Interview with **Hollis Watkins**
November 9, 1985
Jackson, Mississippi
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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 340]

[sound roll 1319]

[slate]

INTERVIEWER: WHAT I'M GOING TO DO IS I'M GOING TO TALK—

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —FIRST ABOUT WHEN YOU FIRST GOT INTO THE MOVEMENT, DESCRIBE THAT TIME, BEING IN MCCOMB, BEING NINETEEN, AND THE KINDS OF THINGS THAT GOT YOU INVOLVED AT THE TIME. OK, WHAT GOT YOU INTO THE MOVEMENT AT THAT TIME IN MCCOMB, AT NINETEEN?

Watkins: [pause] Ok, are we ready?

INTERVIEWER: MM-HMM.

Watkins: During the early '60's, the thing that got me involved in the movement in McComb, being about the age of nineteen—I was disgusted with the situation in McComb, the condition that black people especially had to go through with, and was about to give up and leave the state, cause I had just finished high school, and I went to Los Angeles and had the option to stay there and while I was there I was looking for a job, actually to stay. But

somehow, while I was looking for a job I began to see the Freedom Riders on TV, and that was exciting to me because it seemed as if there were young people that was doing something about the condition in which they were involved in. And I felt that I wanted to check them out and find out what they were about and see if this was something that I really wanted to do. So because of that, I came home, and I was real excited because they had announced on TV one day that the freedom riders was headed to Mississippi, so I left Los Angeles, stopped looking for a job, and came back to Mississippi. After getting back to Mississippi—I guess there was a news blackout in our area, because I didn't hear anything about them at that time on the news. But fortunately within a week or so a friend of mine came and told me that she had heard that Dr. Martin Luther King, and some other big people were going to be in McComb, and she told me where and when she had heard that they were gonna be there. So I went and told a few other friends of mine about it, and we decided that we would go out to McComb to check them out, to see what they were about. And the reason I say go out to McComb is because I was born out in the rural, which is about seven or eight miles from the little town of Summit. Summit is about three miles from McComb. So when we got to McComb, we went to the old Burglund town supermarket upstairs at the Masonic temple. We, met some people and we told them that we had heard Dr. Martin Luther King were [sic] gonna be there in town, and some other big people. One of the people we met was Bob Moses, and he told us that he didn't know anything about Dr. Martin Luther King coming to McComb, but he and some other students and young people were there working on voter registration, trying to get people registered to vote so that they could become first-class citizens. And he asked if we felt that we would be interested in giving them a hand. So I asked him to explain the process a little bit to me, and he went through the process of explaining how, in order to become a registered voter, you had to fill out a, a form, a voter registration form, and then interpret a section of the constitution. And he said that once you do that successfully you become a registered voter. At that time he gave us sections of the Mississippi constitution and gave us a specific section, of which we all had to interpret. Once we did that he looked it over and told us that if, we had gone to the registrar's office and did that, then we would be registered voters. Then to me it wasn't much to it, and I felt that I could help do it, so I told him that I would definitely, you know, help to get people registered to vote. All I needed him to do was to tell us what process that we went about in doing that.

00:04:15:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK, CAN YOU SLIDE—SLIDE JUST A LITTLE BIT CLOSER TO THE LENS LINE.

[cut]

INTERVIEWER: —YOU'VE NEVER MET BEFORE—

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: HE'S NEW. GIVE ME YOUR IMPRESSIONS OF THIS PERSON THAT YOU'RE MEETING THIS FIRST TIME—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: IT'S ALL YOURS, NOW.

INTERVIEWER: —AND BOB MOSES AT THE TIME YOU FIRST MET.

Watkins: The first time when I met Bob, he really impressed me because he was young, and he was very calm in, in the way he expressed himself—seemed to have been a young person that was from the North that had Mississippi interests at heart, and he was the kind of person that seemed to have had patience and had a lot of tolerance in explaining in complete details. And the way he related to people, you never would have known that he had been a school teacher, what have you, up North, because he related to, us as just one of the, the other local people, you know, in the community. And I think that was one of the things that made us, you know, like Bob and just willing to work and go all out, you know, for him, because he never appeared to be an outsider, but he appeared, appeared from the very beginning as one of us that had grown up right there in Mississippi, that was willing and ready to deal with the challenges. And that's why we instantly began to hit the streets and asked people to come out to the voter registration meetings, come out to the mass meetings, and so that they could learn how to become registered voters and then encouraging them to go on down to the courthouse and register to vote. The other thing was that Bob was right there doing the same thing with us. It wasn't like, you go out and do it and I'll stay here, but he was right with us.

