

Interview with **Dave Dennis**

November 10, 1985

Production Team: B

Camera Rolls: 346-352

Sound Rolls: 1321-1323

Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

Preferred Citation

Interview with Dave Dennis, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on November 10, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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*.

00:00:32:00

[camera roll 346]

[sound roll 1321]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FLAGS

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK, DAVE DESCRIBE FOR ME THE MISSISSIPPI THAT YOU ENCOUNTERED IN '61 WHEN YOU ARRIVED AS A FREEDOM RIDER.

Dennis: Well it's very difficult to describe Mississippi certainly I didn't get a chance to see much of it or anything. We first arrived here that was just sort of like on the freedom ride and the—there was just a line as we got off the bus of police officers that you really had no choice, but to walk from the bus into the white waiting room where you once you were into there you were asked to leave and if you did not leave at that time you were arrested. But you really had no choice because there was a line from the doors of the buses on both sides, line of police officers, straight into the bus station. Why, either side that you looked right or left all you saw were white officers with guns, you know, that point you to a direction inside of a bus station that I would assume looked like any other-bus station. Some Captain Ray and others were there to say, ask to leave and that you refuse to leave then they put you under arrest and we were all arrested but then from there into another line out of another door into a paddy wagons whereby we were taken on to the a county jail where we were all booked and then put into di—cells, holding cells, I think it was.

00:01:55:00

INTERVIEWER: SO YOU WERE, YOU WERE THEN IN MISSISSIPPI AND YOU WERE ONE OF THE WHAT THEY CALLED THE FREEDOM RIDERS IN MISSISSIPPI AND FOR TALKING TO OTHER MISSISSIPPIANS THE FREEDOM RIDERS MEANT SOMETHING SPECIAL. TALK ABOUT HOW WHEN YOU CAME BACK TO THE STATE, BEING A FREEDOM RIDER, WHAT THAT MEANT TO THE MISSISSIPPIANS THAT YOU ENCOUNTERED AND—

Dennis: Yeah, well when I first got on the—became a freedom rider I guessed that the personally I have to deal with it in terms of my first introduction to it. And the—I was at the time I was a student at Diller University in New Orleans and a member of the New Orleans chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality. With a number of people on the rides like a Doris Castle, Retha Haley, and Jerome Smith and others and, at the time, the buses that were burned in Anniston, Alabama the people who were on that bus were brought into—from Alabama into New Orleans for medical care and other things. They had been briefly treated in Anniston after the buses had been attacked. So that was my real first introduction of seeing all these people coming in, you know, beaten, bleeding and, and everything. I, at that time though, I was not anxious to become a freedom rider. I must say, I wanted to do what I could to help the people there and my friends Jerome Smith and others came and got me one night at Diller University and they began to talk about going on the freedom ride or joining the people in Montgomery, Alabama. There was a lot of news that it was under martial law and everything else is and I was not willing to go. I must admit that I was not a volunteer. But they began to buy drinks for me, you know, and one thing after another, next thing I knew, to make a long story short is, I was on a train and getting off in Montgomery, Alabama in a, in a little stupor of drunkenness, I guess. You know and that. As I got off the train there was these marshals coming, you know, but I didn't know that. I just saw a bunch of whites so I ran back on the train. So they took me off and after that is we got into sessions in Montgomery and with King and Farmer and most of the leadership and most of the people in SNCC and CORE were involved at that time. And the peop—large arguments whether or not the Freedom Rides should continue well now we should not, what are we gonna do with it? And from there is there was a lot of orientation regarding of, I guess, what you might say of preparing oneself for that, not just in terms of participating in a, in a continuous movement, but it was a strange type of preparation. Everybody I think there in a sense were prepared to die, I mean, it was really saying—because no one had any feelings that of getting on those first two buses that you were gonna be able to go and get out of it. It was like a death kind of scene. Everybody knew that this is a suicide mission in a sense is. And some people came so indoctrinated, I guess the most interesting thing that had the most effect on my life from that point on, in terms of commitment to the movement, was after we got into Jackson Mississippi and, and I guess a lot of people did not see a lot of things. Expecting something else to occur and it didn't occur. Well, once we were in this holding cell there were a number of people several of them, can't recall their names now, who just really just freaked out because the fact is that they were still alive and they could not believe they were alive and on top of that is they conditioned themselves to such an extent to die. I mean, I saw one person just start beating his head against the wall, you know, I'm dead, I'm dead, girls start pulling, just pulled a handful of hair out of it. It was one of those kinds of things of being—the

preparation there was to die for a cause that I've never seen occur before and never did see it again until, you know, in Mississippi, I think, that everybody worked in Mississippi, at that time, is to the people who were very much involved in the movement had that same type of feeling, you know, every—from day to day.

00:06:05:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, WITH THAT IN MIND TELL ME—DESCRIBE BOB MOSES TO ME WHEN YOU FIRST MET HIM. WHAT'D HE LOOK LIKE? WHAT DOES HE TALK LIKE? WHO WAS THIS PERSON YOU MET AT THAT TIME?

Dennis: The first time I met Bob Moses was in Louisiana. I had not come to—Mississippi it was after the freedom ride after I had left school and then I was directing summer course activities in Louisiana. We had had a demonstration in Southern University and a group of the students had been kicked out of the school and they were living at the hotel, Lincoln Hotel in Baton Rouge. Bob Moses and some of the other SNCC people came over from McComb to attempt to recruit some of the students to work in Mississippi on voter registration and that was my first encounter with Bob Moses. Quiet, but at the same time a very forceful person with a very deep commitment with a different type of a direction. At that time, most of the directions that we were in were more what you consider to be direct action oriented. That is, sitting at lunch counters, marching, demonstrating, picketing, those kind of activities. And Bob's move was toward getting people registered to vote and organizing people for political type of activities that were more of just a hard work kind of natural drama—dramatic kind things that, at least, that's the way we saw it at that time there is. So the type Bob Moses that I met at, at that time was that type of quiet Bob Moses, forceful. That was the first time I met him and he remained the same, I guess, and very consistent in terms of his personality and commitments throughout the period of time that I knew him.

