Interview with **Courtland Cox**
May 14, 1979
Camera Rolls: 6-9
Sound Rolls: 4-5

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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.*

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[camera roll 6]

[sound roll 4]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SPEED.

[hand slate]

INTERVIEWER: OK, CAN YOU TELL ME ANYTHING ABOUT THE EARLY PLANNING SESSIONS FOR THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON? WHO WAS INVOLVED AND WHAT THE POLITICS WERE.

Cox: The, the early planning sessions for the March on Washington tried to incorporate a coalition type movement. The people who were most integral to that motion I would say were Bayard Rustin first, A. Philip Randolph second, then he brought along people he thought were closest to him, CORE. I think, SNCC, he thought they were an activist group and then the, the—on another circle I would include the NAACP and Urban League and then the, the Catholic church, the Protestant church, and the Jewish religion. And so, that I think Bayard's strategy was that you get A. Philip Randolph as the leader. Secondly, you get the most activist groups, CORE, and SNCC to, to be the, the driving force and then you, you bring in other forces like Urban League, NAACP, who had to move once things were in motion.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: CUT.

[cut]

00:01:28:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK THIS WILL BE THE SECOND SYNC ON THIS INTERVIEW.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SPEED.

[hand slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SECOND STICKS.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT WHO, WHO PUT UP THE MONEY—

Cox: Can I, can I ask, do you want this?

INTERVIEWER: OH. [laughs] WHO PUT UP THE MONEY FOR THE, WHO PUT UP THE MONEY FOR THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON? WHO SUPPLIED THAT?

Cox: I think a lot of the money came from the labor unions. Some monies came from the civil rights organizations. I know the personnel came from the civil rights, civil rights organization; they paid for the personnel. A lot of it came from liberal organizations, church groups, and that's probably where most of the money came from, the liberal labor civil rights community.

00:02:20:00

INTERVIEWER: HOW DID IT HAPPEN THAT, THAT FOLKS WANTED TO CHANGE JOHN LEWIS' SPEECH? OR CAN YOU TELL ME THAT THEY DID AND THEN TELL ME WHY?

Cox: I think the, the politic—the, the, the real question about John Lewis' speech centered on the role Kennedy wanted to play in the March on Washington and the light he wanted to be seen in at that particular point. The fact of the matter is Kennedy wanted to speak at the March on Washington and was only through the insistence of Bayard Rustin and some others that he did not speak at the March on Washington. Then the whole question came to whether Kenne— the people received came to Kennedy—whether Kennedy received the group before or after the March on Washington. Symbolically if they received him before the March then they would report to the group on what Kennedy said. If they rece—he received them after, he would—the group would be reporting to Kennedy on what went on at the March on Washington so that was a whole play on that. But I think the real question about John's speech was the whole question of how Kennedy wanted to be perceived in terms of the black community. Cause, if you remember, Kennedy came to, to, to the Presidency, Office of Presidency on a lot of votes from the black community and he wanted to be perceived as someone in front of this allowing it, wanting it, encouraging it. ***And John's speech was the only speech at the March on Washington that criticized the Kennedy administration for***

lack of civil rights enforcement, because the SNCC people were being brutalized in the South. And he stated that. And he stated that they were—he was gonna march through the South as Sherman. There was the image of violence in that. The Kennedy people didn't want that so what they did was Kennedy called up Archbishop O'Boyle [sic] who was the bishop of Washington and said to him I want John Lewis' speech changed. Archbishop O'Boyle called A. Philip Randolph and Randolph called Bayard Rustin and they came to us about changing it on the two points, that is, to say, they criticized the Kennedy administration for lack of enthusiasm in enforcing civil rights law and the whole question of alluding to violence, even though, it's historical violence the, the allusion was too much in 1963. So what, what Bishop O'Boyle said was he wanted a change or they were gonna withdraw from the March on Washington. We refused to change it and, in fact, told Archbishop O'Boyle that he could leave, but it wasn't, you know, that was his problem. Then Bayard, after we were adamant in not changing it, Bayard went to A. Philip Randolph and Randolph said, you know, I have waited twenty years for, for this—what was it, '41, '63? OK. Twenty-two years for this March on Washington; please let us have unity at this last moment. And it was only because of that plea from Randolph in terms of the whole generational thing, the whole historical perspective that we agreed to, to make some changes, but I think the basic change in John's speech came from the Kennedys who did not want to be criticized in, in this arena.

