISSISSIPPI, WHEN YOU CAME INTO MISSISSIPPI DESCRIBE THE, THE PLACE YOU WERE COMING INTO. THE THINGS THAT YOU WERE CONFRONTING AS A CIVIL RIGHTS WORKER IN MISSISSIPPI AT THAT TIME.

Carmichael: Well, you know, I had already seen it. So it wasn't anything new.

INTERVIEWER: OK ONE MORE FOR—SAY I SEE, I'VE ALREADY SEEN IT—

Carmichael: I had already seen it when I got to Mississippi. I had seen it, I'd already seen it so it wasn't anything new. I'd seen it in Maryland here. I'd seen it in Virginia. So it wasn't anything new and I'd see it on television.

INTERVIEWER: OK. WHEN YOU SAY IT WASN'T SOMETHING NEW WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? WHAT WASN'T NEW?

Carmichael: I mean the, the, the reaction of whites against, what they considered to be, an infraction on their status quo. So, I had seen the reaction. I had known it. Even if I had not known it, I'd known enough people in SNCC who worked in the Deep South who had seen it. So I knew exactly what to expect. I'd been already in a non-violent campaign. So I'd been arrested several times before. So it wasn't something shocking. The intensity and the rage of course was, well, was more intense than elsewhere, but it was the same thing. I, I can remember when we came in from New Orleans I saw, she had to be at least seventy-six years old, a seventy-six year old white lady with a cane raised and she was trembling with rage trying to hit me. And I was more worried about her dying of a heart attack than trying to hit me, you know. I mean I've never seen even such intensity, you know. They spat at us. They [laughs], they—it was really wild, you know. But I had seen it on television before so I knew exactly what to expect, you know.

00:01:58:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. WHY, WHY CONCENTRATE, WHY DID SNCC CONCENTRATING SO HARD [sic] ON MISSISSIPPI? WHAT WAS IT ABOUT MISSISSIPPI THAT BECAME AN IMPORTANT FOCUS FOR THE MOVEMENT ESPECIALLY FOR SNCC AT THAT TIME? SAY IN 19—WE'RE TALKING '62, '63 NOW.

Carmichael: It was the enemy's stronghold. It was the enemy's stronghold. Here's where the laws of segregation and the exploitation of the African masses were more strictly enforced than anywhere else in the country. Consequently, once you break this everything else is finished. Others had, others had different idea of taking on these little ones step by step, but we said, no hit 'em in Mississippi, finish 'em, and you'll finish all the others. Let's go.

00:02:40:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. WHEN YOU REFER TO, TO, TO BLACK PEOPLE USE A TERM THAT, THAT WE UNDERSTAND OR GET. THE AUDIENCE I KNOW—

Carmichael: [laughs] That'll be difficult for me.

INTERVIEWER: I KNOW THIS IS VERY DIFFICULT.

Carmichael: Yes, stumped by that one. [laughs]

[cut]

00:02:57:00

[cut]

INTERVIEWER: THINK ABOUT HOW PEOPLE WERE TALKING TO YOU. YOU'RE TALKING TO ME RIGHT NOW—

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —BUT THERE ARE PEOPLE GONNA WATCH THIS WHO HAVEN'T—

Carmichael: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: BE A VERY SIMPLE—REALLY A VERY SIMPLE UNDERSTANDING. SO TELL ME THE VOTE, MISSISSIPPI WHY, WHY ARE WE MOVING TO—WHY IS THE VOTE BECOMING THE STRATEGY? WHY IS THIS SOMETHING THAT WE REALIZE IS THE TARGET?

Carmichael: Well I think, you know, the people could see beyond their daily lives the relationship of the vote to the political subjugation which they were forced to endure. Since they had no political power they couldn't get their streets paved. They had nothing to say about the type of schools their children went to. They had absolutely nothing to say about the taxes. I mean they had absolutely nothing to say about anything that affected their lives. Consequently, they instinctively knew that this fight on the political front would be the fight that would come to better the conditions in which they lived. So instinctively they could see the necessity of the vote. And everybody who had responsibility to education, to having their roads paved, et cetera, et cetera while not everybody even cared to go and eat at a white hamburger stand even if they had the money to.

00:04:08:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW TELL ME ABOUT THE OTHER SIDE. TO THOSE WHO HAD THE POWER, WHAT DID THE BLACK VOTE MEAN? WHAT DID IT MEAN AND THEN HOW WAS IT—HOW WAS THAT TRANSLATED IN TERMS OF KEEPING BLACK PEOPLE FROM HAVING THE RIGHT TO VOTE?

Carmichael: Well it would mean, for those who were oppressing Africans there it would mean, it would mean they would have to lose a lot of economic benefits and economic profits. Consequently, they had to struggle for their very economic life to ensure that there were no changes in the political status quo.

INTERVIEWER: OK. LET'S CUT ONE SECOND PLEASE.

[cut]

00:04:44:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: TEN.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARK IT. GOT IT.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK. TALK TO ME ABOUT THIS. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN? THIS THING OF TAKING POWER. WE'RE TALKING ABOUT POWER NOW IN MISSISSIPPI. HELP ME TO UNDERSTAND THAT.