00:05:57:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, YOU WANT TO CUT FOR A SECOND?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YEAH.

[cut]

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK, THIS—DESCRIBE FOR ME, THAT MARCH, AND BEING ARRESTED, AND GOING TO JAIL AND END IT BY TELLING ME ABOUT THAT, THAT THREAT AND HOW THAT REPRESENTED THE, THE DANGERS OF GOING INTO JAILS.

Watkins: The march took place after Brenda Travis, Ike Lewis, and Bobby Talbert were not allowed to go back into the public school there in McComb. Because of that, the students walked out. Once we got to the office, someone said, well, why don't we go down to the courthouse and pray on the courthouse steps. And that's what we did, we marched downtown, went to the courthouse, and attempted to pray on the steps one by one, but each time someone stepped on the steps they were arrested, for about the fourth or fifth person. Then everybody that was in the march was just herded into the jail, arrested, and in the process then there were people like Bob Zellner, who was one of the ones that was attacked and beaten at that time. Others that was [sic] arrested were people like Curtis Hayes, myself, Brenda Travis again, and Ike again. And while in the jail we were brought out one by one and interrogated. At the time when they brought me to the top of the stairs to, interrogate me

they didn't carry me the way other people had said that they had carried them. They carried me to a separate room, and in the room they had a lot of men with dirty clothes that surrounded me and demanded that I say "yes sir" and "no sir" to them. Finally, after making sentences out of my questions to keep from doing that, they put me in another room by myself instead of returning me to the room where all the other people had been returned after interrogating. A few minutes later the doors opened and two men in plain clothes walked through with a hanging rope in their hand, that had the noose tied in it, with a little red rag tied just below the noose, and said, OK nigger, said, get up, said, we're going to have a hanging here tonight, and you're gonna be first. Knowing that I didn't want to be hanged, not knowing what to do, I just sat in my chair and leaned back and smiled. You know, I just kind of gave a smile at them, and they looked me dead in the eye as I looked them in the eye, and they stopped, and shortly they walked out the door.

00:08:32:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT SMILE—WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT, THAT MEANT TO THEM? WHAT WERE YOU SAYING?

Watkins: I think to them, I think they saw in my eye where, that I was determined to fight for my freedom; that I wasn't afraid of dying, if it really meant that; and I don't what else they saw in my eye. But, whatever it was, you know, I'm thankful to God that they didn't attempt to go through with what they had said they were gonna through with. Many times, you know, if the spirit is willing then we don't know what the outcome will be.

INTERVIEWER: THANKS, OK. LET'S CUT—

0:09:09:00

[cut]

INTERVIEWER: —ON WHAT—

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: — SHE REPRESENTED TO THE MOVEMENT HERE. MRS. HAMER, WHAT DID SHE REPRESENT TO LOCAL PEOPLE HERE?

Watkins: If I had to describe what Mrs. Hamer represented to, to local people — if you would look at a human being as a whole, I would say Mrs. Hamer perhaps represented the heart, because she was the kind of person that was full of spirit, full of fire; that was the kind of person that didn't mind expressing what she believed, and was willing at all times to stand up for what she believed. So because of that, when the spirit of those of us that was getting low, when we saw Mrs. Hamer, how she spoke to us, how she would sing, you know, with us, uplifted our spirit and gave us, more determination to go ahead and fight, and press for the things that, we believed in. And she was that kind of person all the time, and this is what she expressed, this is what she represented, not only to those that was [sic] in the freedom

movement, but just to the, to the common people that lived on the plantations from day to day.

00:10:24:00

INTERVIEWER: OK—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: STILL ROLLING.

INTERVIEWER: I WANT TO GO BACK TO—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: [unintelligible]

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU [unintelligible], OK?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YEAH.

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 341]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: LIGHTS.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: STICK.

