

Interview with **Harry Belafonte**

Date: May 15, 1989

Interviewer: Henry Hampton

Camera Rolls: 9001-9011

Sound Rolls: 901-906

Team: A

Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads, 1965-mid 1980s*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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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 II*.

[camera roll #9001]

[sound roll #901]

00:00:12:00

Interviewer:

One last thing and that is if, if you could use my question in your answer so that if, if I'd asked you about Black Power—

[slate]

Interviewer:

—you'd just—

Harry Belafonte:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

OK. You have a—

[walkie talkie in background]

Interviewer:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

[laughs] We're rolling.

00:00:30:00

Interviewer:

[coughs] Do you have a first memory of the concept of words "Black Power?"

00:00:39:00

Harry Belafonte:

When it first arrived on the scene in its full blown infancy, so to speak. By that I mean, there'd always been a quest for power. The whole struggle in the civil rights movement was, was a constant reflection of a certain amount of powerlessness that was, that had permeated through Black life, Black culture, Black aspiration. So, I think people were constantly in touch with the idea that we were in need of power. Given Dr. King's position on the movement in its broadest sense and seeing it as all-encompassing, not just for Black needs but for the needs of all of those who reflected an existence in the, in the underclass or in the poor peoples of our country. Dr. King was somewhat careful in how he used racial definitions to characterize aspects of the movement. [pause] So, no one ever really talked to the idea of, of "Black Power" as such. It carried with it a host of, of definitions that for many it was an unsafe well, cer-certainly that was the response of many people when we first heard it. But when it arrived and when it was used as effectively and as powerfully as Rap Brown used it, as Stokely used it, as all of the guys out of SNCC, and the women out of SNCC applied it, it touched something that was irreversible. Those who were afraid of it because it, it suggested anger and it suggested aggression were justified in that in, in that as one of its definitions. Because it did represent a certain kind of aggression. It represented a certain kind of psychological aggression. It meant that we were seizing a position, that a goal was very clearly defined: Black power. All that we were to do from this day forward was going to be something that infused the idea that Black people would no longer be powerless. That whatever we may have achieved, even if we achieved civil rights from the SNCC perspective, and I think with great validity, also from Dr. King's incidentally, but even if you achieve civil rights, one did not necessarily achieve power as we've come to understand.

00:04:03:00

Interviewer:

Stop right there. Just [unintelligible].

Camera crew member #2:

[inaudible] water, please?

Harry Belafonte:

Beg your pardon?

Camera crew member #2:

Will you take a sip of water, please.

Harry Belafonte:

Take a sip of water. Oh, because of my thr—[coughs]? That's gonna, that's gonna plague you all along.

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

[laughs]

Harry Belafonte:

That's the nature of the beast.

00:04:24:00

Interviewer:

Can I get you to think about you were a particular character between camps in many ways, between Stokely Carmichael and Rap and the SNCC kids and Dr. King's SCLC. Do you remember being in that role?

00:04:40:00

Harry Belafonte:

Oh, yes, very clearly. It was, it was a role that had been—I'd been given the role. I mean, I, I, it, it was a very difficult role to be in. But it was also a, a, a great challenge in a way. People in SNCC, I think, trusted me a great deal because from the very beginning of the formation of SNCC, I had been very supportive of it and continued to be all through its existence. And I had been one of the primary sponsors financially of SNCC. I had a, a number

of meetings with SNCC in its earliest formation. The counsel of Ella Baker and things that I had discussed with her gave me a great deal of insight into what SNCC was about and what SNCC had hoped to achieve and I felt very comfortable with that. I felt that their, that their suspicion and their sensitivity to SCLC and the elders of the Black community who represented it, that that was historical and it was classic and it was the way it should have been. Young people are always in rebellion against the, the elders and the leaders if you come upon a moment in history when that history is not moving forward in some positive and some meaningful way. And certainly, Black people in this country were deeply frustrated by what had happened to and was happening to existing Black leadership, Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, even leaders prior to that. The, the great and the, the vibrant leaders, Paul Robeson and Du Bois had all but been contained. There was really no, not, no, no aggressive [train passes] voice doing for us what the youth felt should be done. So I was very satisfied [clears throat] that SNCC served a very important dimension to the movement, that they were going to become the provocateurs, they were going to become the radical voice, they were going to become the voice of non-compromise, which I felt was vital to the movement.

00:07:09:00

Interviewer:

It took me at a point and a position in the late '65, '66 about beginning to exclude Whites from the movement—

Harry Belafonte:

Yes. [clears throat]

Interviewer:

—and that was a, a position of great stress.

00:07:24:00

Harry Belafonte:

It was a position of great stress because it was around a very specific individual when it erupted. It was around a young man by the name of Bob Zellner who was a White member of SNCC and had certainly evidenced his deep commitment to the struggle and his willingness to go wherever anyone else went in the quest for the end to racism. He was not the only individual but he was a primary force because he was certainly one of the most upfront of any of the Whites who had been involved in SNCC. And when the question arose, most people thought it was, it, it was a decision that had been re-reached based upon racial factors and had been defined almost exclusively as such, which was not the case. The case was really, in the beginning, quite tactical. The question was, with the Whites who were in SNCC involving themselves directly in the Black community of events, wasn't it more beneficial to the movement to have these very same White people who were quite astute by now and

very sensitive to a host of issues and had learned a great deal out of the Black aspects of the movement, wouldn't it have been more beneficial for them to move into the White communities and to do organizing in the White communities since, obviously, Blacks could not do that effectively? What the White communities needed was White leadership and what better leadership was there available for that than the leadership that came out of the civil rights movement in SNCC and in other aspects of the movement, and SCLC as well? So that this rather tactic, this rather meaningful and I think and substantive discussion and criticism, yielded the result that SNCC would purge itself, which was, I, I always thought it was unfortunate that, that SNCC's position on this had not been more clearly described. Certainly, that was the way I understood it, 'cause when I had to talk with and discuss these events with Dr. King, that was the position that I represented to him. Because when I spoke to Stokely and when I spoke to Rap and I spoke to others in SNCC, and speaking to Bob Zellner himself, Zellner felt, as he expressed to me then, he expressed to me then that it was an important crossroads in the movement and that he felt that the SNCC's position was, was, was correct.

00:10:11:00

Interviewer:

You were—

Harry Belafonte:

[coughs]

Interviewer:

—not only between SNCC and SCLC, but you were also raising a lot funds for SCLC.
And—

Camera Crew Member #1:

[sneezes]

Interviewer:

—during those years that these positions of Black power and no Whites didn't—couldn't have made that any easier.

Harry Belafonte:

No, it didn't make it any easier. As a matter of fact—

Interviewer:

No, it didn't make money-raising any easier, if you [laughs] could include it.

00:10:32:00

Harry Belafonte:

As a matter of fact—

[camera rollout]

[wild sound]

Harry Belafonte:

—the Black power issue did not make raising funds, a large portion of which—

00:10:40:00

Interviewer:

[unintelligible] lost the negative.

Camera crew member #1:

Rollout.

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #9002]

00:10:45:00

Male camera crew:

Mark it, please.

Female camera crew:

Ten seconds.

Camera crew member #1:

That's [inaudible]

Camera crew member #3:

I've been rolling the entire time.

Camera crew member #1:

It's been going. Say when—

Camera crew member #2:

Yeah but we need to see the slate to [unintelligible]

Camera crew member #1:

[laughs] OK. That's a different one.

Harry Belafonte:

[clears throat]

Camera crew member #1:

Mark please.

[slate]

00:11:01:00

Camera crew member #2:

Take two.

00:11:02:00

Harry Belafonte:

Just a coupla things that I think just for archival or, or for other reasons. Black power also did something beyond just setting a new dimension for the, for the movement as such. It, it, it did a lot to unify people who had a history of certain levels and grades of dissatisfaction within their own tribal characteristics. Light-skinned Blacks, and the feeling somewhat removed from Black-skinned Blacks, and, and Blacks who had some Indian in them feeling a little bit different from Blacks, who've da, da, da, da. All those variables which people were having a problem with, you know. Black power kind of just gave everybody a single place to be and Black in its, in, in, in the use of the word Black [coughs] in, in, in, in, in the reality to the psyche, Black is really Black. But the Black power movement said Black is really

Black and using that as the base, we accept the fact that all gradations of that color is acceptable under the term Black. So, it became very unifying. Light-skinned Blacks didn't have to sit back any longer. Because I've, I watched thousands of light-skinned Black people struggle with, with their condition as opposed to Black-skinned Blacks. It was, it was a weird kind of thing to see emerge. I'd always been aware of it [coughs] but I never saw it display itself quite the way it did when the word "Black Power" came up. And it was a unifying, it was a, it was a, it was a, it was a very strange, unifying thing. Everybody had finally a word that they could feel some universality with. It was universal: Black. It said it all. It didn't get into gradations. Everything else seemed to have had gradations. And it was also a word that came out of a realizable and a recognizable Black source. Everybody can debate where did "negro" come from, everybody can debate where did "colored" come from, everybody can debate the use of a host of definitions to describe us, but "Black Power" came from a nitty-gritty place, a, a vibrant movement, aggressive people taking charge of their lives. So, it had that aura around it. And it was terrifying for a lot of White folks, even for a lot of Black folks. But it was also very healing for, I think most. It, it, it, it served, I think, a very healthy dimension at that time in the movement.

00:13:58:00

Interviewer:

It may have been healthy, but how do you raise money around something that's that assertive?