Carmichael: Well, if you're talking about here loss of economic profits, ill-gotten, through a fight on the political front then you're speaking seriously of a struggle to the death. Of course anyone knowing, at that time, just the history of Mississippi knew precisely what you're up against. We had seen Medgar Evers get shot in Mississippi, just for encouraging people to vote, in cold blooded, and we saw when his—the men who killed him was brought up to the court he was let scot-free. He walked right out of the court. He wasn't even arrested as a matter of fact. So it was clear to everyone what was going on. We had seen people's house burnt down. We'd seen people arrested for no reason. Some of us had been arrested. We had houses shot at. We had houses burnt down. We were facing nothing less than naked white terrorism. And we properly understood this if for a few years ago, before we went to Mississippi, the picture of Emmett Till was strongly imprinted upon our mind. Emmett Till was a little child, I don't think no more than thirteen years old, who whistles at a white girl and he was killed and thrown in Tallahatchie and I was—and all my life all I wanted was to get into Tallahatchie County and it was a terrorist county. It took years of work to get into Tallahatchie. They had people so intimidated, I mean, even I had to sneak in there late at night and come back out before the morning. Tallahatchie County. So all of this was—we came, we came to crack it wide open and nothing was going to stop us from doing that. No matter what it took, including our lives. That was already decided.

00:06:25:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, WITH THAT IN MIND HOW—DESCRIBE THE USE OF, OF NON-VIOLENCE TACTIC IN THE CITY. IT WAS, IT WAS LIKE AN IMAGE OF THE MOVEMENT. HOW DID THAT APPLY IN MISSISSIPPI THEN?

Carmichael: Well it doesn't really apply, you see, the question of non-violence does not apply when you take it—the—

INTERVIEWER: START AGAIN. I WAS TALKING.

Carmichael: The question of non-violence doesn't have any real relevance when you talk about organizing. Non-violence as a tactic and a public demonstration is this point affective. But if you're an organizer you're talking about being on the road to three, four, five o' clock in the morning sneaking on a plantation with the Ku Klux Klan laying in wait for you. You come down the highway they come chasing you. If you stop and be non-violent they're going to kill you. If you're dead we need another worker to come replace you to carry on the

people's struggle. So the logic of this was just incomprehensible. That's why the people who were involved in organization instinctively understood that non-violence was a tactic and consequently the tactical name of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee stayed there, but most organizers in the Deep South who worked for SNCC were carrying guns. And these contradictions were clear. I'm riding along in Mississippi. I am sent to Cleveland, Mississippi to have a meeting and a discussion and to do some work with a man called Amzie Moore who's with the NAACP. Fine. I get in the car with Mr. Moore we go. On the way back, I look at some cars and I see they look like they might be following us. [coughs] And I say to Mr. Moore, I said, these cars might be following us. He says, oh don't worry about it. I said, they might be seriously following us. He says, don't worry about it, and he reaches under the seat of his car and pulls out a brown paper bag with a gun in it. I feel very safe now. [laughs] I said, oh you're not going to have to worry about anything, but just pass it here. [laughs] You just keep on driving. [laughs] Don't worry about anything. [laughs] You see, the logic of non-violence is finished here, completely finished, completely finished yeah, yeah.

00:08:18:00

INTERVIEWER: THERE WAS, NOW I'M GONNA JUMP AHEAD NOW, BECAUSE THERE WAS A SPECIFIC TIME WHEN—AFTER THE MURDER OF THE, THE THREE CIVIL RIGHTS WORKERS ARE FOUND THAT THERE, THERE IS A DISCUSSION ABOUT USING VIOLENCE AT A DEMONSTRATION. YOU WERE THERE. YOU'RE—IT'S ACTUALLY IN YOUR DISTRICT. YOUR PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT THIS. YOU ARE THE ONE WHO REALLY SAYS, NO THIS, THIS IS NOT WHAT WE CAN DO RIGHT NOW. TALK TO ME ABOUT THAT. WHAT WAS THAT?

Carmichael: Well, it would not work with exactly what we were doing. Number one there is a difference between spontaneity and organization. Big difference. Of course, when you're organizing you must use spontaneity, but merely because you're using spontaneity doesn't mean you're organizing. Our people can be mobilized very easily, but to keep them organized is a serious task and we were laying the groundwork for organization in Mississippi. This spontaneous uprising, this spontaneous confrontation, not uprising, confrontation. This spontaneous confrontation would create problems for our organizing efforts. In the first place people would be arrested. Resources which should be continued for the organizing which is long range and more effective would have to be disrupted. Attitudes will have to be changed. Those who are doing quiet work now will come under more fire from whites who will, through this confrontation, want to augment their revenge, you know. So in all aspects it would disrupt the organizing efforts. It was simply a question between spontaneous activity versus the long haul for organization and always in that discussion I've always been against spontaneity always for organization. Now we understand there times when the people rise up and you have no choice, but to rise up with them. That's understood. But it was just a question and that one had been worked out in SNCC long before with a lot of struggle. It had been worked out as a matter of fact since the decis—decision which was made between organizing and public demonstrations, public accommodation demonstrations.

And so I went with organizing from the very beginning. I recognized the necessity for organizing above mobilizing the people.

INTERVIEWER: CAN WE CUT FOR A SECOND PLEASE? CAN YOU CUT?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YES.

[cut]

00:10:31:00

[slate]

[change to camera roll 424]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE'RE ROLLING. MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: WE'LL PICK UP FROM THIS, THIS—FREEDOM SUMMER. THERE WAS—THE IDEA TO BRING WHITE STUDENTS INTO MISSISSIPPI TO WORK WITH YOUR ORGANIZERS THERE. WHAT WERE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT THAT AND WHY DID YOU FEEL THAT WAY?