INTERVIEWER: OK LET'S CUT PLEASE—

[cut]

00:07:55:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FLAGS. MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: YOU READY?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YEAH.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Dennis: I guess the best way to describe Mississippi whereby people today can understand and bring it into terms or visions is to look at the footage for what's happening in South Africa—

INTERVIEWER: CUT. OK. CUT. I'M SORRY, I CAN'T DO THAT—

[cut]

00:08:19:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FLAGS. MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK IN, IN, IN ONE OF YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES TRY TO GIVE ME A SENSE OF MISSISSIPPI AND THE MISSISSIPPI THAT YOU WERE ENCOUNTERING THEN.

Dennis: Well, when I came to—first came to Mississippi, after the Freedom Rides, that was as a field director for CORE to take over the directorship from Tom Gather who had been drafted into the service. And primarily what we were involved in then was accommodating the freedom riders who were still coming to the state for trials and for various political activities. Of my exposure to Mississippi at that time was it was a very tense situation, very hostile in terms of the police department and as terms of whites, period. I mean, there was a total separation of the races and that existed. You were followed constantly by the police department. You were harassed by the police department. You were arrested on—for any reason whatsoever you could think of to put people in jail. People were beaten in Mississippi and not, not just in terms of people who were involved in civil rights activities, but there was just a total type of effort on the part of the system to suppress any type of activities on the part of people and discourage them. One way of doing that is, is that to keep people involved is there was a tremendous amount of harassment of anybody who associated with any people who participated in the movement and as a result of that aspect of it, it was very difficult to recruit people on a local level for, for a period of time, especially in Jackson, Mississippi. I mean much more successful in getting people to participate from other rural areas, like the Cantons, like McCombs, Mississippi and places, Natchez and place like that is. Haddesburg, and others you know whereby you had people you could get them involved much more quicker [sic] than you could in than you could in Jackson, Mississippi.

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

[cut]

00:10:31:00

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK.

INTERVIEWER: SO—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: HANG ON A SEC WHILE I GET SETTLED. OK, IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: OK, GIVE ME, GIVE ME THAT—TELL ME, TELL ME THIS MISSISSIPPI THAT YOU'RE COMING INTO. DESCRIBE IT—MOST OF THESE PEOPLE WILL—CAN UNDERSTAND TOO.

Dennis: Yeah, you see, coming into Mississippi from Louisiana it wasn't really much difference. Say you cross the state line. Mississippi got of course more of the publicity because of things were going on there, there's more activities. The conditions that existed or the type is, is that you, you—there weren't, there weren't any public places whereby one couldn't go to and enjoy as a human being. The result is separation. There was black here, white there. You had separate restrooms. You had separate—you couldn't eat at the same lunch counters, you know. There is a—if you go to a department store where you have lunch counters and things like that there was a little section, a hole in the wall in the side, where blacks were allowed to eat and then there were the other whites, beautiful lunch counters and stuff like that whites were allowed to. Hotels, most hotels, you know, that you—in fact there weren't any real, what you considered to be white hotels, your Holiday Inns, your Sheratons if there were any, your Hiltons, or whatever you had equivalent to that. They were all segregated. Blacks could not go to those. I mean you had some places for blacks to go to that we say a little hotel here that some blacks might have put up, a boarding house here. A boarding house there. I mean traveling in those particular days just to go from one place to the other you just hoped like God that you could, by God that you didn't have to stop. Or you could buy gas at the service station but you couldn't use the service, you know, the restrooms. You would have to go down the road someplace, stop on the side of the roads and use the bathroom and hope like hell that the sheriff or the police didn't see you because then you get arrested for, you know, indecent exposure or something like that is. And those were the type conditions that existed. Blacks were—we take for granted now, I guess, the fact is that registration, voting, and things of that nature which you weren't—blacks were not allowed, you know, that opportunity at that particular time is. I mean, you had the tests for instance one part of the test, I'll always remember in, in, in Mississippi for becoming a registered voter is that they would take a part—a section out of the Constitution of the United States and tell the person to interpret that. Now in terms of, number one is, just to be able to interpret that, I mean, people would doing—lawyers are doing that, you know, on a daily basis, attempting to interpret it, the Supreme Courts are still attempting to interpret what the constitution means. And you had people who would give you that test who would determine as to whether or not your interpretation of that was right or wrong and if you didn't pass just that one section then, you know, you would not be allowed to register to vote.

00:13:19:00

INTERVIEWER: AND WHAT WERE THE, WHAT WERE THE DANGERS OF SAY A PERSON TO TRY TO REGISTER TO VOTE OR TO TRY AND SIT AT ONE OF THESE RESTAURANTS? WHAT WAS, HOW DID, HOW DID THAT, HOW WAS THAT MAINTAINED?

Dennis: That was main—the person who attempted to crack the barrier and about sitting at the restaurants—lunch counters to eat or by using a restroom that was considered to be white only or by registering to vote met with all kinds of violence, oppression from the police department and the whites in general. That is that they would be beaten. You had the threat of being put in jail and harassed in terms of—if you lived in that community is not being able to get a job. The fact is harassed on a daily basis or last but not least is your life. I mean, there people who were killed just for attempting to get people to register to vote or people who were killed or beaten very badly just because the fact is that they attempted to sit at a lunch counter and people who were actually killed because the fact is they even supposedly looked at a white person, you know, the wrong type of way like the Emmett Tills and stuff like that is. And so therefore is those are the kinds of things that you had—you confronted with, just in an attempt to let's say express yourself or to participate or exercise the rights that was supposed to be given to you by the Constitution of the United States.

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S, LET'S CUT PLEASE—

[cut]

00:14:44:00

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: FIRST, DESCRIBE FOR ME WHAT CORE'S INVOLVEMENT WAS IN ORGANIZING STUDENT PROTESTS IN, IN JACKSON. WE'RE IN '63 NOW.

Dennis: Well in '63, the Congress of Racial Equality was involved in Mississippi. We didn't operate as CORE per se. What I mean by that is they had workers in here, but I had a lot of problems with the national office because prior to that time we had, through the influence of Bob Moses and others, they'd organized a group organization in Mississippi called the Council of Federated Organizations, better known as COFO, which Bob Moses and myself were co-directors of it. And once that organization was formed we sort of merged everybody into it and called ourselves COFO workers. SNCC workers were COFO workers. CORE workers were COFO workers and those were the primary two groups that participated at that time. We as, mostly, did not see ourselves other than as COFO workers. We didn't organize in the SNCC chapters we didn't organize in the CORE chapters. So the organization, CORE's participation was more as say COFO workers. CORE didn't like that. SNCC didn't like that. From the national offices, the—they but that's the way we felt that we would do that to keep from having any real competition among the organization on the national level that we felt would hurt what we were doing in Mississippi.

