Interview with **Bernard Lafayette**
Date: October 21, 1988
Interviewer #1: Judy Richardson
Camera Rolls: 2021-2025
Sound Rolls: 211-213
Team: A

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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 #2021]
[sound roll #211]

00:00:12:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

00:00:17:00

Interviewer #1:

Why were you pushing for SCLC to come to Chicago? What ki—what did you hope to succeed in doing here?

00:00:25:00

Bernard Lafayette:

One of the reasons we were pushing for SCLC to come to Chicago is because there was this myth about the subtlety of the problems in Chicago, and people say they're problems, but they're not the same as in the South. And it's easier to address the problems in the South because they're so blatant and obvious, but things in Chicago are sort of beneath the surface and they are sorta smoothed over, and the real issues are not there. Well, one of the things that Martin Luther King did in the movement was really dramatize the issues by his presence and being able to articulate them in such a way that everything became very obvious. So that was one of the reasons why we were interested in coming to Chicago. Also because there were so many people who were affected by the problems in the North. And it was just simply a, a symbol. Chicago was a symbol of things that were happening in places like Newark and Detroit, Philadelphia, New York and other large cities, metropolitan areas. So, while the South benefited from the support that was in the North for the southern movement, many times we were not able as a movement to address the problems in the local urban northern communities. So, this was very important because a large number of people were affected by those problems.

00:01:42:00

Interviewer #1:

And you also mentioned that you wanted to see what would happen when you brought the nonviolent movement north, and, and I sense that there were a lot Southerners, Mississippians here, too.

Bernard Lafayette:

Mm-hmm.

Could you talk about that, too?

00:01:52:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Chicago was really sort of an experiment to see if nonviolence could apply to the Northern problems in the ghettos and that sorta thing. One of the things that we were concerned about was, how do we in effect create the drama and the sympathy for the nonviolent approach? Well, in deciding—

[rollout on camera]

[wild sound]

Bernard Lafayette:

—on Chicago it was a tossup between several other places.

00:02:21:00

Camera crew member #1:

Sorry, we need to—

Interviewer #1:

I have to cut. I'm sorry.

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

Interviewer #1:

[inaudible]

Camera crew member #2:

[inaudible]

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #2022]

00:02:25:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

00:02:27:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Why did, why did you push for SCLC to come to Chicago in the sense that, you know, you were experimenting with the nonviolent movement, the—there were Mississippi Black folks here, the Daley machine, you know, what you expected from Daley?

00:02:39:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Mm-hmm.

00:02:41:00

Interviewer #1:

Why did you come, why did you push to come to Chicago?

00:02:45:00

Bernard Lafayette:

One of the reasons we pushed to come to Chicago is because, while we had a lotta support from the Northern cities for our movement in the South, there were nevertheless problems that existed, you know, really se-severe problems of people in the slum areas of Chicago, for example, and other places in the North. And this was an opportunity to experiment with the whole nonviolent approach to see whether or not we could apply some of the same organizing techniques and some of the same principles and strategies to dealing with the problem in the South, that we used in the South, to apply to the North. And that was the basic reason why we wanted to come to Chicago. The other reason, Chicago as opposed to some other places, because for the year, say for example, in 1965 a study was done, I believe it was by the Urban League, but it said that something like forty-two percent of the Blacks in Chicago were either first or second generation [car horn] from Mississippi. So you had a lotta people from Mississippi. And that was the reason, you know, Chicago is right above Mississippi, so people migrate straight up the line. So, there was a good deal of support [car horn] because what you're talking about is dealing with northern Mississippians, and we had a lot of experience dealing with Black Mississippians, so here they were transplanted north. Some had very close relationships and would go back and forth and spend part of the time. So, therefore there was a good deal of appreciation for what we're doin'. There was a good deal of respect for Martin Luther King and a good deal of support for the movement itself. So, these are the kinda things that made it possible. Also, the image of Chicago, in terms of its politics, in terms of its, you know, image and, and liberal Mayor Day—Mayor Daley was considered a liberal mayor and was very supportive of civil rights in the South. And even in the North we found, there in, in Chicago, here in Chicago, Black elected officials. We had congressmen. I remember Congressman Dawson and some of the others. On the local level you had city councilmen. So, you had a good deal of participation in the government, so we felt that we had some friends and that by dramatizing some of the problems and issues that Martin Luther King could very well do and some organizers from the South, we could begin

to address these issues and also begin to help Chicago as an example for other northern cities to deal effectively with the problems of the slums and the ghettos and that sort of thing.

00:05:25:00

Interviewer #1:

Now, as somebody who was a southern organizer, what was it like for you to come north? I mean, what kinds of differences did you see between the Northern and the Southern struggle?