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INTERVIEWER: HOW—WHAT WERE THE—HOW—THE SPEECH WAS CHANGED IN THE MORNING. MAYBE YOU COULD JUST TELL ME THAT, THAT THE—

Cox: Well, the speech, the speech, the speech was changed, the speech was changed—the people came to town I think maybe about ten o'clock the crowd started arriving. They came to us about eleven and all this took place on the top at the Lincoln Memorial where Lincoln sits looking down benevolently upon the colored. You know, that, that we were up under and where the statue is. Randolph—we were sitting—it was, there was re—there was a little typewriter we had up there and people were either sitting on the ground or a little box or a little wooden chair. So it wasn't comfortable surroundings; things were hurried. And, I guess, John and myself and so we were in our early twenties being very militant. Forman was a little older. So I think the, the key players were Bayard, A. Philip Randolph, John Lewis, James Forman, and myself. And we went back and forth in terms of how this discussion was to, to go and after Randolph made his plea then John, I mean, then Jim Forman sat on a box, put a typewriter on another box and he and I sat down and redid this speech in terms of the kinds of criticisms that the Kennedy administration had.

00:07:30:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT—CAN YOU TELL ME ANYTHING ABOUT ANY FACTIONALISM IN SNCC IN TERMS OF FOLKS WHO WERE INTERESTED IN DIRECT ACTION AND—

Cox: Well, I think, that there have always been some factionalism in SNCC. I think the, the, the factionalism centered on the question of methodology, but I think probably centered on

also the question of philosophy. I think those people who were for reform and some sort of ordered and limited change probably supported much more the voter registration view because that was action that fed into a lot of agendas that people had. The first agenda would be to, to broaden the base of the Democratic Party in the South because they felt that if blacks were registered to vote, you know, they would vote Democratic. So you would have a broader base in terms of the Democratic Party. I think the other thing, the other agenda, was that if you—blacks voted in the South, then you could get rid of or cause pressure on the Dixiecrats. Remember the, you had those, the Republican-Dixiecratic coalition blocking a lot of the legislation within the, within the Congress and a lot of the most powerful people were chairpersons of the, of the, of the Congress were from the South. So, therefore, it was important that you had some political motion that could challenge them and I think you had on that the whole question of democratic rights, the right to vote and all those kinds of things. So that it was, you know, a number of agendas fed. I think then the other thrust was the direct action thrust which really said this country is wrong. It's fundamentally wrong and we have to go at the heart of segregation and you had the whole religious, philosophical question of trying to change an unjust society. An uncompromising stand. The, the preparation to go into Mississippi and Alabama into the worst places so that, so that, I think, although, although on the surface it looked like a difference in terms of method, that is, to say whether you wanted voter registration against direct ac—against direct action, I think, one ultimately fed a reformist agenda; the other I wouldn't say call it revolutionary, but it was something that, that wanted to, to, to turn things upside down. More philosophical, more religious, and more talking about injustices as opposed to, you know, other kinds of agendas.

INTERVEWER: CAN YOU JUST TELL ME, WHAT WAS THE SITUATION WITH THE, WITH THE—

00:10:43:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: —CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE? HOW MANY, HOW MANY PEOPLE DID YOU NEED TO, TO—

Cox: Right, the, the—

INTERVIEWER: OH IT'S OUT?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: RUN OUT.

Cox: OK.

INTERVIEWER: SORRY.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: CAMERA ROLL SEVEN.

00:10:53:00

[cut]

CAMEERA CREW MEMBER: OK.

[hand slate]

[change to camera roll 7]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: LET'S ROLL SEVEN.