00:16:15:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. LET ME—THAT’S GOOD. AND DESCRIBE FOR ME THE DAY IN JACKSON WHEN THE STUDENTS ARE PROTESTING AND THEY’RE TAKEN AWAY IN GARBAGE TRUCKS AND TAKEN TO THE FAIRGROUNDS AND THE EFFECT THAT HAS ON THE COMMUNITY AT THAT TIME IN JACKSON.

Dennis: Well, at that time is, we were organizing demonstrations in Jackson area. I participated in the Jackson organization of those demonstrations and some of the SNCC people and some were CORE workers. We had a dual operation there. We were not divorcing ourselves from our primary objective and that was to continue on the voter registration work and things in the other areas of the state. Mississ—Jackson sort of happened, at the time is, it was a secondary effort on our part. The demonstrations per se is had a tremendous effect on the people as a whole in Jackson. I mean, most of them were students who were demonstrating at that time and the manner in which the Jackson police department and state troopers handled the situation is, really, sort of enraged the people and got the people very much involved. At the same time is that type of activity though if you—is something that caused the death of Medgar Evers. When that—our demonstration escalated to the point that it did and brought the attention that it did on him. And—but as a whole is that it did have a tremendous effect on the manner in which the, the Jackson, Mississippi and the state as a whole, to react to what was going on in the state. Prior to that time is we had, we had, had a lot of problems we're getting of, of real tight massive participation from Jackson, Mississippi itself. After that Jackson began to become much more involved. But that was when involvement from the adult population which brought about by the entries and involvement of the students and we're not talking about college students per se, a lot of the high school students were jailed and beaten at that particular time and that’s what made the adults or cause the adults to become more, become more active in their participation.

00:18:32:00

INTERVIEWER: OK, TALK TO ME, DESCRIBE MEDGAR TO ME. TALK TO ME ABOUT HIM AS A MAN. DESCRIBE HIM SO PEOPLE WHO NEVER MET HIM BEFORE BEGIN TO UN—KNOW HIM.

Dennis: Medgar Evers and I were very good friends. He was one of the first people other than Bob Moses and others to befriend me when I first got here. We was tight friends and we did things together we would go out together, you know. And go to eat together and things of that nature. And he was a very strong willed person, very committed to the movement. Who always had the fear or feeling about death. And when I say fear is that he wasn't afraid of dying, he, he felt it was close, I mean, from what he did on a day to day basis, he knew he was a marked man. But his commitment was extremely strong and as a human being you couldn't find a better human being. And he was more committed to Mississippi and the people as a whole than he was to any type of real organization. He had some very strong conflicts with his, with the national office of the NAACP because of that, but at the same time he was a firm and strong worker for the National Association for the further Advancement of Colored People: the NAACP.

INTERVIEWER: LET'S CUT—

[cut]

00:19:45:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK, MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: HANG ON ONE SECOND THERE. LET ME GET SETTLED HERE. OK.

Dennis: Medgar was—he was not a nonviolent person. What I mean by that is he, he wasn't one who felt that he should be an aggressor but he felt that he should defend himself. And one of his reasons for not being willing to participate in a lot of things that we did is a, CORE people and SNCC people at that time, or COFO people was because he felt he could not be nonviolent. Medgar used to carry guns you know in the trunk of his car or—but for his own protection, I expect of it. I used to tease him about that too because, what are you gonna do with this in the trunk of your car? I mean, you gonna got to it if the guy comes? We used to laugh and he said, well if I put it in the car and the cops catch me I'll go to jail, whatever, you know, or else they'll shoot me. Claim the fact is that, you know, they—I had pulled a gun or something like that is and so yeah. It was always in the trunk of his car and the last time, the last day of Medgar's death, he and I had some, both of us had close encounters on that day of different sorts you might say and he had, we had traded cars. He had my car and I had his car all day and I had done—and I had used his car because I was doing some work in Canton and I knew that every time I went in my car the police would come and stuff like that and so he had used mine. That night at the rally they had I brought his car back and Medgar told me that someone had attempted to—

00:21:16:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: SORRY WE JUST RAN OUT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE JUST RAN OUT.

INTERVIEWER: I'M GONNA—

00:21:20:00

[cut]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FLAGS.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: HANG ON ONE SECOND, LET ME GET SETTLED. OK, YOU BETTER TAKE THAT FROM THE TOP.

INTERVIEWER: OK FROM THE TOP.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I'M GONNA GIVE YOU THE SAME FRAMING CAUSE IT'S—

Dennis: Which? Where? Was—

INTERVIEWER: OK. YOU WERE BEGINNING TO TALK ABOUT ON THE DAY.

Dennis: OK. Right. Well, on the day that Medgar was killed we had had several different encounters, you know. They were somewhat related and not related. We had traded cars earlier that day. I was working and primarily at that time I had some work doing, was doing some work in Canton, Mississippi. So I had been followed a lot in my car and stuff by the police and everything so I wanted to go in and get some work done, without that, so I traded cars, used Medgar's car, Medgar used my car. Well, there on the evening when we got back together, he was—told me the story about the fact that he had been almost run down by a car, you know, while he was trying to get into my car. So he was teasing me about the fact a man could get killed in this car. And I told him well, I had had an incident too, I'd been stopped, you know, by some Klan members and stuff like that over there and so we just joked about that. And then he asked me, he said, well after the rally we wanna go to his house. He had asked why don't I come by and I told him no, a person would get killed, you know, going with him. So we laughed about it and that was the last time I saw him alive.

00:22:44:00

INTERVIEWER: WHERE WERE YOU WHEN YOU FIND OUT—FOUND OUT?

Dennis: I was at home. I had gone home, was in bed when I got a call.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT—JUST TELL ME WHERE YOU WERE AND THAT.