00:05:33:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Well, I was asked to take on a project for the American Friends Service Committee, for the summer, their urban affairs, proj—urban affairs program, to see how we began to experiment with nonviolent organizing in, in the ghetto community. And I remember being asked by Jim Lawson, who had recommended me to, to go North and I'd worked with him in Chica—in Nashville and also in, in many other places. There was a little bit of fear on my part. See, well, you know, Chicago, one of the first things we did—

00:06:11:00

Interviewer #1:

Excuse me, could, could you say—cut. If you could say—

[beep]

[cut]

00:06:17:00

Camera crew member #2:

Marker.

[slate]

00:06:20:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. As a southern organizer, what was it like coming north? You mentioned the fear for one thing.

00:06:25:00

Bernard Lafayette:

When I came north as an organizer to Chicago, I had a different kinda fear. In fact, I took out a extra life insurance policy because, you know, in the movement we always had risk and we knew that we always felt that we would be, you know, like the song says, "We Shall Overcome." And, and in Chicago, the question's whether I would be able to survive than we would overcome. [laughs] Because in Chicago, you could get killed on the street, you know, for no cause. And of course, I, you know, if I was gonna die, wanna die for a cause, something was worthwhile. So—but, you know, this was part of the reality of being an organizer in Chicago. So it was different. It was cold, and cold not only in terms of the, the temperature and the climate, but there was cold in terms of how people, you know, reacted, you know, which is quite different. Except when we found people, you know, from Mississippi in the South, they were just the same. I mean, they cooked the same and they was very warm and friendly. So there was a kind of receptive attitude on the part of the people there and they understood what we were about and they were ready, you know, to join in with us. And I think that's one of the reason why we were successful.

00:07:38:00

Interviewer #1:

Talk a little bit about Black folks and their receptivity to you, and also the Black clergy. What kind of response did you get first from people and then from the clergy?

00:07:47:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Mm-hmm. There was, in many areas there was very warm response and a good deal of support from some of the clergyman, for an example, in Chicago. That's where we had our mass meetings and they would open up their churches, et cetera, but that was a different kind of a thing that I realized, which I had never realized before, and that was there was a conservative attitude on the part of some of the clergy and people involved in the leadership of the Black church. In the South, we understood that what would be considered quote, conservatism, unquote, was actually fear because they really understood what we were about and they believed in what we were tryin' to accomplish, but they were actually afraid for their lives and they were afraid their churches would get bombed. That was not the situation in the North. They were certainly, you know, would find support for this kind of thing, but their conservative attitude had much more to do with their values rather than, you know, the fear. And that was a, a conservative Black person, that's the first time I heard it. It was funny to me because that was sorta antithetical 'cause most Black people I know, you know, wanted to be free and would, you know, do what they could, you know, to participate if they could overcome the fear. We served mainly as a catalyst to try to raise the consciousness of these people with whom we were working, and many cases were successful with them, and

ultimately we were successful in the long term. But in many cases we met a cold resistance among some of the Blacks who did not, you know, really appreciate what we were trying to accomplish.

00:09:19:00

Interviewer #1:

And can you talk about the effect that the Daley machine had on that? I mean, did you, were you surprised that some Blacks who you thought supported you, who you turned around and you found out they weren't?

00:09:27:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Mm-hmm. One of the surprises is that we thought that many of the Blacks who were part of the Daley machine, you know, would've been supportive, but we found that some were very unsupportive and they were not, you know, they were very supportive of the movement in, in the South, but when we talk about the kind of issues and problems that exist in their own communities, 'cause they were very tightly controlled, even down to the precinct level there were people who were very resistant, and we came to understand that because people, you know, their jobs were tied to their involvement and, and the maintenance of the machine. And when we began to challenge some of the conditions and some of the issues there in, in the local communities in those, you know, areas, then we got severe reaction.

00:10:20:00

Interviewer #1:

Can you give me any specific times when you saw that happen?

00:10:23:00

Bernard Lafayette:

One specific thing was when we were working on the West Side of Chicago in the Lucy Jean Lewis campaign, who's a Black woman who was running for representative. And I was passing out leaflets on one side of the street, and I was approached by a Black person, Black male, who told me to get outta there and he showed me his pistol. And I took the same position that I would take in the South, that I have a right to be here, and unfortunately you don't agree, but I will stay here. You do what you have to do because I'm gonna do what I have to do. And I later on found out that he was, had a job as some kind of security officer and that's why he was carrying a gun, but he was also part of the, you know, machine, and so he was protecting his job. [laughs] And I was tryin' to open it up so some more people could get some jobs and decent housing and that sorta thing.

00:11:20:00

Interviewer #1:

Now—

Camera crew member #3:

Hang on a second, Judy. Can we stop for a second?

Camera crew member #1:

Sure.

Camera crew member #3:

[inaudible]

[beep]

[cut]

00:11:25:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

00:11:28:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. You mentioned fishing for issues. What, what did that mean for the movement [unintelligible] in Chicago?