INTERVIEWER: AND,

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SECOND STICK.

INTERVIEWER: —AND MAYBE ALONG WITH THAT YOU CAN GIVE ME, YOU CAN GIVE ME A BRIEFING ON WHY THE DIRECT ACTION WAS A HARD ONE TO SUSTAIN. SO LET'S BEGIN TALKING ABOUT THE TWO ARMS OF SNCC IN MCCOMB—

Watkins: OK.

INTERVIEWER: —AND KINDA HOW IT BRANCHED OUT.

Watkins: Yeah. In the McComb area we had two arms, or two divisions, of SNCC. One worked on voter registration and the other one worked on direct action. It was much harder to sustain the arm that was working on direct action.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: [unintelligible]

INTERVIEWER: I'M SORRY.

[audio recording problem]

00:11:11:00

[cut]

INTERVIEWER: —IN MCCOMB—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: CLEAR.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —AND THE TWO DIVISIONS OF SNCC AND

Watkins: Right.

INTERVIEWER: —HOW THEY BRANCHED OFF.

Watkins: Right. In the McComb area we actually had two divisions of SNCC: one division worked on direct action, the other division worked on direct action the other division worked on voter registration. The division that worked on direct action—it was much harder to sustain that group because, in working on direct action you have a lot of jail, and that mean [sic] that you have a lot of money to, raise to get people out on bond, and it was hard to sustain that, that division because of that. But the voter registration didn't require that kind of thing, so it was easier to sustain that, and because of that in keeping in line with the plan we decided to expand the project out from the McComb area all across the state of Mississippi. And as that expansion project took place I went into Hattiesburg, Willie Peacock and Sam Block went into, Greenwood. Charles Maclaren, for example, went into, Sunflower County, Cleveland. Other people went into Ruleville, into Nova, and those areas as we expanded the voter registration project.

00:12:29:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, THANKS. OK, LET'S CUT FOR A SECOND.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: [unintelligible]

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK, TALK TO ME ABOUT SNCC AND ABOUT SNCC COMING

INTO THE STATE AND THE, THE RECOGNITION OF WHAT THEY WERE DOING.

Watkins: As SNCC came into Mississippi and began to work on projects, I don't think the members of SNCC themselves really realized the major role that they would be playing in society, and the impact that it would have upon this country. I think they saw it as a few things needed to be changed and they were willing and determined to work to bring about that change. And as a local Mississippi nineteen year old young man, I was willing to help bring about that change and I think the elderly people in Mississippi who had been wanting, but for fear of being killed, for fear of their homes being burned and not being able to send their children to school, was afraid to do anything but felt good about seeing young people out there doing things that they could support; therefore they could kind of pass the buck and say well, it's them, you know how young people are, and they just went ahead and supported them and didn't ostracize them. And I think that's how things were seen or looked at, you know, at that time.

00:13:53:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, THE SUMMER PROJECT. THE DECISION TO BRING ALL THESE STUDENTS INTO THE STATE. WHAT WAS THE DEBATE AROUND THAT, AND, AND, TALK TO ME ABOUT THAT DEBATE AND WHAT IT WAS BASED ON.

Watkins: The summer project to bring all of the students down into Mississippi was a tough issue that we were all facing. Some felt that it would bring about more publicity to get more whites involved, that it would further serve as a deterrent, event to keep the whites in Mississippi from doing things. There were other of us, from Mississippi especially, that was looking at this effort in terms of a long range project. We felt that even though it would do this, but ultimately, it would destroy the grassroot organizations that we had built and were in the process of, building. And in the long run we felt that it would be more detrimental to the project than it would be helpful. So, this was the basis of the two different debates, ultimately the, the side won to bring them in because there was more for that side. People came in and those of us that were on the other opposing side, we went along with the project because we were part of the organization, felt that that was the thing to do.

00:15:14:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT, WHAT KINDS OF THINGS DID YOU THINK IT WOULD DESTROY IN TERMS OF THE GRASS ROOTS, AND BE SPECIFIC ABOUT THOSE THINGS.