00:14:03:00

Harry Belafonte:

The, the ability to continue to raise funds from the sources that had been traditionally giving, that had been traditionally giving to us, became much more difficult. Because the quest for Black power put a language into the mix that made the people who were White and supportive of our cause, who saw it in non-racial terms, begin to take a position that this became a little too sectarian, became a little bit too alienating. It was now specifically towards a goal that suggested non-integration. It was much too much into the Malcolm X camp. It was moving too, it was going too radical. And no matter how much one tried to explain that away, even accepting some of those definitions as applicable, but it had to be placed in a much larger context to be understood and therefore, it continued to command a moral and ethical giving by those same sources. It, it was very hard. And consequently, [clears throat] it fell upon me to begin to look to sources of funding that the movement had never examined before. And that was what led me to do a whole special trip throughout Europe to identify specific countries and to identify specific governments and to identify specific leaders who were deeply sensitive to our cause, who would not be turned off by emergence of certain slogans or words or definitions that, and that would feel the commitment to our, to our, to our movement. And I, I, I selected two places in which to do a sampling as to the success of that possibility for new resources, not just economic but also moral and political support coming from, from, from an outside place. The first was

in France, a huge benefit was given in Paris which at first had come under the auspices of the American Church, it was under the clergy and the American Church. And then when the State Department and the FBI got through doing its mischief on Dr. King and had intimidated the, the, the, the Americans in Paris, they, be—they, they withdrew and left us with a date and left this mobilization but, but, no, but, were no longer committed to it. And it was interesting because it wasn't as if we had gone to Paris with a broad cross section of the movement. I mean, we went only with Dr. King and even in the face of that, the church, the American Church withdrew its support. But French allies had gotten—I'd explained to them what had happened, that we were in this rather difficult and precarious position, that the church had withdrawn its support from Dr. King and from our presence there, under the guise that we were somehow, according to FBI records, were doing mischief and we were communists and whatnot. And this French community stepped in and the leading artists of France and the leading sports figures in France all came together at the Palais des Sports and it, it, it saved the day. The event turned out to be hugely successful. We made all of the French press and the international press and we received large contributions and had set up our basis to be able to continue to do this. Our next stop after that was in Sweden where we got the King of Sweden, and we got the, to be our patron. We got the Prime Minister to be our Chairman. We got the Bank of Sweden to be the receptacle for our fundraising and we got the Post Office of Sweden to be our conduit. And we did a, we did a whole Scandinavian hookup where all of the Scandinavian countries focused on one event, which was to be the first of many. And a concert was given and Dr. King spoke. And about a week later, after we returned to the United States, had a meeting at the Swedish Embassy. They presented Dr. King with, I think it was a two hundred fifty thousand check as the first offering from, from our efforts. We were somewhat encouraged by all of this because [clears throat] it was not only a new source of revenue for us economically, but it was also a new source of power, of—we were beginning to touch the conscience of, and give legitimacy to people who wanted to support us on the outside that didn't know quite how to do it.

00:19:04:00

Interviewer:

You were also in Africa, and playing that role between the SNCC kids and Sékou Touré, and later.

00:19:14:00

Harry Belafonte:

That was the, the, the young people of SNCC going to Africa was a different set of circumstance. When Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney were discovered missing and presumed murdered, before that information had become fully be-be-before it had been evident, I mean before, before all the facts had fallen into place, I was called by Jim Foreman. And Jim said, we were at the tail end of the summer, the three civil rights workers are missing, all the students are going to go back to campus. I believe that the people of the South here in Mississippi are going to feel—are not going to be able to understand all

of the facts that the program had come to an end and that all of the students were leaving to go back north. It may be assumed that all the students are leaving and going back north, not because of the new school year, but because the three civil rights workers were murdered. And that would look as if this act of intimidation had successfully aborted the, the, the voter registration campaign. And that if this became evident, if, if this, if the, if this became, this, if this was interpreted as a fact, that it would then have its ramifications to the Ku Klux Klan and others wishing to do evil, doing it all over the South, and using murder as an important weapon to, to impede the movement. And what was required was a huge sum of money to be put in place by those students who would volunteer to stay on past that semester and stay in the South and continue to work, especially in the face of the, the missing civil rights workers. And that the decision had to be arrived at very swiftly because the passion—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Harry Belafonte:

—was there and the students were going to vote on it very shortly.

00:21:25:00

Interviewer:

OK, we're, we're out—

Harry Belafonte:

[clears throat]

[beep]

Interviewer:

—it's gonna be hard because you're—

[cut]

[camera roll #9003]

[sound roll #902]

00:21:48:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

Interviewer:

Harry, just one more time. [inaudible]. It may just be a white hair. Is that just a white hair?

Harry Belafonte:

Did it, is it a hair?

Interviewer:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

I just wanna make sure 'cause, you know, in the, in the [unintelligible]. When we get the—

Harry Belafonte:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

Harry Belafonte:

OK? Is it a hair. Should I go to the mirror?

Camera crew member #1:

[laughs]

Harry Belafonte:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

Is that just me?

00:22:10:00

Camera crew member #3:

Oh, yes. OK. Let's stop for a second.

[cut]

00:22:12:00

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

We're shooting film and cutting OK.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it, please.

Camera crew member #2:

Are you gonna hit it?

[slate]

00:22:22:00

Camera crew member #2:

Take four. Thank you.

00:22:27:00

Harry Belafonte:

[coughs] [pause] With this, with, with this state of emergency, I asked Jim how much did he, how much money was required here? And he said between fifty and sixty thousand

dollars. And I had only a matter of a few days in which to raise this money. You have to understand that if it were just that one event alone that required monies, it would not have been as difficult. But you have to understand that we were busy supplying money to so many levels of the movement that it was becoming more and more difficult to find sources to give. Much of our money had been tied up in bail that was just not being returned by the courts for people who were, who were on bail. Much of it had been sp—given to other mobilizations and whatnot, so when Jim called for this amount of money, after having raised the, the, the, the, the initial sum for the voter registration for the students to begin with, it was a difficult thing to do. So, I had to hook up with, with people in various parts of the country and I had to get individuals, because there was no way to mobilize a rally or a benefit, that had to be gotten from individuals. With the understanding that it was quite possible that the money would not come back, unlike bail and other things. So—but I set for myself another goal [clears throat] and that was I'd become sensitive to the fact that many of the people in SNCC were on a burnout. They had really been on the front line for so long, doing so much, and had been beaten and battered and, and intimidated, and still held the line. But they were beginning to make mistakes. Decisions were being arrived at in, in, in, in, in, in ways that, that, that didn't sit well. And that what became very clear to me was that they really needed a hiatus, they needed to get away, they needed to, to just stop for a minute and, and, and just do something very natural, rest the body, put the mind to bed for a second. And when I thought about all the places in which that could possibly be done, for me to do it in Africa, and to be able to take, at, at, at their selection, a group to Africa, to just go to stretch out, to become part of an African environment in the country that was noted for its political progress and for its ideas and where it was going. I then took this fundraising moment to raise additional funds that I then gave to SNCC. And I said the sixty thousand is for the voter registration needs and the additional ten thousand that I've gotten here is really for your transportation, to take people who are the most in need of it, and I know it was a difficult decision to make but it had to be made, to just go on to Africa for two weeks or three weeks and just really cool out.

00:25:50:00

Interviewer:

Why Africa?

00:25:52:00

Harry Belafonte:

[clears throat] Because it was all Black. It was a place to which many people had alluded. Many people talked about it. Many people talked about the emerging Black leadership of Africa, hoping that America would fall in place with the, with the Jomo Kenyattas and the Tom Mboyas and the Kwame Nkrumahs and the Sékou Tourés and the Julius Nyereres who were emerging. [clears throat] And I felt that, [coughs] excuse me, I felt that in the African environment, removed from civil rights, removed from certain aspects of White pressure as was understood, and political pressures were understood, that it would be a very

different place, that there would be a chance to get out of self and to interface with, with a place that most of them had never been before.

00:26:41:00

Interviewer:

Do you remember it touching anyone in particular, [unintelligible]?

00:26:43:00

Harry Belafonte:

Yeah. [clears throat] I think the person who was most affected by the trip. Well, if, if, first, let me hasten to, to, to change that. I can't say who was most affected because effect is not always immediate. It can be very long range, and for a lot it was long range. But the person who immediately appeared to be the most affected was Fannie Lou Hamer. Of course, when we arrived in, in, the, the, the, the Ghanaian government had put us up as, as their guests. So everything was as, as a gift from the government. And they were given the best places in which to live and, and, and fellow Africans were there to, to, to serve and to, and to help with the needs of the, of the guests. And Fannie Lou Hamer was in the middle of taking a bath over in her area, right in the middle of taking a bath, when Sékou Touré without any protocol, without saying anything, drove up to meet this—we weren't supposed to meet him till the next day officially at a reception. But he was doing his evening thing and drove by and I had to go over to tell Fannie Lou Hamer that the President had arrived and it was the only time I could ever remember Fannie Lou Hamer gettin' totally rattled. I mean, she said, What? No, no, no, no. You, y'all playin' a joke. No, no. You don't do this to me now. I'm, I'm having a bath. And she went and it, it was wonderful to—and then when she, when, when she was, when she understood that we were telling the truth that he had come, she dressed and she came to the meeting and after the meeting, Sékou Touré talked through the interpreter. After the meeting, Fannie Lou started to cry and she said that she didn't know quite what would happen to her from this experience because for so long, Black people had been trying to get to the President of the United States of America where we were citizens and where we had rights and could never see him. And here in Africa, when we had an appointment on a certain day, this President came to see her. Was, what, was, was, I don't know, metaphorically or somehow symbolically, it meant a great deal to her and I don't think anybody who was on that trip ever saw themselves in quite the same way again. But it was an environment that did a lot for the people who went and then when everybody came back I think it was a well, it was an appropriate thing to do.

00:29:26:00

Interviewer:

Won-wonderful. Let me jump you to Malcolm, Malcolm X, and a first memory.

00:29:35:00

Harry Belafonte:

[coughs] My very first memory of Malcolm X was a matter of fact in Harlem at a street rally that he was speaking at. And I listened to him and I was instantly aware of the fact that this was no ordinary human being. This was not a streetside polemic, somebody just looking for recognition and had a scam he was running. This was for real. And I knew very little about the Black Muslim movement. I was aware of its existence but it didn't texturally do much, I was too distracted and too preoccupied and I never really saw in it the significance that had emerged. I knew about Elijah Muhammad, I knew about all of that out of Chicago and, and, [clears throat] and, but it was something that was quite confined. It wasn't till Malcolm X that it began to have national and international ramifications. And the more I listened to him, the more I found myself in conflict. Because I had [clears throat] seen in his utterances, not so much pride of manhood, quote, unquote, pride of race, I saw in it something that tactically disturbed me, as it did others, and that was if, if you beat the drums of war loudly enough and you make all of the members of the tribe war-ready, they begin to trust that sound. What happens when the moment comes to apply it and you discover that you are incapable of effectively making the difference you thought you could make because violence and the design of violence would be quickly snuffed out. It was, it, it was very troublesome. And it wasn't until [coughs] extensive conversations with Dr. King that I not only felt somewhat supported in my query but was also supported in the fact that Malcolm was deeply, deeply significant and that he was also doing something else that the other aspects of the—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Harry Belafonte:

—movement was not doing and did not do until Black Power came along. [coughs]

00:32:34:00

Camera crew member #3:

[laughs]

Harry Belafonte:

Huh?