00:11:34:00

Bernard Lafayette:

One of the things the movement did was to fish for issues. While there were a myriad of problems that exit, what are the, what is the single problem that you can come up with? And this is one of the things that Martin Luther King was very good at. He would get on one issue and he would stay on it till something was accomplished. So, one of the things we did was kind of fish around, began to see which of these problems would lend itself to dramatizing. As it were in Chicago, we found—

00:11:58:00

Camera crew member #3:

I'm sorry, can we stop [unintelligible]?

Interviewer #1:

OK. Maybe we should cut.

[beep]

[cut]

[wild sound]

Camera crew member #3:

That was [inaudible]

Interviewer #1:

Just about fishing for issues.

[cut]

00:12:06:00

Camera crew member #1:

Speed.

00:12:07:00

Interviewer #1:

OK.

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

00:12:11:00

Bernard Lafayette:

One of the things the movement did was to fish for issues because there were always a lotta problems in any community where we worked. Like Martin Luther King, for example, one of his success was the fact that he stayed on one issue until something was actually accomplished, and sometimes, you know, people should do that. In Chicago—

00:12:24:00

Interviewer #1:

I'm sorry. We should, 'cause it's going a little quickly.

Camera crew member #1:

Let's, let's change.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, let's change. [laughs]

Camera crew member #3:

[laughs]

Interviewer #1:

Yes.

[beep]

Interviewer #1:

[inaudible]

[cut]

[camera roll #2023]

[sound roll #212]

00:12:32:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark it.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

Interviewer #1:

OK, what was the point of the movement fishing for issues?

Camera crew member #1:

Just one sec.

00:12:38:00

Interviewer #1:

Oh, sorry, just, just a sec. [door closes] OK. What was the point of the movement fishing for issues?

00:12:46:00

Bernard Lafayette:

One of the things that the movement always did in any community and that we also did in Chicago, and that was to fish for [car horn] issues. There are many problems in the community, just a myriad of problems and that sorta business, but the important thing is to try to find one issue that's predominant and stay with that issue until you're able to get some resolution—

00:13:06:00

Interviewer #1:

Excuse me [unintelligible]

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

Interviewer #1:

Is it OK?

Camera crew member #1:

Why don't we just cut?

Interviewer #1:

OK [unintelligible].

Bernard Lafayette:

[laughs]

Camera crew member #3:

[inaudible]

[beep]

[cut]

00:13:16:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

Interviewer #1:

K.

[background noise]

Interviewer #1:

How did the—

Camera crew member #1:

OK.

00:13:24:00

Interviewer #1:

How did the movement fish for issues?

00:13:27:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Well, one of the things the movement did was to actually fish for issues. While there were a myriad of problems in the community, the important thing was to identify the most predominant problem and be able to work on that particular problem until there were some results. And that was one of the things that was very important about the way Martin Luther King approached problems in a community. In Chicago it was important for us to try a variety of things so we could begin to flesh out, so to speak, some of the real issues and problems around which people could be organized. It was important for us to get the people involved. It was very interesting when Jim, James Bevel, the SCLC organizer from the South, came when I was here in, in Chicago initially. And he was up for a little vacation from the South and he said, Well, what, what are you talkin' about? There's no problems up here. Everybody look like to me they're eating and look at all those people, they're fat and they're, you know, fine and healthy and, and Daley is good to everybody. So what's the problem down here? We don't have any problems. Well, he was sorta teasin', but trying to force us to think critically about what really was the problem. Because while you saw no signs of segregation, there were obvious co—obviously conditions that were affecting Blacks more so than other people, for an example. But when you began to look at the problem, it was not simply a Black and White problem. There were problems that affected Blacks but they also affected a large number of Whites. And I think that this is the thing that was different about some of the things we approached in the North. The lead poisoning, for an example, we began to work on organizing people in, in the Tenant Unions, and as a result, like one time my secretary didn't show up, secretary to Tenants Union who was a local woman, who was a single parent. And I asked what happened because she was always very faithful, and she said, Well, I had to take my kids to the hospital. Say one of 'em had been eating some paint chips from the wall and the doctor said that, you know, they had all kinda problems, caused vomiting and it could cause brain damage. I said, What?! I mean, you know, [laugh] just was