Dennis: Well, I was at home. I had gone home and eaten and gone by the time, we were getting ready to eat, you know. No I didn't eat. I got going home and, and taken a quick bath and went to bed and as soon as I was got into bed, I got a call in saying that he'd just been shot. My first reaction to that was, was I was just stunned and shocked. I didn't, I didn't move, I couldn't move. I just sat there, you know, and for a long time. I guess the realities of, of life and death and what we're doing just really hit me suddenly, you know. And I was extremely angry not knowing what to do or anything of that nature. So, I guess, life sort of

changed. Things became—after that incident things became very automatic for a while to me. I became extremely cold. I became—my feelings about what had to be done in the movement—I was more like an army sergeant in a sense is. There was some people once we were—I, I had sent some people over into Natchez it was to pick up some—get some affidavits that we needed for some lawyers and they came back and the car had been shot up and stuff like that. And they were very upset, you know, my first reaction was, did you get the affidavits? And they said no. I told them well, as soon as you get something to eat, take the keys to the other car out there, I want you guys to go back and get those papers ‘cause we need ‘em and I walked away. I didn't realize what I had done until later on that evening when one of the workers there came up and said, Dave do know what you did? You know, I mean, I mean how could you do that? And I said what are you talking about, you know. And then we had a long discussion about it and my first reaction was well they had something that had to be done, that's their job, you know. And then I began to feel my feelings were different, you know. I mean it's something that and that incident occurred before Schwerner and them were killed and so and now—

00:25:18:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. I WANNA TAKE YOU NOW AND—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: ORLANDO CAN YOU SCOOT YOUR CHAIR A LITTLE CLOSER TO THE CAMERA AND SCOOCH YOUR HEAD OVER A LITTLE BIT. YEAH THERE WE GO. A LITTLE MORE ON THAT SIDE.

INTERVIEWER: SPEAK, SPEAK TO ME NOW ABOUT MEDGAR'S DEATH AND, AND IT'S—THAT IMPACT ON BLACK MISSISSIPPIANS AND THE REST OF THE PEOPLE.

Dennis: That was the first, Medgar's death, brought about, I think, for the first time in, I know, in the Jackson area and other place too there was real anger among black people. Extreme violence. *On the day that Medgar was to—funeral—I mean, there was a violence. I mean, there was no way to predict it. There was a different element to the people who had never participated in the movement before. The guys off the street who were just angry, you know, who that, at that time as we had very little contact with in the Jackson area. We had mostly worked in church, through churches; we had worked through students, young people, and then just people in general, you know? But the street people we had not really worked with as, because they didn't want to have anything to do with us, because they always felt that they could not cope with the nonviolence. Not that they disagreed with what the movement, that, it's just that the tactics that we used. You know, on that particular day that group of people decide to speak out in their own way, and that's what they did and that's where the violent eruptions occurred at that time is. And—but they did have enough respect that they listened to people and they were able to control it to some extent once we got into dealing with it and you know and things. But that was anger, the kind of type of anger that you saw in that we experienced in Watts and in, and in Harlem, twice.*

00:27:12:00

INTERVIEWER: SPEAK—TELL ME ABOUT THAT MARCH AND YOU TELLING SOME STORY ABOUT JOHN DOAR STEPPING IN THE MIDDLE THERE AND WHAT YOU EXPERIENCED WHEN THAT HAPPENED.

Dennis: Yeah, well, John Doar was very active. He was one of the people in all our experiences that was involved in with the government who, I think, had a genuine commitment to make the government responsive and—

INTERVIEWER: SORRY, I'M, I'M GONNA HAVE TO CUT YOU RIGHT HERE.

[cut]

00:27:14:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARKER.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK. I'D LIKE TO PICK UP THAT MARCH AND THAT INCIDENT WHEN JOHN DOAR DOES STEP, STEP OUT IN BETWEEN BEGIN TO TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED FROM YOUR VANTAGE POINT.

Dennis: [coughs] Yeah as the, the march began for Medgar Evers' funeral the— there was a violent reaction, the people of the of street people, you might call them, whatever you want, is that people who had not expressed themselves before because the fact is that they had not, they did not believe and neither were they committed to our philosophy of non-violence at that time decided to express themselves in a way. John Doar was at that time with the Justice Department and very much involved. He was one of the few people that we found in the Justice Department and felt they had a very strong commitment, real commitment himself, to make the government—to respond in a positive manner to the needs that existed there. He made a genuine effort to do what he could to stop, as he put it is because he felt to stop the violence because he felt that what was gonna happen here was mass slaughter. I mean, *the police department and others came there. They, they actually antagonized the people. They were there in full battalion gear* and everything else is *with their riot thick armor on and guns*, and everything else is, *and they were being pretty rough with the people on the street. And the people said, we're not gonna take that. This is a funeral of our leader, and here they are, you know, harassing us, and the white folk killed him.* And that started a violent reaction and John Doar attempted to stop it, but at one point is, as he round the corner a, a, a black guy, who I just so happened I knew, came around with a rifle and just put it right on him and he was about to kill him, I think John Doar's days were numbered at that time and I was able to stop that, you know. But he was—he didn't stop him, I mean, he, at that time, just said thank you and continued to try to—he grabbed—took a bullhorn from one of the police officers and, and got the crowd more under control. That was very much responsible for a lot of the control that existed at that time.

00:30:09:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. JACKSON SEEMED TO, TO KIND OF VACILLATE FOR A WHILE AFTER THAT. SOME PEOPLE SAY THAT, THAT THERE WAS POSSIBLY AN EFFORT WITHIN EVEN FROM THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO KIND OF DIFFUSE WHAT WAS GOING ON THERE. DO YOU HAVE ANY SENSE OF WHAT WAS GOING ON AT THAT TIME IN THE MOVEMENT AND WHY IT BEGAN TO KIND OF—NOT—DIDN'T CONTINUE TO DEVELOP?