Carmichael: Well, you know, I guess the probably best way you can term was inside of SNCC there was nationalist forces and non-nationalist forces that would probably be the best way to pose it. Now SNCC and DC non-violent national group they were a strong nationalist base. You had, you know, Courtland Cox coming out of places like New York with Harlem and strong nationalist background. Myself also. And also having been born in the Caribbean, it means that our struggle here could not just be a struggle other than really deeply linked in nationalism. [coughs] So we had a strong nationalist—so there was a constant struggle inside of SNCC between the nationalist forces and, for lack of a better term 'course it is a vague term, the non-nationalist forces. And the summer project was opposed by the nationalist forces and all the problems which we outlined turned out to be absolutely correct. We'd said, number one, that doing that would begin to give only a false hope to the people. One. Because they would see all these things just for a summer and once the summer was over, it would be back to business as usual and we could not sustain it. One. Secondly, it would push local people into the background completely and totally and they would no longer be in, be in control of what would come because it would be too big for their capacities. And then here you would have this staff, this cadre, which you were developing, they would be retarded in their growth. Again only for the suffering of the people. There are many, many other points, but these are some of the points we harpered [sic] on. Of course, we were very strong about the point that we didn't also want a lot of white students to come down because we knew what would happen and the atmosphere would change and once again the African masses in Mississippi would think that they were saved by whites. So they were strong points not just

strategic points and tactical points, but strongly logical points here that really came to our struggle. We opposed it completely.

00:12:53:00

INTERVIEWER: WERE THERE MANY PEOPLE WHO FELT THAT MISSISSIPPI NEEDED TO BE OPENED UP TO THE REST OF THE COUNTRY? THAT THE ATTENTION OF THE COUNTRY NEEDED TO BE DRAWN TO MISSISSIPPI?

Carmichael: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: WAS—WHAT DID YOU FEEL THAT THIS WAS—

Carmichael: We were totally against that. For us here it was the question—

00:13:06:00

INTERVIEWER: AGAINST WHAT? YOU HAVE TO TELL ME WHAT YOU'RE AGAINST.

Carmichael: I'm sorry. I keep forgetting you now and then. There were, there were those, there were some of those inside of the organization who felt that this would help open up Mississippi immediately. But we were not concerned with opening up Mississippi. We were concerned with the level of organizing power that our people had inside the state of Mississippi and this was the different issue completely. So you could see there were really strong ideological struggles here, but as I said, the nationalist forces, we were completely defeated. We were the minority and there was a vote and we lost, but we were disciplined. We worked harder on the Mississippi project than anybody else because we had meeting, we said, they're wrong. Let's show them their wrong. Let's show them how wrong they are. Let us work harder on their project than they will and bring it quickly to its failure. And we worked harder than anybody else and no one who works for SNCC can deny the fact that the nationalist forces were the hardest working forces in Mississippi in 1964 Summer Project because, we knew, it be a failure and we worked to make it a failure. The second congressional district, into the area where most of us were gathered, was one of the best organized and had some of the most militant. That's stuff—of course not to, not to our thanks these people—not to our work these people were there, but the encouragement, the vitality, the enthusiasm, oh yes. The second congressional district played the most militant role throughout the entire—all the way up through the MFDP.

00:14:24:00

INTERVIEWER: THERE, THERE ARE THOSE WHO SAY THAT BY BRINGING IN STUDENTS FOR THE SUMMER WHAT YOU WERE DOING WAS NOT ONLY DRAWING THE ATTENTION OF THE COUNTRY TO MISSISSIPPI, BUT WHAT YOU WERE ALSO DOING WAS OPENING UP LOCAL MISSISSIPPIANS TO—A, A, A

CHANCE TO, TO, TO ESTABLISH SOME RELATIONSHIP—LET'S CUT FOR A SECOND I WANT TO TALK—

[cut]

00:14:44:00

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: GO AHEAD.

INTERVIEWER: OK, SO TALK TO ME ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT THE SUMMER AND WHAT TOOK PLACE IN YOUR DISTRICT AND WHY.

Carmichael: OK. We worked in the second congressional district, that's the delta area, that's flatland. Here your work is to—'cause here you have the plantation strength, this is where the plantation system took its real roots. So here, you're still talking about a legacy of a plantation system. A big white house with the shacks and what they call sharecropping for practical purposes slavery because these peasants, Abraham Lincoln freed and he freed them with our money, so the day he freed them they were in debt and they stayed in debt until the 1960s. So that means you had families who had lived on this plantation for long time. If not were traded off by another white man, just like in slavery, because they were in debt. Because the minute they were freed they came out of freedom where could they go? They had no money. So if they stayed on the plantation the boss man would say, OK you can stay, but from now on you're free you ain't got no food, you ain't got no rent, you can—I'll lend it to you and that's where it started and that's where it was up until the 1960s. The system had not changed at all. We went straight from freedom into debt. I mean we were slaves and didn't need money and we went into debt when we never even—[laughs] money never even touched our hands and we were dead in debt. So you can understand the situation. You would have a plantation here with about—houses with all these plantations and you would have to go on the plantation and you would still have the system with the boss man, that is the slave driver, the overseer he was still there and he always had his gun on a truck and, of course, it's a, it's a, it's a capitalist country so if you trespass on private property you can be killed. So you've already got legal grounds to be killed and in addition to this you are, what they consider, to be a Communist agitator whom they want to kill anyways so you're inviting death on legal grounds. So, you can imagine the use of white students here would, would be most impractical. You couldn't send them on a plantation together. What would an integration people be doing on a plantation in this—you can only send groups here that were not integrated. You had to send all African groups here. They would have to go onto the plantation system. The integrated groups couldn't do it. In the district in the towns of Greenwood and Greenville, Greenwood because of hard work and also Greenville because of hard work plus a different type of atmosphere, which they were trying to create in the state of

Mississippi we could use whites and did use them inside of our district. Now we must point out that there was a struggle inside of SNCC, as we said, about bringing down the white students and we, ourselves, were in the corner of the nationalists against it, but we were glad that this contradiction which existed in SNCC would not go outside of SNCC because we had a bigger enemy than we did inside of SNCC; these white terrorists. And if we were divided these white terrorists would be advancing their cause to our peril. So we understood that this, this contradiction which we had must be—remain inside the organization. So most white students who came and worked in our district would never say that they were treated hostile or—many of them didn't even know what occurred inside the discussion until after they had served and read about it in party files et cetera, et cetera. Even those who worked in the second, in Greenwood, Bob Zellner, who was white, was head of the, the project there and others played roles in Greenville et cetera, et cetera.