INTERVIEWER: IT'S A QUESTION ABOUT HOW THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON CAME TO BE. WHAT AGENDAS WERE OPERATING? I MEAN, WAS A. PHILIP RANDOLPH JUST TRYING TO CONSUMATE HIS TWENTY-TWO YEAR OLD DREAM? WAS SNCC HAVING ITS OWN PARTICULAR CONCERNS OR WERE THE LIBERAL LABOR PEOPLE SIMPLY CONCERNED TO PUSH KENNEDY'S CIVIL RIGHTS LEGISLATION? DID THE MARCH REPRESENT A KIND OF CONSUMATION OF ALL OF THESE AGENDAS OR DID IT REPRESENT A MEDIATION?

Cox: Well, I think that, I know—the March on Washington represented a number of things for a number of people. The first is that, I think, the civil rights bill, the first civil rights bill, was coming up and the discussion about how to get it dealt with in terms of the Republican Dixiecratic kind of coalition. And I think that one of the, the A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, type person felt that it was important to, to go back to the kind of things that they knew in the earlier days when they were in CORE in '46 and the kinds of views they held there. The kind of pacifist action in terms of the labor movement. So that kind of motion came out of there. They, they felt that, that kind of action was needed for that. Then there was the other group really led by Malcolm X, Julius Hobson Sr., Gloria Dandridge, Stanley Branche and a number of other people who felt that this was—they were going to bring the country to a halt. I mean the discussion was about laying down in front of trains and on runways and airports and, and bringing this country to a halt until civil rights legislation was passed. Dick Gregory was involved in that discussion. So you had a whole group of people like that who felt that the March on Washington you could get hundreds of thousands of people to grind this country to a halt. And they were entered—involved in it because of that. Then you had a number of other people who felt that if you did not get in front of this you—and control this kind of motion, then, in fact, it would get away from you and if they want a position, there go my people and I need to get in front of then because I'm their leader. And so, that's what the kind of motion that you had. So that, I think, with some people they felt the pacifist labor movement instinct to, to get some kind of pressure built with another group of people they were prepared to bring this country to a halt. But with another, that you had to join it in order to put brakes on it and put all sorts of kinds of, of, of, you know, reins on the motion. So that they—as, as I see it, they probably about three major agendas. Then I think the other thing that, that those who were not for it initially when they saw that it could go

somewhere tried to channel it mostly into focusing on a particular piece of legislation. I think that Bayard Rustin, A. Philip Randolph had, you know, jobs and freedom and they wanted to initiate the twin motions, but, I think, people like the NAACP and the Urban League had a—and people like the Kennedy administration, had a particular piece of legislation that they wanted passed that they thought they would use this motion to, to, to get passed.

00:14:49:00

INTERVIEWER: SO WHO SPOKE TO WHO FIRST?

Cox: I think that, prob—probably the, the people who spoke first were A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin. I think the people who came in second were the, the SNCCs, the COREs. I think the people who came in third were the NAA—Urban League. People who came in fourth were members of the religious community, Protestant, Jewish, and, and Catholic. And on top of all of that was the Kennedy administration wanting to make sure that that motion was within the bounds of the, the—their political process.

00:15:30:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. TELL ME ABOUT THE CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE.

Cox: OK. The mo—the, the Democratic Convention at Atlantic City was a very important turning point for the SNCC people and, I think, for the civil rights movement in general. Because I think up to that time the, the people in the civil rights movement had not come so, so face to face in a, in a bold situation with naked—with power. And, and, in a sense that I think we was unknown beforehand in terms of national sense. I think the SNCC people and the CORE people and the people from Mississippi were used to the whole question of guns and violence and petty politics in the state—on the state level and dealing with that. But we always were, were able to appeal however, ineffectually, to the Federal Government and they did their little thing even though Hoover was a racist and had number of FBI agents who were racists down there. But what happened in Atlantic City was that we went through all the processes that the Democratic Party said one had to go to—go through in order to be credentialized [sic], though, the whites from Mississippi went through none of the processes and violated all of them. So the question was, was the Democratic Party gonna obey its own rules or whether it's gonna favor those whites who had been in the party all the time. Now, the Credentials Committee would take a decision as to who would be able to represent the state of Mississippi on the floor. And, and—so that, so that the presentation was being made by both groups. Now what happened was that the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in that environment in 1964 had a tremendous sympathy among white liberals, the black community, the church community, and the person who seems to, to, to symbolize that, that, that thrust from Mississippi was Miss Fanny Lou Hamer. Now, Miss Fanny Lou Hamer spoke on television and was being very effective in terms of her presentation of what was going on in Mississippi and so forth. And what Johnson did, at that time, when he knew that she was on and he—she was beginning to ruin his Congress, he called the TV stations and preempted in the middle of her speech, literally preempted in the middle of her speech the air time. And he spoke about, I think it was—he spoke about his trip to the hospital or some