Interviewer:

That's terrific.

Camera crew member #1:

Ten minutes [laughs]

Interviewer:

Run out, just run out [unintelligible].

[beep]

Harry Belafonte:

Damn.

Camera crew member #3:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

That was a wonderful piece.

Camera crew member #2:

Yes.

[cut]

[camera roll #9004]

00:32:47:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:32:51:00

Harry Belafonte:

Malcolm brought an instant sense of being potent. He put impotency aside for a lot of us and that made people very heady, it really did. It was a wonderful euphoric feeling to all of a sudden get up one day and say, Yeah, I'm really tough. I'm resilient. I'm bad. He articulated

so much that was pent up in, in millions of Black voices. And for a long time his greatest satisfaction, tactically correct or not, it was the fact that he was a great tonic for what people needed to hear and to have some relief from. Certainly for me, the greatest couplet, the greatest thing that could possibly have been brokered at that time would have been a holy alliance between Dr. King and Malcolm. Many of us worked for that tenaciously. It would certainly have meant that both forces would have had to have done a great deal of examination about their position to find a basis on which to be able to come together that would not make them have to retreat from, from, from, from a role that they had cast for themselves. Because in retreat, one would have, it suggests defeat, it suggests one surrenders something. I had hoped that such a brokering would come about where, where it was not a surrendering of anything but an amalgamation of something that yielded something terribly new and, and, and, and beautiful. And I think that was a hope that, that many of us had. And in fact, had felt that Malcolm's trip to Africa and then ultimately his trip to Mecca, when he came back and said, which I thought was very key and very fundamental, when he said, I have been to Mecca and there is no race. He, he used his trip to Mecca to point out that he had seen all of Allah's children and they were blue-eyed and white-skinned and black and brown skin and they came in, in, in, in all colorations. And that [clears throat] he was beginning to view the future in a, in a, with, in another dimension, was for us, I think, a moment of incredible joy. Because it meant that he saw himself in universal terms, he saw himself in all-people terms and that, that was the first basis, [coughs] excuse me, [coughs] that that was the first basis for Dr. King and he [clears throat] to be able to, to come together. He didn't live much longer after that.

00:35:55:00

Interviewer:

I was about to ask—

Harry Belafonte:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

—when, when we lost him, do you remember the, the assassination and then—

Harry Belafonte:

Very clearly.

Interviewer:

—the feelings you...

00:36:03:00

Harry Belafonte:

The assassination was a, a, a, a, a, a tremendous sense of loss, a great loss. First of all, leaders were hard to come by. They weren't just growing up every day, not to the stature of a Malcolm and not to the stature of a King. We had leaders who were able to work in, in, in, in specific areas and, and do very specific things, all strategic, terribly important. As a matter of fact, in the long haul may have been the most important because they became the caretakers, the leaders that were local and whatnot. But certainly from a national and international perspective, we didn't have many who had that platform or were given that platform because media still controlled who was heard and who was not heard. And certainly, Malcolm had that platform and had it quite vigorously. And he and Dr. King coming together [clears throat] was the most wanted goal.

00:37:07:00

Interviewer:

Do you remember Ossie's eulogy?

Harry Belafonte:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Shining Black men?

00:37:14:00

Harry Belafonte:

Right. [clears throat] Well, Ossie's eulogy was, I think, most clearly, [coughs] excuse me. Ossie's eulogy was clearly a reflection that was felt by everyone. It was not—his eloquence and his own poetry is always there, but I think that the glory of Malcolm and what he was, potentially. Not even what he had achieved, not even what he had overcome in his own personal life but to go on was, was, was, was for many of us, it—as a matter of fact, it, it, it gave the movement, from the point of view of positive, powerful leadership, a more horizontal frame. [clears throat] Everything in our leadership has been vertical. You cut off the head, you get everything else, and that certainly was true of much of America in that period whether it was Kennedys or whether it was King or whether it was [clears throat] Malcolm and, and, and a host of others.

00:38:23:00

Interviewer:

Mal-Malcolm's death—

Harry Belafonte:

[clears throat]

Interviewer:

—cost us the man but if you watch his history he is, he is—grows from his death. Do you, do you agree with that even if you?

00:38:34:00

Harry Belafonte:

Yes. [clears throat] I think that, I think that Malcolm left us a legacy that will forever be a well that young people or people in general can go to. Because our struggle is still very much in many of its characteristics exactly as it was in the '60s, and the '50s, and the '40s, and the '30s, and the '20s. And it has in, in, in, in very profound and, and, and meaningful ways, changed very little. We have examples of success. We have examples of, of people who appear to have overcome and has taken advantage of the integrationist spirit and done something with their lives which are held forth as ba-barometer for the other thirty million Black people in this country to use as their guide. And therefore if you pursue your interest the way these illustrators have done, then you too will become part of the great fabric of America. Suggesting that anything that we wanted to be was totally within our province and that we control everything. So, if we were poor, hungry, on crack, dope, struck out, homeless, hungry and unemployed, it was our doing. And that if we would just aspire to what the others were achieving, that had gained media representation, that just do it the way they did it and you'll be OK is one of the greatest hoaxes ever. And Malcolm often denounced that. He often found those who sat in the position of privilege were sometimes the greatest instruments of, of, of, of, of, of, of the greatest obstruction to Black aspiration because it confused, it muddles the mind. I don't know what the Black kids, [laughs] I know what Black kids really do when they look and they see, you know, Michael Jordan and a few million dollars and they see Sidney Poitier and they see Eddie Murphy and they see the successes that appear to be mine only for the taking without any real sense of, of how totally out of step those successes are. They're unreal, they have no basis in reality, not even for White folks. You know, the inordinate success that some, some Blacks are, are experiencing given the condition from which we have come.

00:41:28:00

Interviewer:

Take you back to '65, '66, '67 and rebellions, riots which are now beginning to sprinkle—

Harry Belafonte:

[clears throat]

Interviewer:

—sprinkle, to blast the headlines and change the, this movement, as it, because it's a Northern—

Harry Belafonte:

[clears throat]

Interviewer:

—phenomenon. Do, do you remember the Detroit riot?

00:41:55:00

Harry Belafonte:

Very well.

00:41:57:00

Interviewer:

Any [unintelligible]?

00:41:57:00

Harry Belafonte:

First time flames really came into, into very vis—it was, it was, it was an unbearable experience for those of us who had sought to pursue the guidelines set down by Dr. King, guidelines we'd ourselves accepted. I don't think it was—I, the, the person for whom it was the most troublesome was Dr. King himself. The thing that he had feared most, that violence would erupt, that it would become a, a, a, a major player in the course of, of, of, of our history was very, very troublesome. And he, he wretched over trying to find the miracle that would make the difference because he felt he had failed. He felt that no matter how much one would define for him that social and historical and environmental circumstances were very, very much at play. He so believed in his objectives that he also saw himself as the missionary for that objective, [clears throat] as having to be all-omnipotent on some level, that he should somehow these, be, be, be much more touched with the ability to inspire, so that people could understand more fully that he was, that he would somehow be able to get over. And the

Detroit riots was the beginning of a whole series of events that took him on a, on a special course. One meeting that we had at my home—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Harry Belafonte:

—he had come back from a meeting in, in, in Newark. He had met with Imamu Baraka.

00:43:52:00

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

Interviewer:

Don't lose that. [laughs]

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #9005]

[sound roll #903]

00:44:02:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:44:04:00

Camera crew member #2:

And slowly now. Excuse me.

00:44:11:00

Harry Belafonte:

As had to be done on a number of, of, of, of major campaigns, whether it was the March on Washington or Birmingham or Selma, Montgomery, certainly, or the Poor People's Campaign, Dr. King came to New York. He would convene a number of people from media, journalists, opinion-makers, leaders. And Dr. King used that time to be able to give a firsthand discussion—a firsthand definition as to what the campaign was about, what he hoped to achieve, what was the reason behind it, what were the tactics, and what would be the various moves that would be unfolded in the event of certain encounters. This did, did one thing in particular. It did a lot of things in general, but one thing in particular was that it gave allies to the movement, and even those who were prepared to ask objective journalistic questions, an opportunity to hear from King directly what the campaign was about. So that once we unleashed the campaign, there would be—to try to get Dr. King at that time and to try to get a clear picture as to what was going on was not the most ideal environment in which to do it. So we always convened strategic people to hear what Dr. King had to say and to query the, the objectives. On such an occasion, before coming to the meeting in New York at my home, Dr. King had to meet with a, a group in Newark at a place called New Ark, which was where Imamu Baraka had headquartered himself. And Dr. King came late and he gave his, his, his apologies for lateness, [clears throat] went on with the discussion as to the campaign. Because it, it was the Poor People's Campaign that he was on his way to, to Memphis. At the end of that meeting, when everybody had left, Dr. King was highly, highly agitated and he was, you could tell when he paced, he had his shoes were off, his tie was open, he was walking up and down the living room and talking. And Andy was there and Bernard Lee was there, my wife, myself and there was one other person, I think it was Stan Levison, I'm not too sure. But Dr. King, it was the first time that I heard him say something that we, we quoted quite a bit later on and he said, I really, I'm very, very concerned. Because he was looking at all the riots and all the aggression that was beginning to emerge, and he said, This integration movement is beginning to unfold things that I had never quite envisioned. And I wonder if we are not in fact "integrating into a burning house." And he then began to—it was the first time that I had heard him utter anything that suggested that there was another dimension to this whole thing. We were gonna go, we were all gonna have to go someplace else. That for him, by the time the Poor People's Campaign came about and all this eruption was taking place, the Civil Rights Bill as we eventually got, he knew was coming. Nobody quite knew in what form, what all the details would have been, but he knew that that victory was in hand, that the civil rights movement itself would have to give way to something much more profound: economic rights. That's why he began to talk about the Poor People's Campaign. He saw the amalgamation now coming, moving away from just Blacks and Whites looking to integrate, but bringing the people together in a much more fundamental way around issues that affected everybody, regardless of race, class, or color. Or, not class but it was race or color. Or ideology. It was the chance to bring the Native American, the chance to bring Hispanics, a chance—on levels that they felt directly in tune with. And it was at this time that he raised the question about "integrating into a burning house." He didn't accept that that's where we were going but certainly the question was there very largely. It was in this context that rioting, I think, required Dr. King to begin to dimensionalize. Because on hindsight now, at the time Dr. King came into being, there were less than 300 Black elected officials on all levels of electoral politics. By this time in our

history, in the, in, in the, in the thresh of the 21st century in the 1990s, we are looking at somewhere around six thousand.