Watkins: Some of the things that I felt that bringing the students in would destroy in terms of grassroots organization—for the first time we had local people who had began [sic] to take initiative themselves and do things. For the first time we had local Mississippians that were making decisions about what moves to make next, and, where the organization should be going, and how the organization, politically and economically, would, would work, and where it would end up. We felt that with a lot of students from the North coming in, basically being predominantly white, that the mentality, the attitude, would come in and overshadow

the attitudes and the mentality of these grassroot organizations, therefore causing the organizations to go on a different course, rather than that which had already been projected and started. And ultimately, when the people from the North would go back, the people from the South in Mississippi would have to start all over again, and go through that same rebuilding process, of which all of us knew that it is much harder to rebuild something that you have already started again than it is to keep that in motion. And we wanted to keep that in motion rather than stand the risk of destroying and have to rebuild again.

00:16:49:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, COULD WE CUT FOR A SECOND?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YEAH.

[cut]

INTERVIEWER: —TAKING THE INITIATIVE AND THE IDEA OF EDUCATIONAL FACTOR—

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —AND LET'S MAKE THIS LIKE SOMETHING WE CAN MAYBE CUT, OK?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: CUT WITH THE PRECEDING?

INTERVIEWER: IS IT POSSIBLE?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I'M TRYING TO THINK ABOUT [unintelligible]. YEAH. YOU GOT IT.

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S TALK ABOUT IT IN TERMS OF INITIATIVE AND EDUCATION.

Watkins: OK. One of the, one of the threats that was brought forth by the students coming was the threat of, taking the initiative away from the local people. For a long time it was hard to get local grassroot people to take initiative to do things for themselves, and once they had began [sic] to do that, with all OF the students coming down being eager and knowing that they have a certain educational level, then they would say, well, we can do this, and we'll do this, and offering all kinds of suggestions. At the same time, by the local indigenous people knowing that most of the students would be more educated than themselves, then they would feel that, well, since they are more educated than I am, then maybe I should listen to them, do it their way, do what they say do. And because of that, then, they would then become complacent, they would feel inferior, and fall back into the same rut that they were in initially before we started the, the grassroot organizations.

00:18:10:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. NOW, THREE VOLUNTEERS ARE KILLED RIGHT AT THE BEGINNING OF THAT SUMMER. WHAT DOES THAT DO? WHAT DOES THAT DO TO THE STATE? WHAT DID THAT MEAN?

Watkins: [pause] Yes, at the beginning of summer three volunteers were killed. At the time they were killed I was out of, I was out of the state at the training session for others to come in. As far as the people in Mississippi, I think it was a thing that people in Mississippi was braced for and expected, and was looking for all the time. I think what it did do was that it showed to the rest of the world that, Mississippi was serious about trying to maintain the Jim Crow law and the status quo in Mississippi. I think it also put something on the mind of many of the volunteers that had planned to come down, that never took things quite seriously like they should have been taken. But it helped us in many ways to deal with security because they realized that the people were serious and for real.

00:19:15:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S CUT FOR A SECOND.

[cut]

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: YOU WORKED IN THE DISTRICT WITH STOKELY, CORRECT?

Watkins: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: I WANT YOU, YOU TO POSSIBLY TALK TO ME SOME ABOUT STOKELY AND WHAT ROLE HE MIGHT HAVE PLAYED IN HELPING TO FOCUS THE IDEAS OF, FOR THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER IN MISSISSIPPI, AND THE IDEA, AND THE MOVE AWAY FROM, SAY, NONVIOLENCE AS A, TACTIC HERE IN THE STATE.

Watkins: [pause] Yeah, I worked in the same district that Stokely was in, and that was basically because I was in, had already worked in the Greenwood area with Willie and Sam, and had also gone down into the McComb area, and Stokely was in charge of the second congressional district. As far as the nonviolent question, most of the people from Mississippi never really accepted nonviolence. You know, we went along with that being a proper tactic at different times here and there but as far as really accepting it then, none of us really accepted that. That was a position that Stokely had began [sic] to push and, and talk about more so. And I think, in terms of Stokely's position, and pushing and moving away from, from nonviolence and, acquiring power just kind of helped, enhance the feeling and attitude that people in Mississippi had. People in Mississippi basically was [sic] of the same kind of opinion that people in Lowndes County, Alabama, that, that originally started the black

panther party, believed that in order to be successful completely we have to be a political and economic system simultaneously, and be prepared to defend and protect that even with our lives. And that doesn't imply nonviolence, but neither does it apply—I mean imply, aggressive violence, but it does, you know, mean that you're prepared to defend. And I think that's the way people looked at it rather than an aggressive—

[cut]

[wild audio]

Watkins: —thing, but a thing that really consolidated around the ideal of defending that which is meaningful and productive.