other foolishness—his beagles, some—something that was inconsequential. OK. What happened after that was that when Johnson saw that there was some motion and, and things were moving, he began to, to get his, his act in motion. He called Humphrey up and he told Humphrey, Hubert, if you want to be Vice-President of the United States, you've got to stop these people from Mississippi. Hubert Humphrey called Kastenmeier, Reuther, Walter Reuther from the AF of L—I mean UAW, and a number of other people and said to them, these people got to be stopped. You know, my pre-my getting the Vice Presidency depends on it. Reuther called Martin Luther King and a number of other civil rights movement people and told them I get—he told King in particular, I gave you a hundred and sixty-eight thousand dollars last year; if you don't stop these people from Mississippi you will never get another dime from me. So you had that kind of environment. So, so what began to happen was that, that it looked—that, that, as if the, the, Democratic Party, as a whole, would in fact vote to credentialize the whites from Mississippi even though they violated the laws, but it was clear that if we could get eleven of the hundred and ten delegates, 10% of them, to, to vote that the Mississipians had a valid case it could be brought to the floor for the entire convention to vote on it. And Johnson knew that, in fact, if that happened, then you know, it was all down hill in terms of quote "his convention." So what Johnson did is he got, at that time a Negro congressman to, to, to quote, "befriend, befriend the group." And we had a session, a strategy session in the, in the convention hall. Deep in the bowels of the convention hall we were strategizing. Miss Hamer was there. Edith Green from Oregon was there. A number of—Bob Moses was there. Donna Moses, a number of people who were essential actors in the discussion. We were meeting and discussing about what strategies we would involve in terms of doing number of things. And so, one of the things we knew when we got there were we had eleven votes to bring out a minority report. So what happened was we were going over the names and we had the list of the names, because we felt that we could, you know, these people were solid. What happened was the Negro congressman asked us for the list, asked Bob Moses for the list of the names. And Bob did not want to give it to him. And I said to Bob, do you think this man is gonna steal the list of names? Why don't you give the man the list of names? And the, the—this Negro congressman said, yes. I want to give this list of names to Chairman Lawrence, Governor Lawrence, from Pennsylvania and I want to show him we have the strength to, you know, to, to pull a minority—

00:21:56:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Cox: —vote on the House—on the floor of the Democratic Convention. Therefore they have to make concessions to the Mississippi Democratic Party.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: RUN OUT.

00:22:11:00

[cut]

[change to camera roll 8]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: START ROLLING.

[hand slate]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: CAMERA ROLL FIVE AND THREE. THIS EIGHT. [pause] SYNC THE FIRST CLAP.

Cox: OK. I think, we, we—OK, so Bob Moses was still distrustful of the promise by this congressman to, in fact, act on behalf of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and was very reluctant and I must say in my ignorance I pressed him to, to give the list so that he could show that we had some, some clout in the situation. Well, Bob gave the, the list reluctantly to the congressman and what happened next was something unbelievable. Every member, every person who was on that list, every member that Credentials Committee who was gonna vote for the minority got a call and said your husband is up for a judgeship, if you don't shape up he won't get it. You're up for a loan here, if you don't shape up, you won't get it. And you began to see how hard, I mean, how things worked in, in the real world. I think that, that although we were used to, to, to Mississippi and to the, the beatings and so forth, I think, you had a polarized situation where there's the good guys and the bad guys. I think in this situation, you—there was no good guys; you just saw naked power and self interest and, therefore, I mean, you had no allies except those people that you came with. I mean everybody including, I would say, including, including a number of people in the civil rights movement, a number of people in the religious community, a number of people in the liberal community, all came out and tried to, to blunt the thrust of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to take its rightful place as the lawful delegation from Mississippi. I think it had a profound impact, impact on, on many of us to see that kind of working relationship going.