00:49:41:00

Interviewer:

I have to pull you back from that because we are in 1966, 1967.

Harry Belafonte:

No, I, I'm just making it, I was thinking about how prophetic—

Interviewer:

Yeah, no, I mean, I got the point—

Harry Belafonte:

OK.

Interviewer:

—but let me keep you on Dr. King.

00:49:51:00

Harry Belafonte:

OK, 'cause I was just gonna say that he said that it isn't just enough to get Black people elected was the point I was gettin' at.

00:49:58:00

Interviewer:

Actually, I'd like you take that piece on, just don't make reference to 1990s, that's all.

00:50:02:00

Harry Belafonte:

OK, OK. Let me just reword that then. [pause] At the time of the, of the, of, of, of the, the, the movement emerged, there was less than 300 Black elected officials on all levels of electoral politics. Dr. King, although he felt that Blacks using the, the, the, the, the, the, the, the, the voting process, the constitutional basis for involvement, and therefore changing much

about our conditions in life, was not going to be exclusively the only handle that we had on our destiny as a people. Because he maintained that for many, not just for a handful, but for many Blacks who would begin to evidence themselves in these new roles, electoral politics, that their clear class interests would override their racial interests. That once they began to feel opportunity, once they began to feel success, once they began to feel personal power that they would begin to drift away from the very thing that gave them the platform to begin with. They would begin to drift away from, from, from, from meaningful Black interests. That they'd become part of a whole new thrust, that they'd become a disillusionment in ways. And that the only hope for the movement in this country was for a people's movement that would be vigilant, that would be eternally in motion as long as there was a need for it, that would then serve notice on, on el—'cause if there were leaders getting into office and no movement, then we would, we'd just have retrogressed. And he saw all of this in that period of the eruptions in the cities and the violence and the displaced. Because to satisfy the youths of Chicago and Detroit and other places, it wasn't just about the vote, it was about opportunity, economic opportunity, and getting—so, Dr. King saw in those riots, both the frustration and the difficulties that, that were inherent in it, and in it he saw some resultant effects.

00:52:24:00

Interviewer:

You saw him in Chicago when he was trying to get the city of Chicago to, to come to grips with those issues?

00:52:29:00

Harry Belafonte:

Yes.

00:52:32:00

Interviewer:

Frustrated?

00:52:33:00

Harry Belafonte:

Very frustrated because, for instance, in Chicago, a northern city, which didn't have the classic image of a southern city, racist mayor, a declared racist, segregationist. He came into Chicago. He, he had this little apartment that he lived right in the heart of the ghetto. He lived in, in the environment that he was representing. And he talked to Mayor Daley and Mayor Daley was certainly, symbolically, a liberal force within the Democratic Party. He certainly

had been there and a great friend of Mahalia Jackson and could evidence hundreds of Black people who were known to him by first name and whom he had given a lot of opportunity and privilege to. So, he was a tough one to get in line. And Dr. King knew that he was taking on a new kind of adversary, that it was no longer now the, the stereotypic segregationist, White person from the South and the tradition. It was now coming to something far more insidious, the institutionalized, the, the, the, the well-honed benevolent racist. The one who, who, who sought in benevolent ways to give privilege but would not use his power to change the system and to change the condition because it was not to his political interests to do so. It was a new onslaught. As a matter of fact, in Chicago, in the state of Illinois, [sniffs] particularly in Cicero, and the next time he came back, it was the worst single experience Dr. King ever had. He felt closest to death in Cicero than he had anywhere. He never saw hate quite as—in, in the dimensions anywhere in the South and all that he'd been through, as he saw in Cicero, Illinois. Because he saw it among what he considered to be informed White folk who should have been very different.

00:54:47:00

Interviewer:

Did he ever talk about the, the other level of White folk, the liberal who had supported him in the South? Did he ever perceive them beginning to withdraw when he moved?

00:54:55:00

Harry Belafonte:

That was Daley. That—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Harry Belafonte:

—was the Daley crowd. Daley was very much supportive of Dr. King and the movement when it was in the South. [sniffs]

00:55:03:00

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

[beep]

Harry Belafonte:

I'm fine. How you doing'?

Interviewer:

Just, just, they, they're doin' it. That's fine for me.

Camera crew member #2:

Camera rollout. We're goin' to camera roll nine thousand, sixteen seven is up.

[cut]

[camera roll #9006]

00:55:13:00

Interviewer:

True now is that notion that you just outlined that King, Dr. King, focused on which is that simply getting elected, simply participating in the sy—in the system, that the need, that the, the, the true goal had to be around that—

[picture resumes]

Interviewer:

—beyond that in some fashion. It still does. I mean, it, because—

Camera crew member #1:

Rolling now.

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

Harry Belafonte:

Well, Doc, [clears throat] Dr. King had, had, had a great basis for that suspicion.

Female camera crew:

Take seven.

Male camera crew:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

00:55:42:00

Harry Belafonte:

Because the absence of affluent Blacks from support to the movement on almost every level, not just money but just in terms of visible support, using their platform wherever they may be to help sell the cause was very, very difficult to acquire. It—up until now even, there are a lot of people who have never fully committed themselves to what the movement was about. And that, that was a very sharp line for Dr. King to un-understand that Blacks would really look at class interests above racial interests, human interests, and therefore play a classic role in a, in, in, in, in, in, in, in a class war.

00:56:36:00

Interviewer:

Let me jump you from that.

00:56:36:00

Harry Belafonte:

Sure.

00:56:37:00

Interviewer:

So the new groups begin to appear on the scene and one of them using the symbol from Lowndes County, the Black Panther emerges in Oakland, California. Men, young men who call themselves Black Panthers. Do you remember that phenomenon, frightened of it, stunned by it, approving of it? But Black Panthers and that was gonna grow into a national player in this sort of next phase of the movement.

00:57:05:00

Harry Belafonte:

The Black Panthers did in fact cause quite a tremor in the movement. It wasn't even so much that it was a group called the Black Panthers and they appeared to be, quote, unquote, very militant and were going to go to, were prepared to bear arms, and were prepared to go down.

That wasn't the problem. The problem really was that there was such an inordinate level of intelligence that made up all those young men and women who came together. I mean, they, I mean, Eldridge Cleaver and the book that he wrote, you know, *Soul on Ice*, and Hampton and, and, and, and, and, Bobby Seales, all of them. I mean, when these young men spoke, they spoke in such rich, with such rich vocabulary and such passion and such a depth of commitment that Dr. King often said that, Were I able to co-opt to those minds into my cause, there is no question that victory would be swift and eternal. As events unfolded and as the Black Panthers used themselves to show the cutting edge of violence, particularly in the North, and the insidiousness of police and investigations and FBI, they became a living instrument through which all these unholy alliances of those institutions locking together to serve notice on Black people, they, they were, they were, they were catalysts to a whole new set of information. And certainly when the, with the murder of Hampton and all that that yielded in terms of information. Certainly when the guys in, in Oakland had to come out undressed to show that they were not—so that then in the event they were killed, that they were not bearing any arms and that they were, you know. All those things that the Black Panthers devised in ways to, to, to show the, the corruption and, and, and, and the oppressiveness of the system became very meaningful and became very real and became very tangible, and best expressed, I think, in, in, in, in the court trials of the Chicago Seven in which the Black Panthers were represented.

00:59:51:00

Interviewer:

You were, you were very close to, to Dr. King and, and this—the awareness of people surveilling, watching him, listening, and other phases of the movement. Was it something ever talked about?

01:00:04:00

Harry Belafonte:

Talked about constantly.

01:00:06:00

Interviewer:

What was it?

Harry Belafonte:

It was the awareness that it existed. It would have been silly to assume that it didn't exist, number one.

Interviewer:

Sorry, my, what, what? It? Well, reference for me. It's the surveillance of the government, the, the pursuit.

01:00:23:00

Harry Belafonte:

First of all, there is no way for the Federal Bureau of Investigation to have conducted its affairs the way it conducted its affairs if it was not specifically hostile to us and to the movement and everything it represented. And that for J. Edgar Hoover to find some moral basis on which he would contain himself from doing the evil that he did was just not—it, there was no way, that equation didn't exist. He was too corrupt, he was too evil. His utterances, both public as well as in private, were too racist and too—it, it, it was, you know, he was paranoid. All that stuff made us knew that every facility available to the FBI was going to be used and was in fact being used to discredit the movement. And that wire taps and surveillance, certainly events that happened in some instances with SNCC, the coincidence of things emerging when nobody knew, either was the result of an informer in the group who informed, or there was the, the direct intervention through wiretapping and other surveillance. *We talked about that constantly. So that there were times when we spoke to one another from safe phones, given what the nature of the information was and where we would be. Find a safe phone, give me the number, I'll go to a safe phone and call you.* We did that any number of times. I certainly did it with Dr. King, especially during the years of the trial and the whole issue of Bobby Kennedy and Stan Levison and the need that they had for Dr. King to begin to purge our ranks and—of communists, quote, unquote. The, the full dimension [clears throat] of that reality did not become very clear to us until we had access to the information in the archives. The Freedom of Informations [sic] Act, when you saw all of it and, and, and, but what was, what, what, what defied us was that the very people whom we saw as allies to our cause, whom we felt were people of fun-fundamentally good will to us were also involved in wiretapping and were the ones whom we had reason to trust, with certain, with certain information. To, to think of the Kennedys and Bobby Kennedy and people in the Justice Department in the Civil Rights Division tapping us when we were, in what we considered to be open concert with them. There was nothing that we ever said or didn't say to Bobby Kennedy that, that, that, that wasn't reflective of what we were saying in private. We were—Dr. King was very much on the table and he was upfront. I mean, we didn't have major bat, we weren't trying to overthrow the government. There were no reasons for us to break up into cells. We weren't consorting with the enemy, whoever that would have been. What, the Soviet Union? Our generosity to our own cause was also that generosity that opened us up to anybody who would hear us and they could hear it all in an open forum. The need to wiretap and to do what they did only served later on to, to be used as instruments to discredit by getting into our personal lives and getting into personal information which had nothing to do with politics.