00:21:39:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YOU JUST RAN OUT.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 342]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: CLEAR. FLASH AND MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK I'M GOING TO TAKE YOU BACK A LITTLE BIT FURTHER, GOING BACK TO MCCOMB—

Watkins: OK.

INTERVIEWER: —AND I THINK THERE'S SOMETHING, THINGS THAT WE MAYBE NEED TO PICK UP HERE. WHEN YOU TALKED ABOUT THINGS IN MCCOMB, ABOUT—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: HOLD IT, [unintelligible].

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: SO, EXPLAIN TO ME AGAIN

Watkins: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: —ABOUT EXACTLY WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT IN TERMS OF CHANGE AND WHAT KIND OF THINGS YOU WERE TRYING TO CHANGE.

Watkins: Growing up—

INTERVIEWER: CUT. GOT TO CUT.

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: [unintelligible]

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Watkins: Growing—

INTERVIEWER: ONE SECOND. CUT. SO LET'S—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: NO—

INTERVIEWER: CUT.

00:22:23:00

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: SO LET'S—

Watkins: Growing up as a young black male in Summit-McComb area, there were many things that bothered me. One thing that stayed in my mind was when I was very young, my father went into the grocery store to buy sugar and they told him they didn't have sugar, and I saw white people going in, buying sugar. As I grew, you know, there were—when I would be in town, there were restrooms that I could not use. If I went to the movie, eventually I had to sit downstairs where things was constantly thrown, you know, on our heads. There were not libraries that we could go to, to do any research to help further our studies. There were many eating places in the towns where blacks weren't allowed to go into them and eat. There were about two that if you went to and went round on the back you could be served through a little

window. So these are some of the things that bothered me; these are some of the things that I felt that needed to be changed, in addition to the whole thing of voting. There were churches—even in terms of the religious aspect that blacks could not go to church with whites. And I had questions about this and I felt it was wrong and—these things along with many others I felt we just had to take a stand and try to change.

00:23:57:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. [pause] NINETEEN. WHAT DID YOU RISK, BECOMING A PART IN—AND WHAT KIND OF THINGS WERE YOU RISKING AS A NATIVE MISSISSIPPIAN?

Watkins: As a native Mississippian, there were many things I was risking. One of the things that I was risking and did face was being ostracized by my family. After I, participated in the first sit-in demonstration in Woolworth's lunch counters my relatives would see me walking down the street and then they would pass over on to the other side rather than meet me on the street, because they was [sic] afraid of what white people might do to them because they were my relatives. This is aunts, uncles, first cousins, and, you know, close relatives. In addition to that I, I put on the line the whole thing of being able to ever get a job in Mississippi; put on the line the whole thing of whether I would ever be able to get a [sic] education, you know, in the, in Mississippi; or whether that mark would go through on my children and their children. So these are just a few of the things that, you know, I was putting on the line when I did what I did, as well as what kind of reprisals that might come to my mother and father, you know, who was living, who had to support me at that time.

00:25:18:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, WITH BEING ALONE LIKE THAT, HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH THE FEAR THAT, YOU KNOW, THAT, THAT, YOU KNOW, THAT YOU'VE GOT ALL THESE THINGS COMING AT YOU, HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH JUST THE FEAR OF BEING OUT THERE ALONE LIKE THAT? WHERE DO YOU FIND THE COURAGE?