00:24:37:00

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT—DID—ONE, ONE DAY YOU SAT IN THE SEATS. CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT WHAT WENT ON INSIDE THE CONVENTION CENTER?

Cox: OK. That's right, that's right, OK. Once the, once they had a, a situation which said, OK, we're gonna give the—what happened was there was some confusion as to whether the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was gonna get it or the whites were gonna get it. I think that the whites were gonna get it, but they were some kind of conditions or they was, the spirit wasn't right. So the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was—didn't get their seats, but the whites decided they were gonna walk out until Lyndon Johnson and the rest of the convention started treating them as if they were some sort of pariahs. So they walked out and didn't show up for the convention. And we were riding, I think it was, we were riding a cab: Bob, Donna, and myself. And the discussion centered around, you know, what to do. And so, I said, well, if they left why not take the seats? And Bob said, I was kind of half

joking really, Bob said, that's a good idea. [laughs] He proceeded to, to develop along with, with a number of the SNCC people a scenario for getting the seats. And what we did was we got the badges of people, sympathetic delegates from around the country that, that said delegate's badges or alternates badges and, you know, the, the seats, the seats were empty because the Mississippi delegation had walked out. And so, all of a sudden on national TV at night, this—all the SNCC people, not the SNCC people the, the Mississippi people with the help of the SNCC people got, got—took the seats of the Mississippi Freedom Demo—I mean the, the white Mississippi delegation. And that was on national television and I'm sure that Johnson didn't like that. So the next night when we went back there were no seats there at that delegation. I mean they were—the Mississippi delegation was just a big hole. Everybody had seats around it and it was a big hole where the Mississippi delegation was supposed to be. But, I think, the point was made, at that point, that the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was unjustifiably denied the, the right to, to sit in those seats who—because—and even though they had followed the total process that the Democratic Party had subscribed that they couldn't get it because the question was not a question of democracy. The question, the question of who control, who got what was supposed to be gotten, and the question of white supremacy in the last analysis.

00:27:35:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DID FOLKS DO WITH THESE LESSONS?

Cox: I think, I think peo-different people did different things. I think a number of people became totally cynical. I think a number of people felt that you had to look at different avenues and broader avenues to political power. I think a number of people probably, you know, just said, you know, they probably either moved to the right or to the left. But I think most people were not unaffected by it. I think that the, the—that, that—the, the, the sense of looking at the Democratic Party and seeing how it operated and seeing how, when it came down the, the, you know, all the people that you thought were on your side began to, to crumble. I mean, you know, the, the liberals began to crumble. The labor movement began to crumble. A number of the civil rights leadership began to crumble and the only people who did not crumble in the final analysis were the people from Mississippi and as, you know, and, and they're the people who stood firm. I mean Miss Hamer stood firm. And, and a number of Miss—from—I forgot her name, from Canton. I mean the people stood firm because they knew they had to bear the brunt of that action. And the people who came down and who were, were, you know, who came to do good and whose, whose whole life depended upon the benevolence of either the Democratic Party, the labor movement, the liberal movement, they caved in under the pressure, because that's where their bread and butter lay.

00:29:22:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT ABOUT JOE RAUH?

Cox: Joe Rauh played the role of the broker for the Democratic Party. I mean, he's always played that—he's that today. I mean, Joe Rauh has not changed in umpteen years. I mean, he plays the—he likes to be the liberal. The Mr. Liberal, who, you know, in terms of liberal

causes plays the brokers between those who are victimized and those whom are victimizers. And, I think, that Joe Rauh, you know, up to the point of, of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party challenging a situation that Johnson began to hit back on was for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, raising all the philosophical issues. When the power of realities came, I think, Joe like the rest of the people caved in.

00:30:10:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. WHAT ABOUT WHAT ABOUT THE FBI DURING THE SUMMER OF ‘64 IN MISSISSIPPI? CAN YOU TELL ME ANYTHING ABOUT WHAT THEIR INVOLVEMENT WAS IN MISSISSIPPI AND WHAT PEOPLES ATTITUDES TOWARD THEM WERE?