Dennis: Well one of the things that occurred is some of the leadership blamed— one of the things that occurred after the death of Medgar Evers, I think, that might have resulted in the diffusion of, what one might say, is the dampening of the fire that existed there was the, was the fact that the decision on the part of the COFO peoples SNCC, CORE people primarily to sort of back out. The reason why they decided to back out was because there was a conflict between the NAACP and the COFO people and we felt that, very strongly, that that was not worth to cause dissention in the community. But the organizations fighting over who was going to get the largest piece of the pie in terms of responsibility of the demonstrations which is, which is crazy we felt at that time is. So we sort of backed out. We were the activists, the NAACP at that time were more for saying that quiet things down, I mean, lets move slowly, lets do it through different means other than demonstrations and that kinds of things. Well that was fine. And we went back to our old agenda of voter registration and community organ—organization in the rural areas. And, I think, that is what occurred and that was what slowed things down because the, the demonstrations the things that pushed the fall were the SNCC/CORE people who were in the area at that time is, and it was more—and Medgar, who was not against it, you know, at all. And that's what I think made the changes—

00:32:19:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Dennis: —and so Jackson movement just sort of died away at that time or what you might say went to sleep for a while after that incident.

INTERVIEWER: OK. WE JUST ROLLED OUT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: ROLL OUT.

00:32:29:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change camera toll to 350]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FLAGS.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: I WANNA MOVE UP NOW TO THE SUMMER PROJECT BRINGING STUDENTS INTO MISSISSIPPI. AND I'D LIKE TO FIRST ASK YOU WHAT YOU FELT ABOUT THE DEBATE TO BRING WHITE STUDENTS INTO MISSISSIPPI.

[motorcycle engine roaring]

INTERVIEWER: HOLD IT ONE SEC. SORRY. CUT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: GOT SOME FULL RUBBER ON THAT ONE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: FLAGS.

[cut]

00:32:51:00

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: PART IN MY HAIR FOR THE REST OF THE TIME. [laughs]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK, LET ME GET SETTLED HERE AND I AM ALMOST SETTLED.

INTERVIEWER: DO I HEAR A TONE?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YEAH, IT'S SOMETHING. SOMEWHERE. I DON'T KNOW.

INTERVIEWER: YEAH, BUT WHAT IS THAT? LET'S CUT FOR A SECOND. WHAT IS THAT?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: CAN I HAVE FLAGS?

[cut]

00:33:05:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARKER.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK, DAVE, TALKING ABOUT THE SUMMER PROJECT DIS—TALK TO ME ABOUT THE, THE DEBATE ABOUT WHETHER OR NOT TO BRING IN WHITE COLLEGE, NORTHERN STUDENTS AT THE TIME.

Dennis: At the time that we decided to bring in the large number of students, especially white students, for the summer project in 1964 there was a lot of debate among the workers, locally. Many of the workers did not want a lot of the white students in. One was that they felt that it would take away from the—what we were trying to do in the movement as a whole. And the second thing I think was, was that basically a concern [coughs] in terms of the, the question of black and white issues—

INTERVIEWER: I'M SORRY I'VE GOTTA CUT.

[cut]

00:34:01:00

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK. LET'S FIRST TALK ABOUT THE CONCERN—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YOU HAVE A PLANE COMING.

[cut]

00:34:11:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FLAGS.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK, LET'S BEGIN TO TALK ABOUT THAT, THE DECISION TO BRING THE SUMMER STUDENTS AND NORTHERN WHITE STUDENTS IN THE LATE SUMMER.

Dennis: OK. Prior to the beginning of the 1964 summer project there was a lot discussion and among the workers, at that time, as to whether or not we should bring in such a large number of white students. I think there were several reasons for that. Number one is, is that the, the possible danger that it posed upon all of the workers in the community as a whole. The sec—second aspect of it was, was that the—we were getting into the transitional phase of the black power movement. It's becoming very prominent at that time. A primary push by the "Stokely Carmichaels", and others who were also part of the summer project. And the third thing was, I think, was that the based upon the experience from our having other whites in prior to this time. We had a lot of them came in with various different degrees etc. and with the—saw us with more of a sophistication and the political structure development in this country caused a basic fear among a lot of the workers that we had who were local and who

had not had that type of experience most of their experience in the politics had been on the local level. And those three elements, I think, caused a basic fear, a hesitancy on the, on the part of a large number to bring in large number of white groups. Then there was another element that felt very strongly that of course realizing these factors as being real and true that the overwhelming results that could come from bringing those students in the attention that it could bring up on the state at this critical time that the, the risk was necessary in order to do what we thought was necessary to be done at that time.

00:36:16:00

INTERVIEWER: AND WHAT WAS THAT?

Dennis: What that was, was, was that politically the timing was right.

INTERVIEWER: I'M SORRY. I'M SORRY—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: START THAT AGAIN.

INTERVIEWER: SAY WHAT WAS NECESSARY AT THAT TIME?

Dennis: The things that were necessary at the time I'm referring to was that we were coming into a Democratic convention. The, the—it was time we felt because of the attention being given upon states sending delegates to the national convention, the Democratic Party. It was time for us to focus upon the inequities and the discrimination that existed in the South in terms of black participation in the political structure of this country. Mississippi was set as the greatest example because we were much farther ahead in this state in terms of organi—organizing than they were in any other state. And we felt that by bringing that attention there we could emphasize the problem that existed in terms of blacks' attempts to participate in the political structure of this country.

00:37:10:00

INTERVIEWER: SO HOW WOULD BRINGING WHITE STUDENTS INTO MISSISSIPPI FOCUS THAT ATTENTION?

Dennis: Well, most of the, most of the—

INTERVIEWER: INCLUDE MINE.

Dennis: Right. *Most of the students that, and people that we were bringing in for the summer project, were from the large universities. And they were from families, who were politicians, bankers, lawyers, and others. And we felt, by the fact that by bringing in those particular people, that the attention of their parents and relatives from the various different, other parts of the country, would be on these areas. And by having large numbers of whites in here, is to press, the American public would have much more concern, than if there were just a bunch of blacks that were in, in the state.* So we felt by

using whites that would bring the type of attention because they were following their white children in the area.

00:37:39:00

INTERVIEWER: WAS THERE CONCERN THAT THESE WHITES WOULD BE POSSIBLY THE VICTIMS OF, OF A MORE INTENSE RETALIATION THAN, THAN SAY, BLACK WORKERS IN THE STATE?