01:04:07:00

Interviewer:

Move you to Dr. King and 1967, '68.

Harry Belafonte:

[sniffs]

Interviewer:

The war is escalating and the morality or the immorality of the war is now increasingly clear, being urged, I think by Stokely and the kids of SNCC. Do you, do you remember him in that, beginnings of that, that quandary and then the moment when he decides to make the, the Riverside Speech, when he comes out and the reaction.

01:04:35:00

Harry Belafonte:

It was being urged, not only by Stokely Carmichael and the kids of SNCC, it was also being urged by the Peace Movement which was fairly large. The Peace Movement was looking for a central place in which to be able to bring its energies and to have it propagandized, have, to have it understood. Dr. King became the catalyst for all of it. I just wanted to broaden the base. Certainly SNCC was very active in, in moving that campaign along. Dr. King had no problems with the issue, morally or ethically, but to him in the very beginning, it was clearly understood. What bothered him was the fact that in shopping the information around for feedback, he found so many Black people, for instance, who got all of a sudden caught up in this wave of, of concern about the definition between, between Black, legitimate Black aspiration for freedom in this country, and the question about our patriotism. [siren] That was a big, that was a very difficult hurdle because the one thing that many people in the movement wanted to do.

01:05:49:00

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible] stop

Interviewer:

[laughs]

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

Sorry. It's in the background

Camera crew member #1:

Let me tilt down so you can come back out.

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #9007]

[sound roll #904]

01:05:57:00

Camera crew member #2:

Please—

Harry Belafonte:

[clears throat]

Camera crew member #2:

—hold it for the full ten.

Camera crew member #1:

Tag it up. You're gonna have to, I, I sat in on the transfers. He, he, he said to me he's, I told you that [inaudible].

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

Honestly.

Camera crew member #2:

Take eight. Well, it's on record.

01:06:14:00

Interviewer:

The year is 1967, '68, it's Vietnam.

01:06:19:00

Harry Belafonte:

Many, many, many of the Black—those who represented the Black leadership from NAACP, Roy Wilkins, all the rest, that ilk, you know, they wanted to know how in the name of God could we making these demands on the federal government in the assistance of the Black cause domestically and violate to this government by raising the issue that clearly had to do with foreign policy [siren] and—

01:06:49:00

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible] can I stop?

Camera crew member #3:

This case is next.

Interviewer:

Mike, why don't you—

[cut]

01:06:59:00

Camera crew member #1

Mark it, please.

[slate]

01:07:03:00

Harry Belafonte:

The, the question raised by the Black leadership of that period, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP and others, the only one who was exempt from this was A. Philip Randolph. You know, their position was how in the name of God can you be asking the federal government to give us all the resources we require to change the domestic situation here at home and at the same time violate their, their foreign policy? Put them to the mat on an issue that is at the nerve center, the very heart of this country? At best, they're going to be viewed as unpatriotic in having seized to hurt the country in its most vulnerable moment. And at worst, what you're gonna do is to have such a backlash from people that Blacks will be further back than they'd ever been before. It was a persuasive argument in terms of its potential. But Dr. King had [car horn] come to accept the fact that from a moral position and an ethical position, the war was inhuman and unacceptable. But also from a technical position, since the war was clearly illegal, unconstitutional, all the things that we've come to know that war to be. How were the Blacks of this country ever going to be able to have the resources to do what had to be done if, in fact, integration was to come about if the government was spinning off all of these funds and monies into these illegal activities. And the fact that Blacks were the first to be drafted and were numerically the largest number serving in Vietnam and dying in, in larger number per capita than anyone else. That the whole thing, in, in, in its entirety was a campaign that Dr. King was, was, was prepared to, to go through with, with the understanding that the true patriot, the real American, the one who was doing the country the greatest service, was the one who would, [siren] in fact, state his case that it was illegal, immoral, unacceptable and not to the best interests of the country, [siren] domestically as well as in its foreign policy.

01:09:37:00

Interviewer:

We, we seem to have, have made the magic statement.

Camera crew member #1:

Do you want to cut?

Harry Belafonte:

Yeah, this subject is just never to be discussed.

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #3:

[laughs]

[beep]

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

More personal if you could, if you were the night before the Riverside Speech or the day after or key at some personal response.

Camera crew member #2:

This is take ten and I'm rolling. I'm rolling.

Interviewer:

Keep to the personal context.

Harry Belafonte:

Mm-hmm.

Camera crew member #2:

I'm gonna jump out here after this.

Harry Belafonte:

[clears throat]

Interviewer:

Jump, all right.

[cut]

01:10:05:00

Harry Belafonte:

You want me to get for close-up now?

Camera crew member #1:

Yes, I'm, I'm moving closer. [laughs]

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #3:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

[laughs]

01:10:12:00

Interviewer:

Makeup!

01:10:20:00

Harry Belafonte:

OK? Dr. King had no problem with any of that. He, he clearly saw, not only that the war was immoral, unethical, unconstitutional, illegal, he also saw that since Blacks were paying the price that they were paying, the first to be drafted, the most to be drafted, the most on the front line numerically speaking, comparatively, per capita. We were paying the biggest price for the war and all these resources were being drained away. He, his mission was very clear to him, what he had to do and should do. For the rest of us, I had no problems with it. I really—I didn't have any problem from the beginning. I was already a peace activist. I'd already come through certain periods of history in this country from the Second World War and then into the immediate period after the war. Isaac Woodard and the Blacks who were being murdered and, and maimed, coming back as returning heroes from the Second World War and then going through the McCarthy period and having the FBI on my case then and blacklisting me and all that kind of stuff. By the time I got to Dr. King, I had, I was somewhat seasoned to much of this already. So, in a way, because of this background, because of this history, along with others, Dr. King was able to find important areas to, to air his, his, his, his, his feelings, where he found people who were sensitive to what he had to say and supportive of it. After the speech at Riverside, there was, there, there was a lot of haggling before that by many who didn't want him to do it. Obviously, those who wanted him to do it on the moral [siren] persuasive factors were far more...[siren]

01:12:25:00

Camera crew member #1:

It's the same. [laughs]

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Harry Belafonte:

Pull out and pull in good, far more.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Camera crew member #2:

[inaudible]. That was a false sticks. I'm rolling now.

Harry Belafonte:

That was a false stick.

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

Well, he's a trainee, right?

Camera crew member #2:

This is take eleven.

[picture resumes]

01:12:48:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

01:12:58:00

Harry Belafonte:

Clearly that group was, was, was more persuasive, that position was more. I think the first that I heard after the Riverside Speech of anything that really and truly disturbed Dr. King were two articles that came out in the editorial of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. Both newspapers were scathing in their denunciation of Dr. King. *The Washington Post* in particular was really quite aggressive in its language and it, it, it, it, it, it sought to discredit Dr. King on every level. It didn't take issue with him just on the war. It called him, I, I, I'm trying to recall the article but it, but it said as much, This incompetent leader, you know, has now gone further in his incompetence, that kind of language. And *The New York Times* was not too far behind in the way it framed its denunciation of Dr. King on this issue. So much so that later on when other publications came out, also taking Dr. King to the, to the mat, Dr. King was not so much concerned about what those articles said about him personally as it was what they would do to the mood of the movement. That this was not just a criticism as to a point of view on the war, it now sought to discredit him in very profound ways, leaving nothing intact that suggested the movement was, was the correct thing to, to be happening. In other words, if you don't agree with me on the issue of Vietnam, why kill the civil rights movement and, and, and all of those issues had been raised, so there's a dimension that you don't agree with. But when he saw it connected to the movement itself and all that was coming and, and appeared to be somewhat prophetic from the point of view of Roy Wilkins and others, he was quite vulnerable to that. And I, and I'll never forget at a meeting, Stan was there and everyone. I said to him, I said, What fascinates me is you're, you're, you, you are deeply rooted in, in the Bible, you're deeply rooted in the Christian, in the Christian theology. It is the essence of much that you use to define where you go. How do you see yourself out of step with Jesus if you expect your utterances to be approved of by those who are the directors of vested interests in all that goes on in the world? There's a whole misappropriation here. I don't mind you're being upset and I don't mind you're ready to take on all the adversaries, but you can't be wilted by this kind of language. Because you, [clears throat] why do you have expectations of *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times* who clearly have a role in all of this, that is when exercised in many ways, is not to the best interest of poor people anywhere? I mean, they are the moneyed class. They are the people who, who stand to gain much from our failure or our successes. They will play the game according to those interests. And that kind of approach to him [siren] in resolving his pain with this stuff worked. He began to call upon his own resources to define what was going on and not see himself isolated or a person who saw himself connected to a host of people who have ever taken that kind of position in history, leading movements who pay that price.

01:17:12:00

Interviewer:

There was a meeting right around there, after the Riverside Speech. You had a session in your home, I think, with Stokely and some people from SNCC and Dr. King and they apparently, they came to some kind of agreement that they were gonna be—they weren't gonna publicly criticize one another?

01:17:27:00

Harry Belafonte:

That they would not publicly criticize, yes. One—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Harry Belafonte:

—of the things that I think everybody became very sensitive to.

01:17:36:00

Interviewer:

We're, we're out here.

Harry Belafonte:

[clears throat] Oh. [sniffs]

Camera crew member #1:

OK, set.

[beep]

Interviewer:

Would you tell me—you, you don't have to identify the times, but would you tell me—

[cut]

[camera roll #9008]

01:17:47:00

Camera crew member #1:

OK. Mark it, please.

[slate]

01:17:53:00

Camera crew member #2:

Take twelve.

01:17:57:00

Harry Belafonte:

In the meeting with Stokely and others at my home, with Dr. King, it was one of several meetings. But this one was most fruitful in the fact that we had come to a moment now when whatever differences existed would certainly have to be—given the nature of where everybody was headed, would certainly have to be viewed more carefully. And, and, and every effort had to be made in order to hold discussions that would never make any disagreement become a matter of public policy or become a matter of public concern. We were too vulnerable. The issue of the war, the issue of the movement itself, civil rights, the issue of the Poor People's Campaign, all of America was up for grabs. Because by this time, although all of these Black institutions were beginning to play even more powerful roles than they had in the beginning, one has to also look at the fact that the White movement in this country, the women's movement, the labor movement, the peace movement, all of those movements were now beginning to find a new day for their own objectives. They were beginning to find courage and platform and, and reason and, and spokespeople for their cause. So that this country was in a, in a huge mobilization on all levels including environmentalists, not the least of which. So that the, the opportunity to bring coalitions together, to make people come together, and maybe at the end of all of this, we can iron out differences and, and, and treat this thing as is often done. There was a tremendous energy being put forth and it was at that meeting right after this that SNCC and, and Dr. King and, and SCLC had agreed that there would be a moratorium on differences. And if they became so crucial, that there would a, a conscious effort at coming together to discuss these things before they would erupt.