Cox: Well, I think—I'm trying to remember. I think the, the attitude of the FBI in ‘64 was probably, I mean, the, the things that, that strike me most about the FBI is that first of all they would stand and watch and that things could happen to you and they would watch. I remember one of the, one thing that clearly stands out in my mind in McComb, Mississippi, a house got bombed. I think Curtis Hayes was in it, Mendy Samstein, and a number of the SNCC people were in it and, fortunately, nobody got hurt, but there was a huge hole in the house. And the reason that people didn't get killed was that a car was in front of the explosion and absorbed most of the, the, the thrust of the explosion and, therefore, there was—the house was damaged, but people weren't killed. And I think I went down there along with some other people the next day and the FBI made it clear to us that they were there not to, to look after us to see that we might be hurt, but to guard the evidence of the bombing. That's what they were interested in. So somebody could come by and kill us, but that wasn't their job to deal with that; their job was to deal with the evidence of the bombing after the fact. I think that the FBI also in that situation was reporting on our activities to J. Edgar Hoover. I mean that's known. I mean, they were not impartial in the situation. They thought we were a disruptive force. A force that was out to destroy this country and, therefore, reported on us. I think the, the, the FBI also acted in ‘64 as a force to, to, to encourage the quote “red baiting” unquote that that occurred in terms of the number of the civil rights leaders. That, I think that, that at their best they watched. At their worst they reported and, and, and, who knows, maybe part of the violence that occurred, you know, in ‘64 on the people in Mississippi.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU, DO YOU KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT ANY INFORMANTS WITHIN, WITHIN THE WORKERS?

Cox: No, I don’t know anything. I, I, I mean, they probably were, but, you know, I take that for granted—

00:33:05:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Cox: —that they probably were, but, you know, as to who they were and so forth dealing with that I don't have any information.

INTERVIEWER: DID THAT RUN OUT?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: RUN OUT.

00:33:17:00

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SPEED.

[hand slate]

[change to camera roll 9]

INTERVIEWER: OK. CAN YOU GIVE ME THAT DRAMATIC SCENARIO? WHAT, WHAT HAPPENED THAT MORNING OF THE MARCH?

Cox: Well, I think that, first of all, we came down and when we got up we were all very excited and the March on Washington was supposed to be a huge, big event and I think Bayard Rustin and I went out to the grounds, the monument grounds, and by eight o'clock there were I think fifty people out there. And our question was, was anybody gonna be out here? And everybody kept saying, well there's no one out here because nobody could get into Washington because the roads are all jammed into Washington. And by ten o'clock there was a sea of humanity that existed in—on the March on Washington on the, the monument grounds that—and a number of people were coming in from Virginia and the young NAACPers [sic] and so forth were coming in and doing their little marching steps and so forth. And the situation was probably even made even more momentous and dramatic 'cause that was the day that Ossie Davis announced that Du Bois had died. He had died, I think the day before in Ghana. And it was announced at the March on Washington and those of us who had some appreciation for Du Bois saw it as, you know, as a tremendous, a passing of a tremendous Afro-American. And, I think, we were going on—things were going well and so forth and we felt that victory was, you know, we were really gonna make an impression this day. And I think in the midst of that, probably about eleven o'clock, we got a message that Archbishop O'Boyle had stated that if we did not withdraw John's statement that, in fact, he was gonna withdraw from the March on Washington. Now the reason that he was able to make that statement was that I was the representative for the March on Washington for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and John had—gave me, gave me the speech the day before and I passed it out to the press trying to get maximum publicity. And what happened was the press gave it to, to Archbishop O'Boyle and to the Kennedys and, and they looked at it and did not like the speech, because of a number of reasons. The first, it, it criticized the Kennedy administration and put them in the same league with the Dixiecrats. Secondly, it alluded to the question of violence and, I think, it had a cynicism, not a

cynicism, a, a, a penetration of the reality as opposed to the kind of good feeling that was supposed to be evidenced at that meeting. We told Archbishop O'Boyle—

INTERVIEWER: LET ME JUST BREAK YOU UP. I GUESS WHAT I'M JUST REALLY INTERESTED IN THE LOGISTICS OF—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: CUT.