not aware that that was one of the things in the slum. It occurred to me that a baby even in the crib would not be safe because you had peeling paint that'd come down from the ceilings and eating those paint chips meant that that person could be permanently damaged. So, it did not matter whether you had good schools or good housing and good recreational programs when you have a brain damaged baby. So that became the issue. And we began to organize a, a anti-lead poisoning project, and we began to address the local government, the Daley machine and, and the Health Department, and I was stunned because we began to talk about all these problems, health problems with children who were helpless and they'd say—I would say, Well, why don't we have a screening program on the West Side of Chicago so we can determine how many of these kids already are affected by this problem and have lead, you know, in their blood? And he said, Well if we did that, the hospitals would be filled! And that really shocked me that he was more concerned about the hospitals being filled, rather he would simply let the children die and continue to be victims of the problem. So, I was really angry about that and we went back and organized the community. And one of the things that's important is to get people in the community to take responsibility for the problems. So I pushed these high school students and I said, Look, here is the problem. These babies are dying and these are your sisters and brothers by the way, and children in your community, and somebody has to take responsibility, you know, Would you do it? We organized a group called SOUL, Student Organization for Urban Leadership and they began to have meetings and we began to figure out what we could do. So, we decided what we'd do. We found a chemist from Lying-In Hospital and he helped to develop a litmus test. So we said, what we'll do is go around and collect the urine and at least test the urine to see if they had coproporphyrin, which is a byproduct of lead. And, and these students put on lab jackets and they felt really good and they went around and they had to learn how to get the urine, 'cause you have to get the urine from the girls different from the boys, and so they had to learn these different techniques like putting their hands in water. But they got excited about it and people willing to do something about the problem. So what we did in effect was to dramatize the problem. Although we could not solve the problem, it's important that people who are victims of the problem can learn how to dramatize the problem. As Jim Bevel says, People who are oppressed have to learn how to cry dramatically and effectively in order to get help from others who can help.

00:18:14:00

Interviewer #1:

And how did you decide to go into [car horn] the housing issue? What was the reason for that?

00:18:18:00

Bernard Lafayette:

One of the reason we went into the housing issue, for example, in Chicago is because virtually everyone is affected by housing. We began to see that ***there were patterns of segregation and discrimination, clear patterns. For an example, there were no signs that***

said, Blacks Cannot Live Here, but it was White only and it was obviously White only. And there reasons why it was White, not because Blacks choose—chose not to live in those communities. It's because they were systematically denied, primarily by the real estate agent. Ninety percent of the housing that's sold is by the real estate agents, so therefore the real estate agents have control. And they were doing very tight kind of, [background noise] of, you know, what we call blockbusting where they would allow a few Blacks to move into a neighborhood that was all White in order to cause the Whites to become fearful. And many of the real estate agents claimed that, Oh, well this is just, just business, because you had Black and White real estate agents working together. This thing was different about the South, also. They worked hand in hand here in Chicago because they all made money, because the Blacks were willing to pay more money for overpriced housing because the market was limited for them. The Whites, on the other hand, because they were afraid of Blacks, because the fear had been helped—they helped put the fear in them by real estate agents calling some older White woman, for an example, and, you know, breathin' very heavily on the phone and going to the limit in terms of what they can do to intimidate people. And the real estate agents said, Well, you know, I can help you now and maybe get a good price for your house. But, you know, a few months from now, you know, the prices are going down. The value of property's going down because the Blacks are moving in. In the same breath, the price for housing, the same housing for Blacks going up. And they claimed that they were servin' their clients. Well, you know, it's very curious. And they were even intimidating them about the insurance was going up for their homes because they claimed that more crime was gonna be in the community. So, this would cause Whites who had already paid for their homes or near, you know, finishing their mortgage to jump up and then get into another mortgage at a higher rate, and most of the time, they would be, they could only afford less housing than they already had, and this caused that kinda turnover. Well, whenever real estate turn over, everybody made money, the banks and the real estate companies, and the taxes and everything else went into play. So, therefore, Blacks were victims, and Whites. So, the slums actually was a way of exploiting both Black and White.

00:21:07:00

Interviewer #1:

Why did you start the—that’s good—why did you start the union [unintelligible]?

Unidentified speaker:

[inaudible]

00:21:11:00

Bernard Lafayette:

One of the reasons why we focused—

Camera crew member #3:

Can we stop for just a second?

Camera crew member #1:

Cut.

[beep]

[cut]

00:21:16:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

[slate]

00:21:19:00

Interviewer #1:

People assume that where Black folks move there's automatically a downgrading of the neighborhood. Can you talk about how the city plays into that?

00:21:27:00

Bernard Lafayette:

One of the problems that we observed was that the conditions in the Black community, you know, just really sort of showed that it was unkempt. And one pe—one of the things that we recognized is that, in the Black communities, in many cases, the city did not keep up the same ki—level of services. For an example, the parks were neglected, you know, where Black people live. The streets were not swept. And, you know, these are basic kinda things that have somethin' to do with the appearance of the community. So, naturally when White people saw, you know, [door closes] the conditions of the community, they then assumed that that was gonna happen to their community, and so therefore they assumed it was related to Blacks. Well, Blacks didn't do it 'cause [car horn] Blacks, you know, didn't have the power to determine who would sweep their streets and when they would be kept. And so, everybody was part of a conspiracy. The, the realtors, for example, in terms of managing the buildings, they began to let the buildings fall down and not repair things, the city—in fact, there was a little girl in one of our hearings that we had when we testified and that sorta business—

00:22:30:00

Interviewer #1:

Cut. We're not gonna be able to go into that.