00:18:08:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, WHEN THE, WHEN THE THREE WORKERS ARE MISSING AND FOUND DEAD THERE MANY PEOPLE WHO THAN BEGAN TO SAY THAT THIS WAS THE ONLY REASON THEY WERE BROUGHT DOWN TO MISSISSIPPI ANYWAY. THEY WANTED TO GET SOME WHITES KILLED IN MISSISSIPPI. WHAT DID YOU, WHAT DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT? WHERE, WHERE WERE YOU—

Carmichael: Well, I made no remorse, no special remorse. I mean I'd been in Mississippi before and I'd seen Africans killed in Mississippi so, you know, if I've seen Africans killed, seen white killed does not upset me anymore than it sees African being killed. I'm just equally upset at a worker being killed. So this only had an effect upon the—for the country, but for me anybody can die for freedom. I have no, no—

00:18:48:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU SEEM, YOU SEEM TO HAVE A VERY CLEAR IDEA THAT, THAT—TO BE ENGAGED IN A STRUGGLE LIKE THIS MEANS THAT—

Carmichael: It meant death. There was no question. It meant death.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT, WHAT MEANT DEATH?

Carmichael: Working, working in the struggle meant death. There was no question here. Everybody knew that it meant death. All you have to do is glance at the history of Mississippi. It meant absolutely death. There was—I said there was nothing, but naked terrorism working here. Nothing but that. It meant constant harassment by the police forces and by the forces of naked terrorism; the Klu Klux Klan and the White Citizens' Council and sometimes and all times both were working together just different tactics at different times. But all used any tactic any time. A policeman can shoot you just as quickly as a Klu Klux clansmen could. So there was no question here. This was naked terrorism.

00:19:35:00

INTERVIEWER: AND YOU WERE, YOU WERE TWENTY-TWO YEARS OLD BY THEN? AT THIS TIME.

Carmichael: No.

INTERVIEWER: HOW OLD WERE YOU THEN? TWENTY YEARS OLD?

Carmichael: Yeah could be. Faced it when I first started facing it I was about nineteen.

INTERVIEWER: NINETEEN?

Carmichael: Well, that's all right. You go to war you face the same thing.

00:19:46:00

INTERVIEWER: YES, BUT CAN, CAN YOU HELP ME TO, TO UNDERSTAND OR TO, TO GET A FEELING FOR YOUR OWN—I MEAN DID YOU EXPERIENCE FEAR? WERE YOU AFRAID? WERE, WERE—DID YOU DEAL WITH FEAR IN TERMS OF YOUR OTHER—YOUR, YOUR PEOPLE WHO WORKED WITH YOU? HOW DID YOU—

Carmichael: No, no it's just war that's all. I mean a soldier in war can't know fear bullets are flying everywhere. I mean fear is just going to immobilize you. You're dead already. So no, no, no here there's no fear. Here you're just in war. Bullets are flying and you're seeing other people die. Everybody knew Jimmie Travis got shot in a car, in a car did he? Yes. Well I drove the same road because it's right outside of Greenwood. I worked there. So any night I'm riding down the road anybody can shoot me. So there's no fear here. I just have to learn to drive affectively so that when they chase me, I'll be able to dodge them and they'll have run into a truck or run into a ditch or leave them in the smoke. There was no fear here. There's just clever response. Survival instincts at its best. [laughs]

INTERVIEWER: CUT PLEASE.

[cut]

00:20:47:00

[slate]

[change to camera roll 425]

INTERVIEWER: WHERE I WANT TO PICK IT UP—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THIRTEEN

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —IS GIVE ME A CLEAR IDEA OF THE DIFFERENCES. OK. BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES AND WHERE THOSE DIFFERENCES—AND HOW THOSE DIFFERENCES ARE GOING TO LEAD US TO, TO A NEW APPROACH...

Carmichael: Now, we, we want to, to go back again and emphasize that the two names we gave them was nationalist and non-nationalist again for lack of better terms, more precise terms. And even, I guess, at this time, if you're talking about this time, probably be the terms given at this time too.

00:21:21:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, OK, IN TERMS OF NATIONALISM AND NON-NATIONALISM ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT THOSE WHO SEE THE STRUGGLE OF BLACK PEOPLE'S STRUGGLES—

Carmichael: Exactly. Must lead it, must—and it depends—

INTERVIEWER: THEN GIVE IT TO ME THAT WHEN INSTEAD OF NATIONALIST AND NON-NATIONALIST.

Carmichael: OK. For those nationalist forces then they would see, number one here, the necessity of an independent organization for Africans in the country. One. Number two, that this organization must be led by them, financed by them, and ideologically controlled by them. Number three, that the vote then for them only became a tool not a tool to continue, but a tool to organize to people [sic]. For them it was the level of organization of the oppressed masses that would decide the question of victory. On the other side you had, what we would consider to be the non-nationalist forces, they felt here that coalition forces were necessary and just enough pressure was necessary to be brought upon the state of Mississippi to crack it open and make it part of America. There were others here who were screaming on the nationalist front that we're not trying to be part of America. We're trying to change all of America. You understand? And we're not just trying to make Mississippi come into part of America. Of course some on the other side could not comprehend that, that's understandable. Even some who were shouting it on the nationalist side did not comprehend it. That too is understandable. So on the non-nationalist forces you had those who would see that publicity would be a weapon because all they want is to expose how dangerous and bad Mississippi is to the rest of the nation and the conscience of the rest of the nation would quickly wake up and say, oh we're doing terrible things. Let's try and make it like Chicago. You understand? Our statement was clear. When you get the vote we—the nationalists used to say all the time, when you get the vote don't get excited 'cause they got the vote in Chicago and they still poor and powerless. So there were those then on the non-nationalist side who felt just bringing them in, getting them the vote would solve the problems. This crystallized around the issue of joining the Democratic Party and not joining the Democratic Party. The nationalist forces did not want to join the Democratic Party. They wanted the

Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to be an independent party independent of the Democratic Party and then to from this party build an independent party for Africans throughout America. Those in the nationalist—non-nationalist forces felt that, no, you know, that they could get into the Democratic Party and when they got in everything would be all right. It would just be like, I guess, Chicago and New York, you know. So, these were the real struggles. Now even those on the nationalist forces including myself were against, you know, what was being pushed since again we were the minority. We pushed the program very hard. We worked very hard at the Atlantic City Convention. If you would look there you would find us working very hard because we knew it wouldn't happen. And when the Democratic Party did reject the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, as [sirens] we knew it would, and even the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party—

INTERVIEWER: SORRY, I GOT TO STOP YOU. SI—

Carmichael: Sirens, I got it. Yeah.

[cut]

00:24:07:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK.

[sync tone]

Carmichael: As we said—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: JUST A MOMENT SORRY.

Carmichael: No problem.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: START AGAIN.

00:24:14:00

Carmichael: I got it. As we were saying there were two forces inside of SNCC and we crystallized around the point of the Democratic Party. The non-nationalist forces felt that pressure from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party plus liberal pressure from throughout the country, Labor Union, church, the same coalition of King even including King would allow for them to enter into the Democratic Party. The nationalist forces felt that we didn't even want to get into the Democratic Party. That we had organized force and this force should be used—should be spread to fight the Democratic Party from outside not inside the party where we would have our own control of how to use the party. This was the struggle. This was the class struggle. Of course, as we said the nationalist forces went and struggled at Atlantic City. Dr. King himself, who was asked by SNCC, the non-nationalist forces, to come and help, you know, took a position against the MFDP at the Democratic Convention and they brought him out on crutches to try and change the minds of the people.

So, once—we cannot say that this decision, which the people took, the MFD—MFDP took was imposed upon them by the nationalist forces because they brought out King, they brought out Bayard Rustin, they brought out Walter Ruther, they brought out Hubert Humphrey, they brought out every possible—the biggest political forces the Democratic Party had and since they were going to be the winning party they had all of them before the people explaining to the people why they should accept this filthy compromise and unanimously the MFDP said, no. So they couldn't say that this was imposed by the nationalist forces. This was a decision of the people. So it showed here that the nationalist forces were properly in tune with the people's aspirations and the non-nationalist forces were not.

00:25:50:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. CUT FOR A SECOND.

Carmichael: That one's kind of a rough statement.

00:25:54:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: YEAH.

Carmichael: I ended up with saying that—how you have to cut it but it's a true—

[cut]

00:25:56:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: FIFTEEN.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARK.

[sync tone]

00:25:59:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. WHAT WAS—WHAT WERE THE GOALS OF THE MFDP, OF, OF THE MFDP CHALLENGE FOR THOSE IN MISSISSIPPI AS WELL AS THOSE ORGANIZING IN MISSISSIPPI?

Carmichael: Again, we see through SNCC as two different goals. For the nationalist forces the goal was the organization of the people. That organization which was built, the

Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which belonged to the people which they controlled and which was a militant organization which was uncompromising and it had a network of poor people in it so it really was a poor people's party and a really strong party. So for the non-nationalist [sic] forces this is what we wanted this was the goal. Now we wanted to broaden this goal throughout the country. That's what the nationalist forces—so for them the MFDP the challenge and all that was nothing other than a tactic to help make a strong party. For the non-nationalist forces, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party represented a solution. Number one, they, they assumed that the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party would be seated inside the Democratic Party and perhaps [sic] allow maybe Mrs. Hamer or Mr. Aaron Henry to run and become a senator or a congressman from the state of Mississippi. That's what they really believed and, of course, if you looked they had all the backing of liberal congressman and senators who were speaking and the atmosphere and the country at that time et cetera, et cetera. So they really, honestly believed that they were going to acquire this. The nationalist forces knew there was no chance or no hope for this. That this would not happen. But since they honestly believed it when the compromise was rejected and they themselves had to reject it, you must understand it now, it's not even that they wanted it. The nationalist forces did not have to fight to tell the MFDP not to accept the compromise. The non-nationalist forces were telling them not to accept the compromise. They themselves were shocked at really what was given so it meant that they themselves, coming with the hope of having the solution, having to deny the very solution which they gave in were finished once the compromise had to be rejected. They had no new place to turn. They couldn't now say let's go back again to the MFDP even though they tried now with the congressional challenge. You understand? So—but it was just a continuation of something that had already been finished. The nationalist forces knew it. So for them it was just a question of building a party.

00:28:09:00

INTERVIEWER: SO, SO, IN THE END, WHAT DID ALL THIS MEAN? WHAT DID THIS MEAN IN TERMS OF WHERE THE MOVEMENT IS GOING, IN TERMS OF MISSISSIPPI, IN TERMS OF BLACK POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT IN, IN THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OR IN, IN THE NATIONAL PARTIES AT ALL? WHAT DID ALL THIS MEAN?

Carmichael: In the end it meant that the only program that SNCC had was, in fact, the independent political party. But this minority force which had it had in the struggle, had so, had become—this minority force which had the correct path couldn't carry the weight of the majority force which didn't dis—disagreed with this—stop.

INTERVIEWER: YES. LET'S, LET'S STOP.