[cut]

00:36:35:00

INTERVIEWER: REALLY INTERESTED IN THE LOGISTICS OF—

[hand slate]

INTERVIEWER: —OF THE ACTUAL CHANGING OF THE SPEECH. YOU WERE TALKING ABOUT—YEAH.

Cox: OK, all right. OK, all right. We were on top of the Lincoln Memorial and ***Bayard asked us to change the speech and we told him that we weren't gonna change the speech and that, you know, it, we, you know, he'd have to do it over our dead bodies. We weren't going to change it. Then he went down, during—in the crowd and got A. Philip Randolph.*** And A. Philip Randolph said, I have waited twenty-two years for this. Would you young men please accommodate an old man? And he had, Ba—I mean Rustin, not Rustin, Randolph speaks in these stentorian tones and he was kind of coming at us. And I think Forman, myself, and John Lewis were quite overwhelmed by his request. Here's a man, I think in 1963, Randolph must have been about seventy-five. He must be about ninety now. So, ***he was seventy-five and here we were, you know, one-third his age and, you know, he was asking us to, to do this for him. He said, I, I waited all my life for, for this opportunity. Please don't ruin it. And we felt that, for him that we had to, to make some concessions.*** And, but, the, the march had already started; the speeches had already started. Baldwin had begun to speak. Belafonte was introducing all the five planes of movie stars that he had brought in. So we were in the midst of, you know, trying to change a speech that had been sent out to the press in the midst of this, in the midst of, of this gathering. And John, John had not even seen the speech changes that we were making. So, so Forman would type a, a, a page he'd give it to me; I'd look at it and say all right, it's all right. You know, he'd type another page and then I'd give it to John, then after I read it and John would try to quick read it, to see if, you know, to get the feel of it. But I, I, I think as it came out, it probably, probably brought much more attention to John's speech because the focus of the change that was made and why it was made from, from, from the original to, to the changes got a lot of press attention and so forth. And I think in the last analysis I think most people remember the speech that got changed and, probably, and, and, "I Have a Dream," of course, who could forget that? And, and John Lewis' speech. Those were the two speeches of the march.

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INTERVIEWER: OK, COULD YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE MEETING WITH THE NAACP FOLKS AFTER THE CONVENTION?

Cox: I think it was—there, there was a meeting after the Atlantic City convention with a number of people. The church people were there, labor people were there, SNCC was there and so forth. And we went to the meeting—NAACP was there and we were there to—we were there taking notes basically, cause we didn't want to actively participate, but there was some things that came up that we had to—felt forced to comment on. And the discussion was, now that you had the '64 summer project, now that you had the Atlantic City, where would you be going, what kinds of people you'd want to involve, and so forth. And the Gloster Current who was then I think Director of Branches for, for the NAACP, said that he wanted to, to take this to another level. He, he was tired of listening to the moans and wails of these people from Mississippi. He had, had—one had to begin to cut away the underbrush and that and the man that—I mean, the way he talked about the people from Mississippi and the people from Alabama. This is, is '63 and '64; people who, who were the heart and soul of the movement. It, it gave one, you know, the sense that these people were much more trouble than, than they were worth. They that, that, that they were not viewed as people. They were viewed as things—disrupters and the kind of relationship that he wanted to establish with the, the, those who were in power. And I think that, that meeting gave you a sense, I mean, gave us a sense because there was not much disagreement with him that there was—that those who were in the leadership of the civil rights movement in many respects wanted to, to, to cut out the heart and soul, to, to as, as Gloster Current said, cut away the underbrush, to, to make it a, a, a much more respectable, a much more a, a much—a movement that could fit much more into the situation. And I think that, that movement that, that meeting prob—and many others like it and the, the need to cut away the underbrush probably was the beginning of us finding ourselves in the situation we are in today, because it took away the motion, the thrust, the most dynamic elements in order to try to accommodate to those forces that they said were oppressive. They—I mean that, in fact, the leadership of the civil rights movement probably showed itself to, to be the full—most accommodating force in the civil rights movement to the forces that were antithetical to its own interests.

INTERVIEWER: OK. LET'S CUT FOR—

[cut]

[end of interview]

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