Bernard Lafayette:

Oh, OK.

Interviewer #1:

It's, it's OK. Yeah.

Bernard Lafayette:

Well, the statement she made [inaudible].

[beep]

[cut]

00:22:36:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

[slate]

00:22:38:00

Interviewer #1:

Contrary to what the White community sometimes sees, how did you see the, the government actually playing into a downgrading of a neighborhood once Blacks moved in?

00:22:47:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Many of the Whites began to see what happens to Black communities and they became afraid that it was gonna happen to their communities. What was not seen was the fact that the city neglected the, the services of their communities. Streets were not swept, the parks were not taken care of. So it was an abandonment of those communities, which was really not the fault of Black people.

00:23:08:00

Interviewer #1:

Very good. Cut.

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible] change [inaudible]

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

[beep]

[cut]

[camera roll #2024]

00:23:12:00

Camera crew member #1:

And mark.

[slate]

00:23:15:00

Interviewer #1:

If you could describe for me the, the Marquette Park march and how you felt, what it was like? Just paint a picture for me.

00:23:22:00

Bernard Lafayette:

During the march at Marquette Park, it was the first time we actually marched on a protest demonstration as opposed to a sympathy march that many people have had in the South. This time they were marching specifically on the realtors office, and we identified them as actually participating in discriminatory practices. So there was a great deal of excitement. There were large numbers of people from the urban communities as well as suburban communities. We had a lot of Whites. One thing was kind of funny, I saw, you know, we had one White couple drove up in a chauffeur-driven limousine, you know, and all dressed up and everything. They were on their way to some cocktail party no doubt, but they wanted to

be part of this demonstration. So you had all kinds of people [background noise] participating. And, but when the violence took place, when they tried to return to their cars they found that the cars were overturned, and some of 'em, they, they tried to, you know, break out all the windows and that sorta business, et cetera. The mob decided that they could not attack the demonstrators, so they attacked the cars.

00:24:21:00

Interviewer #1:

Now, talk now about the, about the Gage Park march. And if you can, talk about how you used the gangs as security.

00:24:27:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Mm-hmm. In Gage Park we had the experience of really realizing that we need to be organized and prepared to deal with it. We had no idea [car horn] that the level of violence was so prevalent in those communities. We actually used the gang members because we had become familiar with them working in the community and that kinda thing, and of course they many times challe-challenged us on the whole issue of nonviolence because they were not about to buy that. But one of the things we found out about the gangs is they were disciplined, and there was also obviously a kind of, you know, character of courage on the part of them. And that's what we needed in terms of marshals, discipline and courage. And they had no problems followin' directions because they were organized in that way. So, by working with the gangs, we had workshops and trained them as marshals, they worked out beautifully. It was a, just a, a fantastic experience to see them knock down broken bottles and bricks, you know, protecting the people in the marches. They felt a sense of responsibility. And I think it shows the potential of what many of the gang members can really have.

00:25:39:00

Interviewer #1:

And can you talk about Gage Park and, and Dr. King?

00:25:43:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Of course, Gage Park was one of the places where we experienced some of the greatest kind of violence. In fact, Martin Luther King said, said himself he had been, experienced violence in the South, et cetera, he said, but he had never seen the ugliness of violence, you know, the contorted faces of the people and the viciousness. In fact, Martin Luther King was struck by a brick in Gage Park in the line of march. They would set off firecrackers and they would

throw bricks and bottles and all sorts of things, they would yell. And I was so, so surprised to see young people behave that way, and either—and even older White women, they were really showing the worst of humanity.

00:26:28:00

Interviewer #1:

And can you talk about how—what did you see when you saw Dr. King get hit by the rock? If you can say, When Dr. King got hit.

00:26:35:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Well, we were marching, it was on a Sunday I believe, and the brick was thrown and unfortunately, you know, it landed right in terms of Martin Luther King head. And of course everyone crowded around him, and I remember Jesse Jackson was not too far way, and they pushed his head down in order to protect him because we realized that that was going to be a, a serious problem in terms of his being [siren] a target. Then the [siren] crowds—

00:26:59:00

Crewmember:

I'm sorry there was a siren. We should maybe repeat that.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah. OK.

Bernard Lafayette:

That's what it was like.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

Bernard Lafayette:

[inaudible]

Interviewer #1:

[unintelligible]

Camera crew member #2:

[inaudible]

[beep]

[cut]

00:27:06:00

Camera crew member #1:

Marker.