Dennis: Yes. And we felt that, we felt very strongly about the—that—several aspects: number one is that with whites coming in it would bring on a stiffer type of retaliation on the part of the state which would mean is, is that that would bring in much more publicity and at the same time that would, would bring about the main intent and that was to emphasize the inequities of the problems that existed in terms of blacks becoming part of the political structure. We also knew that if a black was killed that there would not be the type of attention on the state as would be if a white was killed or if a white was injured badly it would bring on more much more attention than if it's a black was injured. You see there had been blacks killed and blacks beaten in Mississippi for years and although there would be some small little publicity on it the government never did really act in any type of affirmative manner in order to try to stop that type of violence against black people and we felt that they would if in terms if that existed towards whites. And—

00:39:17:00

INTERVIEWER: SO THEN CHANEY AND GOODMAN AND, AND SCHWERNER ARE, ARE MISSING. TALK ABOUT THAT TIME.

Dennis: Well, we did—number one is we felt that something was going to happen. I don't think that anyone had in their minds that it was, was gonna be a clean summer. Without the racists being able to take their toll on someone here. We hadn't expected it to happen so soon and we didn't expect it to happen so close to the family. Because most people look at Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman as being summer volunteers and that is not true. There were only one summer volunteer and that was Goodman. Mickey Schwerner had been in the state for a while and had been very active in one of the toughest areas in the state, I mean, there was the Delta, there was the Natchez area and there was Philadelphia area and that part of Mississippi those were the places whereby we had the most trouble. And James Chaney was from Arabia, Mississippi which is only a few miles from Philadelphia. We didn't expect it to, to hit so fast and so close at that time.

00:40:33:00

INTERVIEWER: SOME PEOPLE WOULD—IT WAS—AT THAT TIME, PEOPLE SAID THAT, THAT WAS WHAT YOU—THAT'S WHAT YOU WANTED. THAT'S, THAT'S THE ATTENTION, THAT'S WHAT—THAT WAS THE WHOLE POINT. WHAT DID—HOW DID YOU—

Dennis: No, at the—we wanted attention. We expected something to happen. We didn't want death to occur, but we knew that that was that strong possibility, just as it was everyday for us working, anyone working in, in the state. In, in Mississippi. I don't think that a lot of people understood the dangers until this event occurred. See, to give an example of what I'm talking about the difference for the—what, what the summer project brought about, the attention. If you recall during the time they were looking for the bodies of Chaney, Schwerner, and Goodman they found other bodies throughout this state. They found torsos in the Mississippi River. They found people who were buried. They even found a few bodies of people on the side of roads and things of that nature. All the time is, the press and people saying is is that we, they had found a body or they found two bodies. The autopsies are being run or whatever you have to see whether or not they could be identified as some of the, the three missing workers. Soon as it was determined that they were not the three workers or one of the three workers then everybody said well it was not the three workers, they're still missing, and those deaths were forgotten. They was looking for the three people. And that's what we were talking about in terms of what the freedom summer was all about in terms of why it was necessary to bring that attention on. Because people forgot and if it had just been blacks there we would have forgotten again if it had just been three black people missing. Because what occurred there is a proof of that is, that the bodies that they found during the interval of the first missing of the three workers, in the time that they found, there was no real attention given to those deaths.

00:42:37:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU SEEM, YOU SEEM—I DON'T KNOW—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YOU'VE GOT TWENTY FEET.

INTERVIEWER: NICE WORK. LET'S CHANGE.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: END ROLL.

[cut]

00:42:44:00

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: GIVE ME THAT ANALOGY TOWARDS WAR AGAIN.

Dennis: A lot of people felt that we intentionally brought whites into the summer project so that a white could be killed. That is not true. We brought a lot of whites into the state primarily for—to get attention on the problems in the state. And it was just like a war and I don't think that a lot of people understood that we were in a war in the state of Mississippi, I think, we would use a lot of non-violence. And when you're in a war is, you don't send soldiers out to be killed, you send soldiers out to win the war, hoping like hell that they're not gonna be killed. But usually what happens is inevitably somebody is killed. And that's what

the war was all about. People in Mississippi, the racists in Mississippi were using guns, they were using bombs, and they were killing people. But this country was not giving that attention upon the—what was going on here until that summer project. And for the first time white America understood, those people who said they were liberal, they understood that it made no difference what color you were it was what you stood for as to whether or not you would live or die in this state at that time.

INTERVIEWER: CAN WE CUT FOR A SECOND?

[cut]

00:44:05:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: FLAGS.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: WHEN—AT CHANEY'S FUNERAL YOU HAD PREPARED A STATEMENT. YOU GOT UP ON THAT STAND TO MAKE—DELIVER YOUR STATEMENT AND YOU COULDN'T DELIVER THE STATEMENT. AND YOU ENDED WITH, YOU BEGAN TO SAY, DAMN THEIR SOULS. CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THAT STATEMENT? TALK ABOUT THAT MOMENT WHERE, WHERE YOU WENT AT THAT TIME?

Dennis: Well after the bodies were found there was this con—after the bodies—Schwerner, Goodman and Chaney were found, there was a basic concern about cooling things down because the country was angry and I had been told I was gonna give eulogy at the, at the church in Meridian, James Chaney. And *I had been approached by the people of my national office, of CORE, and others, to make sure that the speech that's given is calm. They don't want a lot of, you know, of things stirred up, and everything else like that. And I agreed to do that, and I said OK, fine, that's good. But then when I got up there on, and I looked out there and I saw little Ben Chaney, things just sort of snapped, and I, I was in a fantasy world, to be sitting up here talking about, things gonna get better, and we should do it in an easy manner, and, non-violence and stuff like that. It's because this country, you cannot make a man change by speaking a foreign language. He has to understand what you're talking about. This country operates, operated then and still operates, on violence. I mean, if you said, eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, that's what we respect, and if we are—that's why football is so popular, that's why wrestling matches, boxing everything in this country's so popular. It's an eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth. And I couldn't see by speaking to anyone was gonna make any changes unless I told the way I felt. So I just stopped and said what I felt and that's what brought it about. I mean, there was no need to stand in front of that kid, Ben Chaney, and lie to him.*

INTERVIEWER: OK, CAN WE CUT FOR ONE SECOND.

00:46:31:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

INTERVIEWER: I THINK PEOPLE WILL—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FLAGS.

INTERVIEWER: —SEE THIS ON FILM AND THEY NEED TO KNOW—

00:46:32:00

[cut]

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —WHAT'S BEHIND, WHAT IS BEHIND THOSE, THOSE WORDS. WHAT'S BEHIND THEM AT THAT MOMENT? TELL ME.