Carmichael: I know what I want to say. I know—

00:28:46:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Carmichael: —precisely. OK, let's go.

[cut]

00:28:48:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SIXTEEN.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: NOW BEEP IT FOR ME.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SECOND MARK, SIXTEEN.

INTERVIEWER: GO.

00:28:53:00

Carmichael: Once the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party compromise was rejected by the MFDP, the non-nationalist forces had no further solution. It was only the nationalist forces that had the solution; an independent political party. The nationalist forces left the state of Mississippi completely to the non-nationalist forces. Here, of course, their only alternative to the people was to join the Democratic Party, work with the poverty program and try to—or just leave the state themselves. The nationalist forces, then, went to concentrate in Alabama as a project even though all of them didn't go to Alabama some went to Atlanta some went elsewhere, but everyone was feeding in on the, on the project which we were trying, the small project just as a test case the Lowndes County Freedom Organization which became the Black Panther Party by its symbol. So consequently, this was the only alternative that SNCC had and that's why the Black Panther Party, though it was only organized in one county in Alabama, had more noise in 1965 than Mississippi did when all the counties we had organized with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Thus again we showed that the nationalist forces were absolutely correct in their decisions to move that way. Of course, with the coming of this, this force, this, coming of this force to the fore that is the nationalist forces it meant that the non-nationalist forces would fall out and everybody would begin to attack the organization to destroy it because the organization was coming out to be something other than what those liberal forces had conceived it to be.

00:30:19:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. NOW WITH THESE TWO SEPARATE FORCES EMERGING SAY IN MISSISSIPPI THROUGH—DURING THE SUMMER OF '64, WHAT DID THEY REPRESENT? WHAT WERE WE SEEING HAPPENING IN SNCC AT THAT—WHAT

WAS EMERGING NOW? ALL RIGHT? PUT IT IN A CONTEXT. SO WHAT WERE WE SEEING IN '64 AND THINGS LIKE THAT.

Carmichael: Actually, what you were seeing in '64 was the question of what should be the relationship to, to our people to the Democratic Party and to the political structure in America in general. Should they participate in the system with full faith in the system? Or should they understand that the system has to be destroyed in order for them to be free? That was the question that was always coming to the fore. Of course, those who opted to participate inside the system had demonstrated—I'm sorry we're going ahead of time. You said to keep it there. Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT I'M TRYING TO GET YOU—I WANT YOU—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I'VE GOTTA CUT.

00:31:10:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: OK. I WANT YOU TO—

Carmichael: I'm sorry I was gonna come right up to today.

[cut]

00:31:14:00

[slate]

[change to camera roll 426]

[change to sound roll 1363]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: SEVENTEEN.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK, WHEN YOU COME INTO SELMA AGAIN WHERE—WHAT, WHAT DO YOU ENCOUNTER WHEN YOU GET HERE?

Carmichael: Well there are many, many forces here. You must try very carefully to understand them. In the first place, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and the

Southern Christian Leadership Conference had one conflict going on. Inside of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee—

INTERVIEWER: STOP.

Carmichael: —I'm coming step by step. I'm coming step by step.

INTERVIEWER. BUT YOU SAID—NOW TELL ME WHERE—

Carmichael: I'm coming—

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME THAT WE'RE IN SELMA FIRST—

Carmichael: Oh I'm sorry.

00:31:42:00

INTERVIEWER: —THEN TELL ME WHAT THIS CONFLICT IS.

Carmichael: I'm so sorry. I thought that we—OK I forget, all right. After the Mississippi challenge in Atlantic City, we come back to Mississippi. As we were saying, SNCC was, in fact, Mississippi even though it had other projects outside of Mississippi in Arkansas, in Maryland, in southwest Georgia, et cetera, et cetera even Atlanta, Georgia. But SNCC was Mississippi. Whatever Mississippi SNCC decide, SNCC decided. The Waveland Conference then becomes the most important conference at this time for SNCC. It is at this Waveland Conference that the decision is made for those who do no longer want to work within the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party heading the Democratic Party to find another area of work and demonstrate their alternative project. Here many of us who were in positions, myself for an example, resigned from the Mississippi staff and went to work for the Alabama staff to put the idea of independent party inside of Alabama black belt. Of course, SNCC had been working in projects in Alabama for years. Even while Mississippi SNCC was going on, Alabama SNCC was going on for years. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference which used mobilization as its technique and method and not organization would come into conflict with SNCC. The same conflict we spoke about in Mississippi that we just discussed there. When they tried to have the demonstrations and I was against it. It was the same thing. The method of SCLC was to come through to a town that was suffering under oppression, rabble rouse the town, agitate the town, bring out the town, bring the town together and mobilize activity to hit against levels of injustice. Here, of course, Dr. Martin Luther King, being one of the greatest mobilizers, played a crucial role. And so once you knew that Dr. King was coming to a town that was it. That town was going to turn out. There was no question here. While you could understand some of the problems that SNCC would have, at this point, SNCC is becoming strong. Known as an independent organization. It has its projects going on in Alabama. It needs funds to keep that project going so if its image is no projected in the press it will not get the money it needs. This is not my problem only an organizational problem. Of course, consequently, becomes part of my problem. I may disagree with the approach that SNCC takes to solve the problem, but it is a problem. Martin Luther King would come in with SCLC into a project where SNCC was working, SCLC

would get all of the credit, not only for the work done, but were projected and would get all of the monies from outside. SNCC would get none. So James Foreman who stands—James Foreman whose task it is to see that we get funds, this is his biggest problem. You understand it? You must see the priority of problems we have. For me this is not the biggest problem. It is, however, a problem for SNCC.

00:34:21

INTERVIEWER: WHAT IS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM FOR YOU?