[slate]

00:27:08:00

Interviewer #1:

If you can describe the Gage Park march that Friday and what you felt when you saw Dr. King get hit by the rock.

00:27:15:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Well, that Friday when the Gage Park demonstration took place, we had people from all over coming in. We'd organized the gangs to help with the marshals, and it was really amazing to see the gang members learn very quickly what their responsibilities were 'cause they were always disciplined, [background noise] another thing they had courage and which was one of the characteristics and requirements, you know, for good marshals. So once they had the training, they worked out beautifully. It was really something to see them participate as marshals knocking down bricks and broken bottles and that sorta thing. ***Then Martin Luther King was struck on the head*** with a brick. ***And I remember the reaction everybody had. They all, you know, surged forward and the march was stopped. Everybody said, Halt! Wait! You know, and I remember Jesse Jackson running in 'cause he was right near Martin Luther King. And they held his, Martin Luther King's head down because we knew he would be the target for any kind of, you know, personal attack, and we tried to regroup ourselves. I remember the tension that people had and I—we felt completely surrounded.*** It was like being in a, a long dark corridor. Although the complete community was White and we were deep in the White community and they had us completely surrounded, literally thousands of people, [background noise] and I never even suspected that that many people had such strong hostility and resentment. And, well, we didn't know whether we were gonna come outta that situation alive because they outnumbered the policemen.

00:28:40:00

Interviewer #1:

If you could say—when you mentioned the gangs, not so much in, in terms of Gage Park, but you said at one point that was one moment in time when you saw it, if you gave them something useful they would do it.

00:28:51:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Mm-hmm.

00:28:51:00

Interviewer #1:

Can you say something like that kind of briefly?

00:28:53:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Mm-hmm.

00:28:56:00

Interviewer #1:

You can just go ahead.

Camera crew member #1:

I'm sorry, I'm just talking to him [inaudible].

00:28:58:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Mm-hmm. The thing that really impressed me was the fact that, for this one moment, [car horn] these gang members were actually doing some things that were, you know, showed the best, it brought the best out of them. And I think that's what the movement did in general. And these gang members felt a sense of responsibility, a sense of pride, a sense of giving back to the community, a sense of protecting the community and doing something to [car

horn] change these conditions that also created the problems that they had. And I really felt that this showed the potential of what could happen if people were given some direction [car horn] and support and the opportunity to do something creative and positive in their communities.

00:29:41:00

Interviewer #1:

Can you cut a second?

[cut]

00:29:43:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

00:29:46:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Why did SCLC accept the accords?

00:29:48:00

Bernard Lafayette:

One of the reason why we accepted the accord is because we felt that the time had come for us to try to do some serious negotiations. We had had the, the dra—demonstrations, we had dramatized the issues, and we had to then try to consolidate the gains that had been made as a result. And although the movement's responsibility is not to solve the problems, the movement is like a catalyst. We take the natural ingredients there and to dramatize them to such an extent that people realize the urgency of doing something about the problems, because the problems are already there. So, we felt that we had completed that job in bringing the situation to that point of negotiations. Besides, it was cold in Chicago and it was time to go back home to the South, and so we wanted to at least try to put somethin' together that could make a difference. And those accords, many times people had feelings about it and wondered whether or not, you know, we were able to get as much outta the situation. But I think, obviously, we set things in the right direction.

00:30:59:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, cut.

Camera crew member #3:

[inaudible]

[beep]

[cut]

00:31:05:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

00:31:08:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, why did SCLC decide—why were you pushing for SCLC to, to come into Chicago?

00:31:13:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Well, I was pushing for SCLC to come into Chicago as opposed to some of the other communities of this period, number one, because I was there and had been sent actually to work for the American Friends Service Committee to experiment with nonviolence in a northern urban community, and we'd already started some things there.

00:31:30:00

Interviewer #1:

Excuse me. If you could begin—cut.

Bernard Lafayette:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

[unintelligible]

[beep]

[cut]

00:31:36:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

[clears throat]

00:31:39:00

Interviewer #1:

Why did SCLC decide to come to Chicago?

00:31:42:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Well, there were several reasons that SCLC decided to come to Chicago. Number one, the American Friends Service Committee already started a project here in the area of housing and a lot of the documentation and studies had been done, so there was documentation in terms of the discrimination in housing, that was very clear. [car horn] The other reason was because there was a CCC, CCCO, Coordinating Council of Community Organization. The community was united, its leadership and organizations were there, so they extended an invitation to Martin Luther King. The other interesting fact was the Urban League had done a study and it showed that forty-two percent of the Blacks in Chicago were either first or second generation Mississippi. So they were familiar with us. They knew the freedom songs.