Dennis: Well you see when we—what people doesn't understand, I think, you know, was that we were, we were being shot—

INTERVIEWER: ONE SEC, ONE SEC. OK, LET'S CUT, CUT.

[cut]

00:46:52:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: FLAGS.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME WHAT PEOPLE DID NOT UNDERSTAND AT THAT TIME.

Dennis: What people did not understand, at that time, is that we as workers, as blacks in Mississippi, I mean, were being shot at, were being killed were being, houses bombed, cars shot up and this wasn't just on, you know, every six months some incident would happen, this was weekly. I mean, you know, you, you—every time you walked outside your, your life was

in your hands. I mean, I was one—I remember one night I walked out, it was about three o'clock in the morning, I walked out the COFO office got into my car and this—

INTERVIEWER: GOTTA CUT.

[cut]

00:47:35:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARKER.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: FLAGS.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: TRAIN.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: IT'S GOING AWAY ISN'T IT?

INTERVIEWER: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SOUND IS LOUD.

INTERVIEWER: CUT THEN.

[cut]

00:47:50:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARKER.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: AGAIN GETTING BACK TO THAT. BEGIN TO DESCRIBE WHAT PEOPLE DID NOT UNDERSTAND AT THAT TIME—CUT IT. EDIT.

[cut]

00:48:07:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK. BEGIN TO TELL US WHAT PEOPLE DIDN'T UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE SITUATION OF ORGANIZERS HERE IN THE STATE.

Dennis: One of the things people did not understand outside the state was that the, the dangers that the workers faced every day. I mean, we were shot at. People were beaten. Cars were shot up. Houses bombed. Buildings bombed. [coughs] Excuse me. This was done on a, on a, not on an irregular basis, you know, like every six months or something like that, this was done on a daily basis a lot of times, I mean, there was something happening someplace in the state. And those kinds of things, like that, you began to feel nothing was being done, I mean this—no one could find, the state would not prosecute, the federal government would claim that their hands were tied and everything like that. So the question is what do you do? And we got to a point, especially myself, as it got to a point whereby I just could not anymore tell people to be nonviolent. I could not say, wait, let's depend upon someone else to resolve this problem for us. I could not do that anymore. We had to deal with it ourselves, because there wasn't anyone else out there doing anything about it at all.

00:49:22:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. SPEAKING ABOUT GOING THROUGH THAT, THAT KIND OF DANGER EVERY DAY, TALK TO ME ABOUT THE COMARADERIE OF PEOPLE HERE. HOW IMPORTANT THAT WAS, THAT THERE WAS SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT MISSISSIPPI. PEOPLE SEEMED TO, TO, TO KIND OF COME TOGETHER. THEY FORMED THIS UNITED FRONT. THERE WAS A KIND—YOU, BOB, AND, AND OTHER GROUPS—IT WAS THIS COMING TOGETHER THAT WAS DIFFERENT. TALK TO ME ABOUT THAT.

Dennis: The, the relationship that the workers had and the people had in the state of Mississippi was totally different from any other place I'd worked. I think it had a lot to do with the fact is we didn't separate ourselves by organizational lines. We sort of, you know, shed it those shields, those coats, those cloaks that we, wore, it's whether you're CORE or whether you're SNCC whether you were SCLC or whatever. When you came into the state to work on the voter registration programs the ministerial groups, whatever you were, you became a part of COFO which was a state, a people's group. And if whatever happened to someone over here, I don't care whether it was being manned by so called CORE workers, it was COFO as far as we were concerned. So when anything happened is you always felt the camaraderie, the brotherhood, sisterhood and we were very much—we were very close to the local people. Because in those areas we lived with the local people and we were with them every day, I mean, the workers. And we dealt with organizing and putting people and helping people to become leaders in, in control of their own destiny in organization wise. Like the Miss Fannie Lou Hamers [sic] and Ms. Annie Devines [sic] and others and Ms. Victoria Grays [sic] and all the people like that is came out of those communities and we developed them and they all formed their own organizations with no real association of national groups whereby they were dictated to by outside groups nothing of that nature. They make their own rules, their own regulations and things like that is. And they moved at their pace or we moved their pace of everybody sort of moved together. And we had meetings, decision making meetings, everyone participated. Although I must admit on some decisions there were a few of us, Bob or myself, or both of us did sort of shove things down sometimes to get things moving in a certain direction that maybe was not understood at the time.

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

[cut]

00:51:43:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK WE'RE ROLLING.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AT FLAGS.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK, WE GOT A SHORT FILM HERE. SHORT TOO. IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: OK. LET'S, LET'S FIRST, LET'S TALK ABOUT THAT PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP AND HOW...

Dennis: The other thing is, is that we all had a very close relationship, I think, it was more like a family. There's no doubt about the fact that Bob Moses was the leader. Without Bob Moses there was no, wouldn't have been a movement—

INTERVIEWER: STOP, I'M SORRY, IT'S JUST—

[cut]

00:52:15:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THANK YOU SIR AND YOU CAN MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK, WE'RE GONNA PICK IT UP WITH THE PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS.

Dennis: OK.

INTERVIEWER: BOB MOSES.

Dennis: Yeah, the—we had a great personal relationship, there was no doubt about the fact that Bob Moses was the leader. Bob Moses was the person. Without a Bob Moses, in my opinion there, would not have been a Mississippi project or Mississippi movement of the nature that it was, but at the same time is the relationship was such there, there wasn't that jealousies, there wasn't that—when Bob spoke or said this had to be done or that had to be done everyone listened. I mean, there wasn't—whatever was needed among people and, I