Carmichael: For me the biggest problem is a political problem. Number one—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WATCH CAMERA FRAME TAKE ONE.

00:34:28:00

INTERVIEWER: GO AHEAD. WHAT IS, WHAT IS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM?

Carmichael: For me the biggest problem is the political problem. That is, we have a project going, Martin Luther King is coming in anyway, we cannot stop him so it doesn't make sense to fight him. See where we can use him and use him effectively for the organization and for our work. We cannot fight him. He is too powerful in the press. We cannot fight him. He is too well respected. We cannot fight him. When decisions are to be made, if he makes a decision if we go against it that decision will come anyway. These are just political realities. Of course, this power that he has does not match our fight inside of Alabama with the people we've organized. We'd already demonstrated that in Mississippi when we went up against him in Mississippi and the people rejected him. So that was not the struggle. But the immediate struggle, again, was the struggle of the money and the projection of SNCC. Foreman's tactic, which was a tactic I disagreed with, was to fight SCLC tooth and nail to try and get the publicity that SNCC needed. John Lewis' position was not to do this as it could not be. You must remember, John Lewis came off the SCLC executive committee to become chairman of SNCC. So you can see his close ties to SCLC and his total refusal to fight Dr. King on any issue. You can even go back to the March in Washington where it was when King asked him to take out the words that he took out the words. So, you can see here the contradictions that are developing. For us, who were decided, that what we wanted to do was to organize an independent political party, since the march was going from Montgomery— from Selma to Montgomery and the only county between Selma and Montgomery was Lowndes County this would work for us perfectly. King would mobilize forces in Lowndes County because we had very few contacts. Lowndes County had a population close to eighty-five percent African with not one registered voter. You must understand the terrorism of the county. When you come to understand that this county bordered Montgomery where King carried on his movement in 1957 and even though many of the people in Lowndes County participated in Montgomery, in the Montgomery movement they never transferred the Montgomery movement into Lowndes County which is most unusual in the struggle. If you look at our struggle many times people contacted one county would take it to another county. But even though many of those who came to join the Lowndes County Freedom

Organization began, after a while, to share their experiences with us and even told them—even Mr. Hulett was once a body-guard in front of King's house in Montgomery.

00:36:51:00

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Carmichael: So you can see what we did, was, as King marched through there with all the enthusiasm, we collected this enthusiasm and built the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. *So, the Black Panther Party was built off of the mobilization that King sprout out inside of Lowndes County. And he did us a perfect job.* That's why Lowndes County was able to organize itself within one year and half and caused all the contradictions it caused around the country.

INTERVIEWER: OK. LET'S CUT PLEASE.

[cut]

00:37:18:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK. GIVE ME YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT THE MARCH AND WHAT YOU FELT ABOUT THE, YOU KNOW, THE MARCHERS.

Carmichael: OK, the march itself I wasn't very enthusiastic about. Clearly. So here I was in total harmony with SNCC people. *We were against the march—I too was against it. But, again, I said it was a fait accompli. We couldn't stop it, King was going to have it, and there was no way to stop it. So, what you had to do now is make a positive out of a negative.* Consequently, I marched along with the marchers, but I wasn't considering myself part of the march. And *what I did was, when it entered Lowndes County, I would seek out all the people from Lowndes County who came to the march. I would get them, write down their names, record it, their addresses, and tell them, you know, listen, we're going to stay in Lowndes County, we're not just going to pass through, and they would be excited to hear that.* So while, as I said, most of the march stayed in Lowndes County because Lowndes County is the only county between them and Montgomery County.

00:38:12:00

INTERVIEWER: WHY, WHY DID YOU DISAGREE TO MARCH?

Carmichael: Because it would not serve any purpose. It was the same—what?

INTERVIEWER: GIVE ME BOTH STATEMENTS.

Carmichael: All right. It's back to the Miss—back to the Mississippi Greenwood, Mississippi again. You would come mobilize the people kick up a lot of dust and then leave. Maybe a legislation would be passed, but there would be no organized force here even to take proper advantage of that legislation which was passed. So consequently for me the organizational power is still the only means to advance the people's struggle scientifically and properly. Not the mobilization. Only the organization. So, consequently, since the march would not lead on the path of SCLC or any better organization they were just going to mobilize and leave like everywhere else. Then for us, at least, since they would kick up the dust we, who were going to be there, would catch this dust and keep this dust and carry it on where we must go. So I was against the march completely for that reason. But there was nothing we could do. They were going to kick up the dust so what I did was found it. Got the names and from there we went on quickly and rapidly into Lowndes County.

00:39:08:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW IN, IN CLAY'S, CLAY CARSON'S BOOK YOU, YOU'RE QUOTED AS SAYING, SAYING THAT YOU WERE VERY BITTER AND AN INDIFFERENCE THAT WAS SHOWN TOWARD—TO THE NATION AND THEIR RESPONSE, TO SAY, JIMMY, JIMMY LEE JACKSON'S DEATH V. REVEREND REEBES. CAN YOU JUST TELL—TALK TO ME ABOUT THAT BARRIER?

Carmichael: What's understood goes all the way back again to the '64 summer project that when Schwerner and Goodman got killed everybody forgot about Chaney. So once again, **what it seemed to me is that the movement itself is playing into the hands of racism, because what you want is the nation to be upset when anybody is killed, especially when one of us is killed. You understand? So we played into the hands of racism. And it's almost like, you know, for us to be recognized a white person must be killed. But what are you saying?** I mean, we're dying. We died out of proportion to numbers and yet even today when people speak they will tell you once again Goodman and Schwerner. The names are recorded throughout. Yet Jimmy Lee Jackson, Herbert Lee, understand, so many, many, many names not even known. Even the names of the three children blown up in a church in Birmingham, Alabama are not as well-known as the names of Chaney—name of Goodman and Schwerner. So here again you're just playing into the hands of racism. So, of course we're bitter. We're still bitter, to this day, about it. Because it still means that our life is not worth, even in death, the life of anybody else. Their life is still more precious.