01:20:12:00

Interviewer:

Then, then we lost him. Where were you when you found out he was killed?

01:20:18:00

Harry Belafonte:

I was in my home and it was, it was, it was unacceptable. [car horn] Although I had often discussed death with Dr. King, [clears throat] as a matter fact, one time on NBC when I hosted *The Tonight Show*, Dr. King was one of the guests. I hosted it for a week and it was quite a week, Bobby Kennedy, Dr. King, and, and a lot of political—and, and it was, Dr. King was, he had, he'd come late to the show and he said, he said, I'd like you to forgive me for being late—we were on the air. He said, I'd like you to forgive me for being late, he said, Because, but my plane was late and I got to the airport and the driver was trying to get here on time and he was cuttin' some corners and beating some lights that, that made me say to him, Look, young man. I'd rather be Dr. Martin Luther King late than be the late Dr. Martin Luther King. Could you just drive a little, he said, Let's be late. It was with that handle that I then said to Dr. King, Death is very much in your arena. Death is very present in your life. It is very present in the lives of anyone who is a follower of yours in all the campaigns. How do you, how do you come to grips with it? And he went on to give a full explanation as to his view of death. And this was particularly revealing on the show because it not only gave him a chance to speak to the issues of his family, but Dr. King had a, a psychological problem in that he had a tic, a hiccup. [hiccup] He would get this tic and it would come upon him and he would suffer with it for a given period of time. I mean, in, in a matter of minutes. And it was quite difficult and we had noticed it and talked about it and it was obviously psychological. And then after a while, we discovered that this wasn't there anymore and I'd said to Dr. King, What happened? And he said, I've come to grips with death. I've come to grips with that. And it was in that context that we then talked about it. He had come to grips with it because he believed that he could not clearly make decisions that had to be made in what to do if a preemptor was a concern for life in its, in it, in, in, in, in—under any condition. Death, in other words. That he had to put in place not only the possibility of his own death but the death of his wife, the death of his children, the death of those who were his followers, the death of those who may be in a march at any moment. And he had to deal with this responsibility. And I think that when he went and said, You know, "I've been on the mountain top," I don't know that he was alluding to anything terribly specific, although he could have been. I think he was alluding to a host of conclusions and decisions that he had arrived at because he saw a new day in where he was going and where the movement was going and what had to be done. I think that's what he saw on the mountain top.

01:24:03:00

Interviewer:

How did you feel on the day that you found out he was lost?

01:24:07:00

Harry Belafonte:

The first thing that hit me with, with his death was disbelief then swiftly pulling up on mechanisms that put that into reality. 'Cause the first report was that, it was just that he was shot. And then not too long after that, word came that he was dead. My wife and I were there and we, you know, the tears came and welled up but there was not much time for that part of it. I got on the phone immediately, after the first thing that he had just been shot, and do what I always did, was to call Coretta and the children. First off, to make, to identify where they were, whether he was incarcerated in prison or in this instance, like this, my—I always call the family to just make sure that I knew where they were, and what conditions they were in, and what was nay—what would be needed. Was Coretta in, in Arkansas? Was she in California? [siren] Was she with the kids? Where were the kids? So that, because Dr. King, one of the things that was done to give him peace of mind was for him to know that his, his family would never be left without a lot of attention and care. So that—

[beep]

[cut]

01:25:34:00

Harry Belafonte:

I love the job.

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Harry Belafonte:

Love all the aggression, just clappin' sticks and making noise.

01:25:40:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

01:25:49:00

Harry Belafonte:

[coughs] The [pause] giving in to the loss of Dr. King erupted but only in moments. The real sense of grieving about him did not come for, for me and I think for my wife and for a lot of others until later. The act and the, and the nature of the violence of it put everything in such

jeopardy because of the grief that a lot of us immediately turned our attention to...do not let this moment destroy everything that we had worked for. Because anger, which was obviously quite justified, would have to be directed towards the immediate objectives and towards goals that we—of things that we could achieve as a collective rather than being left unattended. Because it would then do what in some places started to evidence itself, in Washington, and in Watts and other places, when, when, when, when the country was going up in flames. So that when I flew immediately to Atlanta, not only was there a lot that had to be done in terms of—there was just a, a, an invasion of people and faces and things that we never heard from, never knew before. All kinds of people, many of whom we had been trying to reach to help give us access to our, to, to, to, to the success of our cause, all of a sudden came to the fore, almost as if it was a photo opportunity in a way. I don't mean to discredit many who came for it out of real genuine will, but there were others who saw in it a time that, that, that, that it could be manipulated. So, we had to do what we could do to sort out those whom were going to be the manipulators, those who had to be put in place immediately to help move on with the Poor People's Campaign and a host of other issues, and for a personal, private conversation that I had with Coretta King to talk with her about going to Memphis. To being there, to picking up with the garbage workers, and to carry on the campaign in just a matter of two days later, two or three days. And the discussion that we had with the family about the appropriateness of that and everybody agreed that it was appro—so, I had to, I, I arranged for a plane and all kinds of things to give Coretta mobility and to give others mobility, so that people would, in the midst of the grief, still be committed to the movement and to see that the fallen Dr. King did not leave behind a movement that, that was going to abandoned. There were all these disciples, all these people who had been in, in place. Hosea Williams, Andy Young, Jesse Jackson, Stoney Cooks—

[rollout on camera roll]

[cut]

[camera roll #9009]

[wild sound]

01:28:54:00

Camera crew member #2:

I'm rollin'.

Interviewer:

It seemed to be a group, a small group of you who made that a part of your lives, that you did both. You know, you had your professional life, you had your movement life. It doesn't seem as prevalent now. But—

[picture resumes]

Interviewer:

—the risk—

Camera crew member #1:

OK.

Interviewer:

—the cost of doing it.

Camera crew member #2:

Take fourteen.

Harry Belafonte:

Where do you want me to go with that?

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

[slate]

01:29:14:00

Interviewer:

It's just with let, let's go back to, to the people of SCLC after—

Harry Belafonte:

[clears throat]

Interviewer:

—the assassination and what was, what, what happened in the loss of the leader.

01:29:31:00

Harry Belafonte:

I would submit that had Dr. King been given maybe another three years. Let's assume that destiny would've said, You're gonna die. If it had chosen a time three years later, the movement would have been in an entirely different place than where it found itself at the time he was assassinated. [sighs] I think that Dr. King in the Poor People's Campaign with the garbage workers in, in Memphis was on a thrust here that was going to give a new and a much broader meaning to the movement. Which would have required a more broad-base use of people and a more broad-based input from leaders on a lot of levels. So that the emerging group that inherited SCLC and other movements—and, and, and other organizations, were caught in a transitional period for which they were ill-equipped to do the task. Yes, there was still the civil rights issues to be clarified, there was still the Civil Rights Bill to be passed. All that was fairly evident. We had to take the movement however, since it had been clearly around the issues of segregation, integration, and civil rights, we had to carry it now to its next logical and more me—more dimensional place, and its dimensional level had not yet all been put in place. We were just in the process of doing that. Had Dr. King had three more years of refining the leaders and the people who came to being for all these diverse areas, the movement would have been, and the country would have been qualitatively different than where it found itself. Be—

01:31:29:00

Interviewer:

Did you ever go to Resurrection City?

01:31:31:00

Harry Belafonte:

Yes, I went. In going to Resurrection City and looking at all the tents and all the people, what I saw there more than anything else was a sea of hope and an assumption that we would arrive at the same places with the Poor People's Campaign that we had arrived at with the civil rights movement. The one thing nobody really understood clearly was that it wasn't going to happen because not only was there no real plan, there was no leadership for it. So that SCLC, by the time Abernathy took over, by the time it started to regroup, by the time it started to, to, to call meetings together to do things, there was no clarity. There was no clarity as to what were the objectives anymore. We knew the titles. Nobody had the specificity. Nobody knew the exact way in which to go about doing any of it. That caused a lot of confusion and in the confusion a lot of people began to create their own little power pockets and began to seek to do their own thing. I don't think, I would not discredit my, my, my, my, my comrades and my colleagues in this endeavor by saying it was a quest for power. I think a lot of people broke off and did things because they really believed that in, in, in, in, in light of no real understanding and no great leadership for this, they would do what they could do in their own little environment and then set up a lot of little camps. They'd set up a Chicago camp, they'd set up a Atlanta camp, they'd set up a Memphis camp, and set up a New York camp, and set up, and it was very difficult to get people to come together in a like-minded way.

01:33:30:00

Interviewer:

That's a good place to move to Gary. And Gary is one of those moments for us of, of unity in a time of diversity—

Harry Belafonte:

Yes.

Interviewer:

—and con-conflict. And I—can you give any sense of how diverse the elements were that people tried to get to. Why Gary was such a shining moment in a way?

01:33:47:00

Harry Belafonte:

Well, what I thought about Gary at that meeting called by, by, by Richard Hatcher was that for the first time in one place under one roof, almost every representation that the movement had was gathered together at this convention. And, *it was an enormously exciting experiment and an idea. Could we come together, this diverse group? And in the absence of the glue that held it together previously, meaning Dr. King, meaning Malcolm X, in the absence of those leaders and particularly Dr. King, what would emerge out of this? Could there be a consensus?* Could there be a, a conclusion arrived at that would give uniformity and give a sense of purpose? And that was not achieved.

01:34:45:00

Interviewer:

Do you have a memory of Gary?

Harry Belafonte:

In what way?

Interviewer:

Standing on the floor, looking at Queen Mother Moore or Baraka?