They were part of the movement in many cases because there's a lot of interaction between Chicago and Mississippi in terms of Blacks keepin' in touch with each other and that kind of thing. So you had a receptive community. Also, because you had the Daley machine, which was considered a, a liberal machine, and there was support. There were many Blacks who were in elected positions on congressional levels, where we had our Black congressmen, strong Black congressmen, strong civil rights, you know, legislators. So, there was a feeling that we would be able to succeed because we had a great deal of support [car horn] here in Chicago. We also had large numbers of people coming from Chicago to participate in the movement, besides giving funds and that kind of thing. So Chicago proved to be much more ideal in terms of support and because of the conditions. And we thought that we'd be able to gain something here that perhaps might not be possible in some of the other communities. So, there was also familiarity. We had a lot of the ministers and many of them were very much a part of the SCLC clergy network. And so, to—for those reasons SCLC decided that Chicago probably would be good.

00:33:44:00

Interviewer #1:

OK, cut. Thank you.

[cut]

[camera roll #2025]

[sound roll #213]

00:33:47:00

Camera crew member #1:

Mark.

Camera crew member #2:

Mark.

[slate]

00:33:50:00

Interviewer #1:

How did SCLC prevent their workers—prevent the riots from getting worse?

00:33:55:00

Bernard Lafayette:

One of the things in this period is that you had riots in many of the northern communities and some of the other large urban areas like Watts and other places.

00:34:02:00

Interviewer #1:

If you could say in Chicago, so it's specific.

Bernard Lafayette:

OK. Mm.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

00:34:07:00

Bernard Lafayette:

In Chicago there were riots, but one of the reasons why you didn't have anything similar to some of the other cities where you had large numbers of people being killed on the streets in the ghetto community is because SCLC had a presence in Chicago during that period. In fact, we organized a peace corps and went out in the communities during the riot itself and began to work with the people and also work with the policemen and those who were in charge of policemen, you know, shadowing them and saying, No, you can't shoot. You can't kill people in this community. Gotta come up with a better answer. I remember Jesse Jackson's responsibility was to shadow Nolan, who was the human relations person and he was right on the scene. And Jesse was very tall and he towered him, you know, and said, No, we, you know, we can't do that. That was his responsibility. Other workers went out and worked with the people who were actually participating, you know, in the disturbance, and that was a way of quelling the situation so we could save lives and begin to have a movement that could truly address those kinda problems.

00:35:12:00

Interviewer #1:

Great, cut. OK.

Interviewer #1:

I'm gonna have—

[beep]

[slate]

00:35:18:00

Interviewer #1:

What did you do during the riots in Chicago?

00:35:21:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Well, we had different roles to play, and one of my roles was to go in, in with the gangs and to try to redirect them from confrontation with the policemen where we knew they would get killed. So, I worked directly with them. I was small and maybe I looked like a gang member, but we were able to keep them from having a confrontation directly.

00:35:43:00

Interviewer #1:

Great, cut.

[beep]

[cut]

[slate]

00:35:49:00

Interviewer #1:

What was it like as a southern organizer coming into this, into Chicago?

00:35:54:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Well, as a southern organizer coming in Chicago, it was very different. First of all, it was cold. The next thing, the place was overcrowded. There, the place was steaming with people all over the place. All sorts of different problems, and you could see in the faces of the people

that they had different kind of, you know, experiences. A lot of them were not very good. The other thing that struck me was the amount of glass in the streets. There was so much broken glass in the streets, but in many ways that broken glass represented the broken lives in, in the ghetto community. And there was a sense of being overwhelmed because there was so much of everything. The buildings were so tall, the streets were so wide, and the, the, the, the climate was so cold. So there was a sense of, of sadness in a real sense, and it was really a question of whether or not the situation could be changed, but we had to have hope because there was no alternative. In fact, the only other option was beyond thinkable.

00:37:03:00

Interviewer #1:

And what did you feel about the unity, this unity of the Black people here?

00:37:07:00

Bernard Lafayette:

One of the things that we found that there were people who were just simply out for themselves and they felt they had to fend for themselves. Even the children had to fend for themselves. And there was a sense of hopelessness and, and uncaring in the whole community.

00:37:26:00

Interviewer #1:

How, how did the Daley machine play into that in terms of pitting one Black—Blacks against Blacks?

00:37:30:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Mm-hmm. And one of the things you found that, in the Daley machine, that you had Blacks against Blacks. There was not a sense of unity and the color lines meant nothing in that regard because you would find as many conservative Blacks as you would find conservative, you know, Whites who also participated in many ways in helping to perpetuate the system that exist. And it seems that many times people were simply out for themselves, were not willing to make the kind of sacrifices that it would take in order to make the, the kind of changes. There were Blacks who had gotten in positions of power, but instead of using that power to bring about changes in the community, to help many of the other Black people, they simply used that power to help themselves. And the reason they did that, we understood, because they too felt a sense of hopelessness, and sometimes people feel that when they cannot help the people, then they simply help themselves.