think, it had a lot to do with the, also that the, not only the personalities of people, and Bob affected that. He had a very cooling effect on people, you know, and I think that in terms of the closeness we all had, had a lot to do with the Moses personality as we would call it, you know. The other thing that existed was, I think, it had to do a lot of the programs that we had that reached people. We had—we start the first Head Start programs and we would call them Freedom Schools and we had health programs and with doctors in and we had programs that reached all elements of people in different stages and levels that brought about a different kind of relationship too. It wasn't just one dimensional. And that too built a different type of relationship because everyone sort of dealt with the other person's needs and that, in its own strange way, you know, brought about, you had all walks—we just didn't have people who had money, who was involved in the, in the Freedom Democratic Party. There were people who had money, there were people who did not have money, there were people who could read and write, there were people who could not read and write. There were young people, there were older people, there were males, there were females. And that brought about a cross section of feelings and interrelationships that sort of just reached out across the state. So it wasn't just the feelings that were what we had of those who were directly involved or the movement people per se, but the people who participated just as community people who benefited or who just watched sort of felt that charisma and everything else that flowed and I say it flows from Bob on down to others and through the workers on down to the people themselves is and so we all just sort of meld in together. I think, the worst thing that could have occurred, I think, is, is that what happened in Mississippi is, we all left at the same time. Frankly within a year's time the people who played those roles, leadership roles and things from our side were gone and you can't blame them though for leaving, you know. And I'm not making an excuse for myself either is, but there was just so much you could take, I mean, it was just we just reached, you know, the end of the ropes as to much you could take at that particular time. Things changed, only shifted. And not only were we frustrated because we had put so much faith and confidence and hope in this country and then [coughs] when the Democratic Convention and the decisions were made that were made we also that that was the country had said, I am sorry I'm gonna tell you, my most loyal subjects, most democratic people, you know, that we're not going to let you in. When that occurred is, it had a devastating effect on everybody. Students went home and universities were never the same again. This country was never the same again and never will be the same again as a result of that. This country had a chance to make it by saying that is what we're supposed to be about, let's take it and let's roll with it or we're going to just shove it back down their faces. And they chose the latter. And the country has never been the same. Locally, I mean internally and neither externally, so.

00:55:58:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. SPEAKING ABOUT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND A LOT OF THE BRUTALITIES AND THINGS THAT WERE GOING ON, HOW DID YOU FEEL, HOW DID THEY WORK INTO YOUR PLAN TO EFFECT CHANGE IN THE CITY? HOW WERE YOU TRYING TO ENGAGE THE FEDERAL—WHAT ROLE DID THEY PLAY FOR YOU? THIS IS BEFORE THE CONVENTION, SAY.

Dennis: We felt the John Doars and the Robert Kennedys [sic] and others gave us a feeling of—that if we pressed hard enough that, that's all they needed. Was that there was a, that they would say—that we showed the necessity for change and they would make those changes. And we felt the government was gonna do that. And that's the role we were hoping the government was gonna play, and we believed that. I mean, if something went wrong we would call the FBI. We thought they were there to protect us. We thought J. Edgar Hoover was on our side and we found out when things sort of collapsed around us, when what happened to Schwerner and Chaney and Goodman and what happened to us at the Democratic Convention and what happened to us in terms of the laws that were being made, what was the changes they were supposed to be making, during that particular period of time is then we knew, I mean, all of a sudden the realization sort of dawned on us, it was just like a slap in the face. I mean, just everybody just was knocked out. I mean this is, I mean, you couldn't believe it for a while. And the—what the government did was, was to really was, just said OK, you've done what we asked you to do, so what. You know, and just took it and slammed it back into our faces and says, the doors are shut. We don't want you here. And that—what they were—the country—I don't know if they realized it at the time, is, they were speaking to the future leaders of this country and, you know, the people who were there to make changes. These were really people who wanted changes to make the country strong and believe it and they were gonna—and the democracy that we had talked about, that's what they were talking about. Everybody was teaching people how to become part of the system and the country rejected that and that tore everybody apart. I know it ripped me apart. And I know it ripped a lot of other people apart. There have been, there's a lot of people who have not even been able to even participate again—

00:58:10:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Dennis: —it left people hanging—

INTERVIEWER: AND ROLL OUT. OK GOOD.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK THIS IS JUST SOUND, NO CAMERA, AS OF NOW.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: HANGING FROM A TREE. THEY FOUND, THEY FOUND SOMEBODY IN THE RIVER. JUST A BRIEF LITTLE—LIKE A SHOP, LIKE A SHOPPING LIST ALMOST OF—

Dennis: OK.

INTERVIEWER: GIVE US THAT BECAUSE WE'RE—WE'LL DO A SEQUENCE AND THAT WOULD, THAT'LL PLAY VERY WELL. YOU ROLLING? YOU READY?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: YES I AM.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK. THIS IS WILD. NO CAMERA. JUST AUDIO.

Dennis: Well, during the time that the, during the interval between the time that Goodman, Schwerner, and Chaney were missing and the time that they found the bodies, what was found in the, in Mississippi area were other bodies. There were people who, there were a couple bodies were found on the side of the road. There was some body—couple bodies found buried. There were a couple bodies—torsos found floating in the Mississippi River and there was another person found hanging. Now the thing that occurred during that period of time is that there wasn't any real attention given to those bodies that were being found. Everyone was expecting that—we're, we're concerned about whether or not those were the three civil rights workers or either of the three civil rights workers. Once it was found out they were not, then they was all forgotten.

00:59:27:00

INTERVIEWER: WHO WERE THOSE BODIES? WHO WERE THOSE BODIES?

Dennis: They were all except for, my understanding is I think two were white, the rest of them were black—

INTERVIEWER: SAY THAT.

Dennis: —and we just—

INTERVIEWER: PLEASE SAY THAT FOR ME AGAIN.

Dennis: The bodies that were found, other bodies that were found only two, I think were white, the rest of them were black. And they were just local people. They were not civil rights workers anything of that nature as far as we know. But at the same time they were bodies that were being found and but nothing was being done about it and as far as most of A—America was concerned, as long as it wasn't the civil rights workers, then it was OK. Business as usual. And that's what we were talking about prior to the Mississippi Summer. Those were the things that were going on all the time in the state of Mississippi without any attention being given to it. By bringing in the whites that we did for working that summer is the attention was being given to those possibilities at that time is. I mean, on the state, we had all the blacks, three blacks missing, there would have been three blacks missing. Short period of time is, I mean, OK they dead. Medgar Evers was killed, you know, whatever happened on that is, it's a memory. Other than that is, in terms of action being taken in the state to bring about changes, nothing was done.

INTERVIEWER: OK, THANK YOU. VERY GOOD.

[cut]

[end of interview]

01:00:42:00

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