00:40:32:00

INTERVIEWER: AFTER, AFTER REEB'S DEATH, PRESIDENT JOHNSON, ON, ON THE AIR MADE A SPEECH FOR THE VOTING RIGHTS BILL AND IN CONCLUSION HE SAID, WE SHALL OVERCOME, AND USED WORDS QUOTING KING. WHAT DID YOU FEEL ABOUT THAT TIME WHEN THE VOTING RIGHTS AND HIS LEGISLATION—

Carmichael: It was clear hypocrisy, clearly, and not only that it was, for us, the nationalist forces, clear the failure of the non-nationalist forces. This is exactly what they wanted.

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME WHAT, WHAT IS HYPOCRISY THEN?

Carmichael: The hypocrisy of Johnson. Johnson's total hypocrisy. Johnson didn't want to do any of those things. He was forced to do all of it. And then having to do it he did the least he could do and tried to make believe as if he was really doing something. So his singing, we shall overcome, in hypocrisy was—most people in SNCC were not happy. Now, the non-nationalist forces some and other organizations were happy, but most people in SNCC were not at all happy and saw the statement for the hypocritical statement that it was. Especially since SNCC already faced Johnson in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenge. We had faced him so we knew what he was. So when he now, who faced us and threw us filth after people had shed their blood to have full participation in the Democratic Party, would come back and sing, we shall overcome. You know, we felt like vomiting.

00:41:47:00

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Carmichael: And we were younger then too, you know. [laughs]

INTERVIEWER: HOW MUCH FILM HAVE WE LEFT THERE?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: ZERO.

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: LET'S CUT FOR A SECOND.

[cut]

00:41:49:00

[slate]

[change to camera roll 427]

INTERVIEWER: —THE TACTICS OF TIME.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: NINETEEN.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARK IT.

[sync tone]

Carmichael: Before—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: JUST A MOMENT.

INTERVIEWER: GO AHEAD.

Carmichael: The Vietnam conflict for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and its militant position was decided long before they gave to the Peace Movement the slogan, hell no, we won't go! This decision started as a result of a racist congressman in areas where SNCC workers were working, trying to get us drafted. So you can understand how the struggle started long before Vietnam. For example, Eastman would find out that I was working in his district and maybe that I was born in New York or my draft was in New York and, consequently, he would send a note to my draft board to draft me. So even from the time, long before the struggle started, we had to resist a draft in order to keep on fighting in the struggle. Well, obviously, it would be difficult for them to convince me, who was getting shot at in Mississippi for getting the right to vote, to go to Vietnam and shoot somebody to give somebody else the right to vote. Obviously, the logics [sic] here was too clear. We had no choice, but to resist a draft and not only resist, but to con—continue the struggle. So we had two objectives. The first objective, actually, was to continue the struggle while resisting the draft. So even before resisting the draft became a thing inside of SNCC it started since '62, '63 we had been in this struggle. So once the Vietnam War was building and obviously we had no intentions to go to fight to give the vote to anybody since we couldn't vote in Mississippi, you understand? There was no question here. This was already decided long before the militant aspect of—we said, hell no, we won't go! And even if you look, you will see that the Peace Movement itself, which SNCC was aligned to, had the slogan, not of hell, we won't go! They didn't want draft resistance they wanted peace inside—they just wanted America to stop the war. You know, that's what they wanted. It was SNCC that wanted destruction of the draft. And the reason why we needed, was sorted reasons 'cause they attacked us and we began to see the draft, in fact A) as a political weapon against our struggle. So we had to go to destroy the draft and throughout the struggle you will see the militancy of SNCC, wherever people speak for SNCC, they will be going against the draft. As a matter of fact some of the first arrests and some of the longest arrests SNCC faces, as a matter of fact, where around this draft with the Bob Stone and those others in Atlanta where we went to destroy. And you will see the fight with Cleve Sellers going to jail and at this time they were really attacking us. Attacking us, attacking us and by the time we got ready we said, OK, enough time playing with 'em. Just tell 'em, hell no, we won't go! And let's spread it out there. Of course, we were lucky because at this time the Nation of Islam also had Mohammed Ali who also was taking the same positions. So you had, and of course we must be clear here, the Nation of Islam had always taken a position against the War in Vietnam. The—against, against going into the army. Honorable Elijah Mohammed went to jail in World War II not because, like Bayard Rustin and others that he was non-violent or pacifist, but because he simply said, I ain't going to fight in the white man's army. That's all. So their tradition gave a strong boost to SNCC's tradition—SNCC's fight now against the draft. So while they were not an activist group coming out to—SNCC would to picket and to

make demonstrations, no matter what forms, at least they philosophical backing and their position of all their members not to be drafted was a strong back up to SNCC.

00:45:20:00

INTERVIEWER: IN—WHAT DID—BEING FROM MISSISSIPPI IN '64 WHAT DID THE, THE CIVIL RIGHTS BILL IN '64 WHAT DID IT MEAN TO THOSE IN MISSISSIPPI?

Carmichael: Well in 1964 the passing of the civil rights bill meant very little to people in Mississippi. Again, because simply since early days they had decided that the vote and political power was the way to begin to find the proper key to the solution of the problem. So the '64 bill was not even so, so strongly applauded or anything it just passed, you know, just, oh they passed a bill today, fine. All the people, I'm not talking about SNCC people, among the people, oh they passed it. Among SNCC people the party wouldn't even be mentioned. You know.

INTERVIEWER: LET'S CUT FOR A SEC.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:46:06:00

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