00:38:29:00

Interviewer #1:

Cut. Good.

Camera crew member #1:

Great.

Interviewer #1:

[inaudible]

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

[cut]

[slate]

00:38:36:00

Interviewer #2:

If you would respond to the criticism and frustration of the Daley administration. It's easy to come into a city and articulate a problem and get people all stirred up. You were presenting no solutions.

00:38:46:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Mm-hmm. One of the things that people were, you know, accused the movement of was coming to the city, gettin' everything stirred up, and then, you know, leaving, whatever, et cetera. But the role of the movement is catalytic in the sense that it is to bring these things to a head, to articulate the problems and to stir things up in a sense of giving people hope. See, people change when they begin to have hope, so you do turn things upside down. But actually, the movement does not solve problems. The movement actually present the problems in such a dramatic way that people feel the urgency of doing something about them rather than simply lettin' them exist as the status quo. So, once we do that, then it's the responsibility of the administration, the government, who has the responsibility for making decisions. Who also have—the government has the resources for solving these problems. Many times we have the laws on the books that exist but they're not being enforced. So, as a

result of the movement, people began to see the necessity of actually enforcing the law and being able to set forth those policies and do things to make things work and to change the conditions.

00:39:55:00

Interviewer #2:

OK. Stop again for a second. I wanna get another [unintelligible].

[cut]

[slate]

00:40:02:00

Interviewer #2:

One more [unintelligible]?

00:40:05:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Black folks don't create slums, because they don't have the power to make decisions about where they live. And it's not the fact that they, they wanna live in Marquette Park, you know, with White people, they wanna live everywhere and have the opportunity to be free and to have the same kinda opportunities that anyone has. And the problem with the slums is the fact that they are limited in terms of where they can live, and therefore they pay more for housing and have less quality. And what we were demanding in the Marquette situation, as well as other places here in Chicago, was that people would have the same kind of freedom guaranteed them by the Constitution, that segregation in housing is no different from segregation in schools and segregation at the voting polls. And the thing is, that the reason why we have slum is 'cause Black people do not have the power. If they had the power, they would not live in slums and wouldn't create the—wouldn't be, you know, the kinda conditions that we see in the community. And the fact that those in power are those that are responsible for the creation of the slums.

00:41:09:00

Interviewer #1:

Cut.

Interviewer #2:

I'm [unintelligible]—

[beep]

[cut]

[slate]

Camera crew member #1:

[inaudible]

00:41:19:00

Interviewer #2:

Very briefly, why was Marquette Park chosen?

00:41:23:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Well, Marquette Park was chosen because it was a community that was far removed from the dividing line where Blacks and Whites lived. And the problem is that we wanted to try to overcome that line and move people further from that line of demarcation where the blockbusting was taking place. The other reason is because Marquette Park was a place where you had pretty much a solid White community and Blacks were not allowed to live there and they were not shown houses by the real estate agent or apartments and that sorta thing. Now, the reason we chose Marquette Park also is 'cause it represented a political entity in the sense that it was a swing vote in that community, and we knew that would get the attention of the Democratic, you know, leadership in that kinda swing community because it would draw attention to them. Also, we recognized that when people, when Blacks would move in to many of these all White communities, that the real estate agents would tell the Whites in the community that the value of their property was gonna go down. But in fact, when a Black would move in, the property, the cost of the property would go up. So they'd tell Whites one thing and Blacks something else on the other hand. So it was not true that the values, property values went down, it was only when Whites would buy into that kind of argument and that kind of impression that was given by the real estate agents. So, it was demonic in a sense.

00:42:53:00

Interviewer #2:

OK. Now, can you tell me when you, when you're marching in, in Marquette Park, is the issue—is this just race?

00:43:00:00

Bernard Lafayette:

Many people saw the marches in Marquette Park as really racial in a sense that White people, [car horn] you know, didn't like Black folks and they responded, but that was not the case at all. I think to a certain extent on the surface people could see this and inter—you know, can interpret it that way, but at the bottom, if Blacks coming into Gage Park would have meant that the property values would go up, I think Blacks—Whites would have second thoughts as to whether or not they wanted to keep Blacks out, but because of the myth that was perpetuated, and because they were Blacks, they were easily identifiable. And so, therefore whenever you have an identifiable group, then they can be targeted as the problem. But the problem was not the Blacks. The problem was the economics of the situation that was controlled by real estate agents, and both the Blacks and the Whites were exploited in the situation because of color. Color had a lot to do with it, but it was a, an element that was exploited.

00:43:59:00

Interviewer #2:

OK, cut.

Interviewer #1:

Good.

[beep]

Interviewer #2:

Thank you very much.

[beep]

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:44:06:00