01:34:55:00

Harry Belafonte:

Yeah, I mean I spoke with Imamu Baraka. As a matter of fact, it was at that time that something had happened with Imamu Baraka that really threw me for a loop. Although we had had some adversarial encounters earlier on in the movement, and having been defined by him as a lost soul in this maze of, of, of, of, of freedom activity and liberation activity, in Gary he was very warm and very friendly, which I accepted willingly as a spirit of, of a new day. But coupled with that when he told me he was now a Marxist and had found a new level of—for political philosophy and for doings, I was kind of thrown for a, I, I didn't know quite how to handle that information. I didn't know where it came from. I didn't know that he'd any such inclinations and the fact that it made itself evident at that place, [clears throat] I could only begin to query what would his objectives be and his goal in America armed with this new philosophical position.

01:36:13:00

Interviewer:

Was, was there tension? Tension, do you remember the people being frightened it was gonna pull itself apart?

01:36:19:00

Harry Belafonte:

Yes, I think there was a lot of that. I think that people were deeply concerned as to whether or not this moment would lead us into greater diversification or integrate a controversy, integrate a alienation, anything. Would it be confrontational? That it wasn't. There were hard things debated. There was a lot going on—

01:36:42:00

Camera crew member #1:

Let's stop.

Interviewer:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

It was a nuanced intrusion. [laughs]

Harry Belafonte:

It's called room service.

Interviewer:

The housekeeping.

[cut]

01:36:48:00

Interviewer:

Tryin' to give people some sense of the—

Harry Belafonte:

Hmm?

Interviewer:

—the Republican of Africa over here, the Panthers over here, the NAACP—

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

Interviewer:

—all those people—

01:36:57:00

Harry Belafonte:

[clears throat] I remember talking with, with Richard Hatcher at the convention and because he had put a lot into making this thing come about. As a matter of fact, it was setting up Gary, Indiana to become a center for ongoing civil rights activity had hoped that in the city of Gary, Indiana they'd be able to build a, a, an institution that would house, become the major think tank of all people involved in the human rights and in the civil rights movement. And the—as a matter of fact, it's now being turned into a museum, some, some of what has been

achieved. But this was the, the beginning of that moment, that we would find this place, we'd come to this convening and I had never seen a collection of greater diversification except for the March on Washington. At this meeting in Gary, Indiana, there was everyone represented. The NAACP, Black Republicans, Black Communists, Black Democrats, all the, the, the civil rights organizations and individuals. [pause] And there was a spirit of hope but there was also a sense that somewhere in this complex of bodies, people are also looking to see in this squash of people, in, in, this overview, if you could look in, there's all, which one was going to be the leader? Which one or which group was going to be the force? People were looking for answers. People were looking for all kinds of things. It was, it was a very interesting convention.

01:38:48:00

Interviewer:

Do you remember Jesse's "Nation Time" speech? Were you there for that?

Harry Belafonte:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

The birth of the baby and the, the water...

01:38:54:00

Harry Belafonte:

Yeah, the world, water's broken, birth of the baby, "Nation Time." Jesse was also on his own campaign. I think Jesse, with PUSH, with his base in Chicago, having come out of the, the, the late travels with Dr. King and having been at Memphis and all the controversy around that. But he came out of this meeting as a, as a...I think it was the first time that people heard Jesse in a way that we were to have heard, that we were to hear Jesse from that moment on. Very articulate. Had a way with words. Most people described it as, as, as his audition for heir apparent to Dr. King's role. I think Jesse has always worn that mantle. I think he's always felt that calling. I don't think he felt a calling to be specifically Dr. King. I think he's, he knows that no one will ever be that. But if anyone is to inherit Dr. King's legacy and move it forward to some campaign, Jesse certainly has filled that role and started to play it even then.

01:40:05:00

Interviewer:

Did you come away from Gary with a hopeful feeling?

01:40:08:00

Harry Belafonte:

Even if, even if objectives were not arrived at—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Harry Belafonte:

—that everyone had hoped would be achieved, declarations of purpose.

01:40:17:00

Camera crew member #1:

The camera ran out again.

Interviewer:

[unintelligible]

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Harry Belafonte:

[coughs]

Camera crew member #3:

[laughs]

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #9010]

01:40:21:00

Interviewer:

Give [unintelligible]—

Camera crew member #3:

[inaudible] bye, bye.

Camera crew member #2:

Bye. [laughs]

Male camera crew:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

Give me a moment.

01:40:33:00

Harry Belafonte:

I think with all that we had hoped would be achieved and would come out of that meeting, and I think there was some sense of reality that the greatest achievements would not occur then. What we were most hopeful of was that these conventions would continue, and that even if on the first encounter we didn't come to, to, to, to, to real and important conclusions, that we would have an ongoing dialogue with this format and out of it would emerge good thinking. What I loved about it was the pluralism of it. What I loved about it was the diversity of it. What I loved about it was the fact that it brought together people who were, who had to put their stuff on the table and it had to be chewed over thoroughly. And out of that, I think, I felt that if we were to be really healthy in terms of what would emerge, that that was the best environment for it to emerge 'cause everybody had a chance to make input, no one was left out, and that's still to be done, incidentally.

01:41:42:00

Interviewer:

Do you remember Coleman Young when he walked out of it and led the Michigan delegation out over conflict? You, you may not. It was with, it was with [unintelligible].

Harry Belafonte:

No. I remember the incident. I don't remember the specifics of it. What was it about? Oh, OK. The camera's rolling, so...

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

01:42:00:00

Harry Belafonte:

Yeah, I remember something like that, yeah.

01:42:03:00

Interviewer:

But it was the diversity, you did very well there, thank you. In the—October of '87 [sic] there was a, a series of SCLC concerts around the country with Baez and Sammy Davis, Jr., and you. And they, in Houston, Oakland, Chicago, and apparently the, the public response now because of the war and the other things wasn't what the other ones had been and that Dr. King was upset about that. Pretty upset [unintelligible].

01:42:34:00

Harry Belafonte:

He was. Certainly, a major force for Dr. King were celebrities, the arts. And he found in us, as a community, the ability to articulate and to attract people to issues that was in some ways even more powerful than the press. People revere, you know, the, they view their artists and their choice with tremendous passion. That's why people can get very upset when we do anything they don't like and they can become very euphoric when we are doing things that they like. We have a very special place, I think, in, in the psyche of people and how they view us. And Dr. King knew that that was an important source. [clears throat] And one of my tasks was to continue to, continuously corral that energy, to reach out to my colleagues, and to find the ones who were most vulnerable and willing and open to the information. And find out those who were most strategic and find out why they weren't vulnerable and to hold dialogues and whatnot and that was a constant. And it began to give us tremendous relief, not only in the PR-ing of our mission but also in the ability to raise funds. After the Vietnam thing, and when we went out and started to do concerts and started to—or, or continued to do concerts, there was a decided fall-off. And we were able to get back some, even up, up to the time of Montgomery. And, and, and we, we were always on the down side. But there was a period when, for instance, when we went to Houston. It was the first place where we had been met by an active, calculated disruption. A, a tear gas pellet was thrown into the air

conditioning unit which fed into the auditorium that just panicked a lot of people and the concert was disrupted. And there was a campaign in a lot of places where we went by White John Birchers and people who held up signs, maintained that we were unpatriotic and un-American and, and, other devices. And I'm not quite sure that the FBI and a lot of their people were not also playing a part in this, in this kind of instigation of—and, and disruption. After Dr. King's death, the arts community continued to respond, especially in the immediate days. As a matter of fact, a large convening was held in Atlanta before the funeral in order to determine what we would do in the celebration of Dr. King's death. Were we going to take over the stadium? Would there be a concert? Would there be a night watch? We felt we wanted to do that and the arts community was the best one to bring that off. Because, first of all, media would be sure to be there. And we could then turn over the platform to those who would articulate the hope of the future, and to be able to give a one-voice view to the world on what we felt about Dr. King so that we would, so that people would not be lost for information. And even in that environment, many among us came to—it was a dissension and views that took place so we never pulled it off. But we were able to do other concerts. A big one with Cosby and Barbra Streisand and other people and, and, at the, at the Hollywood Bowl in, in, in LA and a few other places, to maintain the momentum of the movement in the immediate days after Dr. King's murder.

01:46:24:00

Interviewer:

Just to jump back to Gary. This notion of the artist as political force which something not common to the American political spectrum. It was evident there. I mean, here you had Baraka, a poet.

01:46:36:00

Harry Belafonte:

A poet.

01:46:36:00

Interviewer:

Right. You were there as an artist. Was that a sense, did people have a sense that they were doing something very unusual as to—

01:46:44:00

Harry Belafonte:

No, I think those of us who came out of a tradition of art in, in, in, in politics, of course, I came out of the '30s. My father was a, was a, was a, was a, was a seaman, unemployed, and

he was a organizer for the Maritime Union. We did concerts all the time, the Woody Guthries of the world, the folk singers of the world, the folk songs of the period. A lot of writing in that period was writing about social and political issues, Steinbeck and Hemingway and, and, Langston Hughes and James Weldon Johnson and others. So that there was not a sense that we were unusual and I'm not too sure when we go to these events incidentally, unless you're performing or unless you're specifically writing a poem, that we're there as artists. We're there as human beings who are doing something that belongs to the family. And when we leave that environment, we then begin to translate it into our songs and into our poetry and into our plays. Sometimes at these events, we're required to do that 'cause we sing at them. We'll bring political, you know, we, we, we, we bring a fabric to rallies by singing songs and, you know. I mean, all, what's a rally without a song? It's a failure. So that our mix in that was for some of us quite traditional. It was for others quite unique. I mean, people who felt that art and politics, never the twain meet. Well, first of all, those people are to me a great query. I don't understand how they can pursue art and in its highest sense and not have a social and a human consciousness and be somehow involved in the affairs of the family of human beings. It's impossible. I mean, to me all great art does that. It's the only art that, that, that, that's, that's meaningful and tangible.

01:48:33:00

Interviewer:

A segue to Muhammad Ali, physical art but magnificent.

Harry Belafonte:

Yeah.

Interviewer:

Do you have thoughts on him when he was beginning to undergo...