Watkins: The fear of being alone—you know, one of the things—the best way you deal with the fear of being alone, is to know that somebody has to take the chance. Somebody has to start somewhere and if you know that it need [sic] to be done than it might as well be you. One of the things that gives you strength is when you see that you have one or two elderly people that do support you and back you whether it's overtly or covertly; you know it's there. That gives you extra strength. And it's this kind of thing that, that gave me, you know, and still does give me, the inspiration, the motivation to continue to stand up and fight, you know, against the things that I know that are wrong rather than just submit to them and hope and pray that they will be changed one day. So it's these kind of things that, that gives [sic] you that kind of inspiration. And then through the music and songs, you know, we give ourselves [pause] that kind of, inspiration. We sang to ourselves and we sang to others, you know, as we say, freedom fighters don't be slow, Mississippi is next to go, keep your eyes on the prize, hold on. If you don't keep your eyes on the prize you can't hold on, and if you don't

hold on to that which you believe in, then someone will take it away from you.

00:27:03:00

INTERVIEWER: THANKS. CUT FOR ONE SECOND PLEASE.

[cut]

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —AS A PERSON FROM MISSISSIPPI AND, YOU'RE ENCOUNTERING ORGANIZERS FROM OUTSIDE THE STATE. WAS THERE A CONCERN THAT ONE DAY THEY WOULD LEAVE, THAT YOU WOULD BE HERE ALONE CONTINUING ON? AND SPEAK ABOUT, WHEN YOU SPEAK ABOUT THAT, SPEAK ABOUT IT IN TERMS OF SNCC, WHO WAS THE ORGANIZATION YOU WERE CLOSEST WITH, AND THAT WHOLE IDEA OF THAT.

Watkins: Being from Mississippi, and expecting and hoping to make it your home permanently, naturally you're concerned about organizers that come from out of the state, because you know for the most part, the greatest percent don't expect to stay in Mississippi. But if you're planning to stay there, then you know that you will be here, so you're interested in build a grassroot organization that's gonna be perpetual rather than doing something for a short period of time. And I think that's one of the things that we made a distinction between, was organizing versus mobilization. We were interested in building organizations that were, going be here, that was [sic] going to be perpetual, self-sustaining, rather than motivating people around certain issues and events, even though you would accomplish certain things in that. That was a great concern. That was the thing that we were definitely, you know, against things that we wanted to, to do was to organize. That was also part of the issue around the 1964 summer project.

00:28:28:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, THANKS.

[cut]

[sync tone]

Watkins: Many times we've, we've talked about reprisals, not really explained or understood what reprisals really mean. But I think people should understand, their reprisals could lead to beatings, jailings, and even death, depending on how they were carried out. For example, I was down in Amite County, the same county that Herbert Lee was killed in, being chased one night by Klans on a back road. That was a reprisal. Had they caught me in their car that night then that reprisal could have led to death. When the people in Holmes County firebombed Hartman's Turnbow's house and waited in, to shoot at him when he came out, that could have lead to death. In Forest County when people threw fire into Vernon's

Dahmer's house that did lead to death. So at any point, at any time, any reprisal could lead to jailings, beatings, or even death.

00:29:49:00

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Watkins: It was—OK.

INTERVIEWER: Let's cut, let's cut. You okay?

[cut]

[slate]

[switch to camera roll 343]

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DO YOU APPEAL TO, GETTING TO [inaudible]—

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARKER.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME ABOUT THAT, THAT SUMMIT YOU WERE—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: LET ME GET SETTLED HERE.

INTERVIEWER: —SENT TO ORGANIZE AND BEING ALONE, HOW DO YOU (INAUDIBLE) DEAL WITH THEIR OWN FEAR TO TAKE STEPS TO TAKE ACTION.

Watkins: Going into a community alone, you first have, you first have to be committed and determined to bring about change. That gets you over the fear that you have within, but how you deal with people is that you talk to people on the streets, you know, on the roads, one to one, and find out what they're concerned about, what their interests are, and talk about how you can bring about a change. Then get a few of those people to invite some of their friends to a meeting. Once you get the people at a meeting, then you uplift the spirit through the process of singing and once you sing, you then begin to talk about the issues—how the issues can be solved and how we can solve them ourselves. And through that process people will begin to see that, and by uplifting the spirit through singing—which most people, especially in the South, and black people, are religious and spiritual people, so you just convert that religious atmosphere into the political and organizing atmosphere, and people will eventually be prepared to move. The thing that you have to be aware of is when they are ready to move, and not push them too fast into something, because you prepare them too fast then they become suspicious.

INTERVIEWER: OK, THANKS.

[cut]

[end interview]

00:31:34:00

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