01:48:41:00

Harry Belafonte:

I've often felt when people ask me about, about Muhammad Ali, I said *he was the genuine product of the moment. He was the best example. He was the, the negro kid who came up in the Black moment who was Cassius Clay that then became Muhammad Ali. That took on all of the characteristics and was the embodiment of the thrust of the movement. He was courageous. He put his class issues on the line. He didn't care about money. He didn't care about the White man's success and the things that you aspire to. He, he brought, he brought America to its, to its most wonderful and its most naked moment, I will not play your game. I will not kill in your behalf. You are immoral, unjust and I stand here to, to attest to it. Now, do with me what you will. And he was terribly, terribly powerful and, and delicious and he, he made it, he made it.* He did it and was very inspirational. I

mean, he was, in many ways, more inspiring than Dr. King, more inspiring than Malcolm, more inspiring on the whole. 'Cause those people were the classic leaders. Here come this young kid right out of the heart of what it was we all said we were doing. That was the, that was the future. That was the present. That was the vitality of, of, of, of, of what we hoped would emerge. And for him to come, you know, the embodiment of all of it, the perfect machine, the great artist, the incredible athlete, the, the, the, the facile, articulate, sharp mind on issues, the, the great sense of humor which was traditional to us anyway. And his ability to stand courageously and say, I put everything on the line for what I believe in, and—

01:50:21:00

Interviewer:

Terrific stuff.

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Harry Belafonte:

That was it.

Interviewer:

I, I, I giggle when I know I just had a, a hit. I just had a hit.

Camera crew member #1:

Is that a cut? Or was that a—

Interviewer:

That's a, a cut.

Camera crew member #1:

Oh, yeah. We almost ready to roll out too. [laughs]

Camera crew member #3:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

Finally, finally, we can roll out on something.

[cut]

[camera roll #9011]

[sound roll #906]

01:50:36:00

Interviewer:

So, you're gonna know what [unintelligible].

Harry Belafonte:

Yeah.

Camera crew member #2:

This is take seventeen.

Harry Belafonte:

Da, da, da, da, da, da, da. Da, da, da, da, da, da, da.

Camera crew member #3:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

OK. Let's mark it, please.

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

Crossing.

Harry Belafonte:

[coughs]

01:50:54:00

Interviewer:

Sometime during these years, you walked into the White House. You, you would be invited there or you would be invited into the Presidential—or the people responsible for the, the country.

Harry Belafonte:

Now, you mean, or then?

Interviewer:

Then.

01:51:10:00

Harry Belafonte:

Then, yeah.

01:51:11:00

Interviewer:

Did you ever have an incident or a memory or something where you, where you tried to tell people the urgency of what you felt or when you were, when you had access to power because of who you were for a minute? Do you remem-remember any event or something substantive?

01:51:27:00

Harry Belafonte:

Most of my visits to the White House and certainly my visits to the Justice Department under Bobby Kennedy were more often in that vein, were more often to the objectives of trying to get them to focus on where we were going and what we were doing and what we were aspiring to and to try to find the, the commonality. What was good for the government and for the politics of what they had to do and how they had to do it, mixed in with what the movement was demanding and had to do and where it had to go and how do you make, how do you make it fit? How do you make everybody come off successfully in it? And obviously, that meant compromise in, in a lot of, of ways. The, the government had to compromise. The Kennedys certainly had to find moments of compromise and so did the movement. One time in particular was because of the FBI and because of the great distrust, justifiable, that we all had of government and what they were doing, was the concern about the draft and was particularly sensitive for SNCC. Because throughout the South, where many of the people in SNCC held residence, they were concerned about the fact that they would become draftable very, very immediately. And that even if they qualified or didn't qualify, they would be

drafted as an instrument of removing leadership from the field. And that this was at best, hurtful to our cause, and at worst, I—it was a misuse of government power. And sensing that this was taking place and was a great consideration on the part of certain states and certain governors and certain, the draft boards in certain areas that were run by, by racists. I had to take to Bobby Kennedy this information to ask that there be an intervention so that the very thing which was important to the White House, which was voter registration, because how sensitive they had become to the fact that Black votes were very key to the future of this country and certainly to the future of the Democratic Party from that moment on. Because the White oligarchy had been seriously broken by the Kennedy victory. The way to yield and to get rid of all those people who bottled up our committees by seniority was by getting the Black vote. It was very, very crucial and terribly important to the Democratic Party and excruciatingly important to the Kennedys. So that in the name of this, these leaders, these young heroes that were in there doing their job, if they were co-opted by the draft and taken out and whatnot, who would do this work? And it was a very sensitive position for Bobby Kennedy to be in. First of all, he couldn't intervene because how could you meddle in the draft and give a sense of pref-preferential treatment. It was clearly illegal. And certainly from a political point of view, it was a terribly sensitive place to be in.

01:54:40:00

Interviewer:

Gonna [unintelligible] you back to the point of walking behind the mule-pulled coffin of Martin King.

Harry Belafonte:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer:

You'd lost him. Anger, depression, the press is there.

01:54:58:00

Harry Belafonte:

There was a sense at the funeral, Dr. King's funeral that we were at a moment in history that was very, very unique. All those hundreds of thousands of people who came, all the people who had to express their loss and their grievance and their grief. All of the people who came there were in a sense of oneness that I've never quite experienced anywhere else again. It's interesting about death. You have a certain feeling when you're in, at the March on Washington when Dr. King was alive which was a major convening of a very diverse group and you had a great sense of yourself and your power. It's another thing to be in this other environment that's almost as dramatic and dealing with loss. It does something about how it brings you closer to your fellow human or how you perceive them. And I'll never forget that I

was standing at one point next to a writer from *The New York Times*, and he was obviously sad about the event and he was a major person at the Times. And I said to him, recalling the article on Vietnam, the, the, the editorial and some other articles which helped to fan the waves of discontent and to make people quite angry at us. I pointed out to him that that march was reflective of something that *The New York Times* had also helped create the environment for that. And that because the way in which they had discredited Dr. King and especially as it was also done with *The Washington Post*, but there was something about it that, that, that, that, that smacked of, it was vitriolic. It was punitive, and it was a great disservice to a, to a, to a rich cause. And at the funeral when I said this, I didn't say it to him in a personal accusation, I said it to him because I wanted him to understand that none of us were really exempt from a responsibility to that moment by just coming to, to, to, to grieve the loss, was no cleansing of responsibility. That the world would go on. And remember what you did to make this moment realizable, what you did to participate in this, and be cautious about how you use your power in the future because new leaders are obviously are going to come. There's going to be a new wave of need, a new wave of demand, and that it's even going to be global.

01:57:56:00

Interviewer:

Stop right there.

Camera crew member #1:

Yes.

Interviewer:

OK.

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

I'm ready to wrap it. I want—they're gonna ask you just, this is your time to say whatever you wanna say.

Camera crew member #1:

Oh, that's time.

Camera crew member #2:

OK. This is take eighteen.

Interviewer:

That's what you think. [laughs]

Camera crew member #3:

[laughs]

[cut]

01:58:10:00

Interviewer:

For the next hour.

Camera crew member #2:

OK, rolling.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it, please.

[slate]

01:58:21:00

Interviewer:

From Emmett Till through all that time, to Selma, to Dr. King.

01:58:26:00

Harry Belafonte:

From Emmett Till, from Emmett Till to all that time from, from the 1930s, from the Civil War, from slavery. I think that [sighs] I'm not quite sure, Dr. King and I used to talk about this, why are we really here? What is our purpose? What is the mission? What are our, what are really our rights? I think that those of us who have been involved in this kind of experience are not out of step with history. I believe that those of us who have had this experience are the richer for it. People have often talked about things that I may have sacrificed in my commitment to the movement, like more money or jobs or greater visibility or, or moving along more rapidly with, with, with, with other interests that they hold dear.

And I feel a lot like Ali must have felt, it doesn't equate. It, it, it's, it's meaningless. Nothing can replace the experience of Dr. King and the movement, and Fannie Lou Hamer and the experiences, and Schwerner and Goodman and Chaney, and, and, and all—Medgar Evers, everybody who was in it. It was a great, great time in my life and I was blessed to have had an opportunity to be in service to it. I continue to be in service because as long as I live and the need exists, I will do what it is that I feel I have to do. But I believe that we will be viewed in history as having been a milestone and a reflection of the best that this moment represented in America. We were the best. Not our walking on the moon, not our technological breakthroughs, not our inordinate successes on the stock market, none of it. Anybody who is in motion to save this planet and was in motion to make a difference in the lives of human beings and how we come to a greater truth about it all, will be the ones who will be in the final analysis, I think. The ones most remembered are the ones most revered. *What Dr. King gave us, what Stokely Carmichael gave us, or Malcolm X gave, what everybody gave us. Whether you agreed with him or not, the energy of that time and the goals that we were all aspiring to, I think, is what it was all about at its best. At its worst, it was when we did nothing.*

02:01:13:00

Interviewer:

[car horn] If you had to say it to an eight-year-old in, in, in that short time.

02:01:21:00

Harry Belafonte:

[pause] I would say that [pause] you are really responsible for the world in which you live. If others happen to come along and join you in the spirit of your endeavor and your objectives to make the world a better place then you're the richer for it. But even if they don't exist, you still have your inner self to answer to. You still have—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Harry Belafonte:

—you to deal with. And I think that those who put themselves in the service of life and the betterment of their fellow human beings are the ones who are on the best mission, the ones who are going to receive the greatest rewards from that experience.

02:02:06:00

Interviewer:

Thank you.

Camera crew member #2

Hold on. OK, these are wild words. If possible, replace them. Oh, he don't—

[slate]

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #1:

[laughs]

Interviewer:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #2:

That, that's the, the false stick.

Harry Belafonte:

[laughs] False stick. [pause] Well, I, I think—

Camera crew member #2:

I think it's, it's like when you're starting a whole sentence, "Well, you know."

Harry Belafonte:

You want me to do the whole sentence?

Camera crew member #2

No, do, I just need the "well," sort of drawn out word "well."

Harry Belafonte:

Well. [pause] I.

Camera crew member #2:

Once more, "well," or [inaudible].

Harry Belafonte:

Well.

Camera crew member #2:

That was it for the [inaudible].

Harry Belafonte:

Well, I, I.

Camera crew member #2:

Once more.

Harry Belafonte:

Well, well, I.

Camera crew member #2:

That's right. OK. I need a "so, consequently."

Harry Belafonte:

So, consequently. Given that fact. Maybe if we.

Camera crew member #2:

No, just, I just need "so, consequently." [laughs]

Harry Belafonte:

Oh. You don't want the—OK, stick to the script, fine. Consequently. Consequently.

Camera crew member #2:

OK. Now I just need "so."

Harry Belafonte:

So. So. So.

Female camera crew:

OK. And now I just need tone. I just need you to—

Harry Belafonte:

[hums]

Camera crew member #2:

[laughs]

[cut]

[end of interview]

02:03:52:00

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