

Interview with James Farmer

Date: ca. 1996

Interviewer: Judith Ehrlich and Rick Tejada-Flores

Camera Rolls:

Sound Rolls:

Interview gathered as part of “The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors”. Produced by Paradigm Productions. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Paradigm Productions Collection.

Interview with James Farmer, conducted by Paradigm Productions on unknown date for “The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors”. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Paradigm Productions Collection.

Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in bold italics was used in the final version of “The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors”.

00:00:11:00-00:00:20:00

Interviewer #1:

I think this should go—

James Farmer:

What?

Interviewer #2:

Right, so we're ready—

Interviewer #1:

We're ready to start.

Interviewer #2:

—to start. This is an interview with James Farmer on October—

James Farmer:

Whenever what?

00:00:21:00-00:04:37:00

Interviewer #2:

— Sixth, Nineteen ninety— Dr. Farmer, we're doing this, this piece about conscientious objection in World War Two. So, even though you weren't recognized as a conscientious objector, it was your intention to be one and you had those principles. Talk a little bit about how you developed the principles of pacifism and how you got to the point where you decided you wanted to be a conscientious objector.

James Farmer:

I developed pacifism through the National Council of Methodist Youth, the you-, youth organization of the Methodist Church just before and during wartime. And I, I came in touch with such persons as A.J. Muste, Howard Thurman, and indeed it was Dr. Howard Thurman who was a pacifist, preacher, mystic, philosopher, theologian, and was teaching at Howard University, and he taught me Social Ethics when I was in the seminary at Howard. And he wa-, he was a fabulous professor. I don't think he did much research or [laughs] come into his class, he would walk into his class and, and stare off into space, a true mystic. And then he would begin speaking, students, young theologians, when you face difficult decisions during your ministry and you don't know how to deal with them, remember this, [pause] he'd say, we are what we do. We are what we do in spite of reservations. And then we theological students would all have our hands up to ask questions about that provocative statement, such as, do you mean then that if we go to war and kill the enemy that we are murderers, or at least killers? Well, he would not answer that question, he would continue to stare into space and would res-ply [sic], would reply, Ahhh. And the class would go on like that. It was provocative and we thought, and we learned. That was Dr. Howard Thurman, Professor of Social Ethics at Howard University at the time, and it was Howard Thurman who introduced me to the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the FOR. He was on the Advisory Committee of the organization and he wrote to the organization and suggested that they hire me. And they did. John Swomley, who was Associate Director and A.J. Muste, who was Executive Director hired me as Race Relations Secretary.

00:04:38:00-00:06:33:00

Interviewer #2:

Let, let's back up a little bit to, to the issues of pacifism and your wanting to be recognized as a conscientious objector. Your draft board didn't want to do that.

James Farmer:

No.

Interviewer #2:

Tell us a little bit about that and whether you think it was particularly hard for African-Americans to be, to be pacifists or conscientious objectors.

James Farmer:

Hmm-hmm [laughs]. Well there were many who said it was tough enough just being black without being black and pacifist at the same time. I received a 1-A card, I was in Chicago working for the FOR, for the Fellowship of Reconciliation. And I wrote my draft board which was in Washington D.C., it was my legal residence, my parents' home. And, I wrote the draft board and I told them that I would not enter the armed forces under any circumstances and I requested conscientious objector status, which was 4-D, I believe. I also told them in the letter that I was coming to Washington and wanted a personal appearance before the draft board. I went to Washington, called the draft board up, and spoke to the chairman on the phone. Incidentally it was an all black draft [phone ringing] board—

Interviewer #1:

Wait one second.

Interviewer #2:

Wait [inaudible]

Interviewer #1:

We're gonna need to unplug the pho—

[cut]

00:06:34:00-00:07:10:00

Interviewer #1:

—or, do you wa-, I think we might want to back up a little, too, and talk a little bit more about the, his understanding—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, yes.

Interviewer #1:

—of, or how he became—

Interviewer #2:

Well let's get through the draft—

Interviewer #1:

—a pacifist. So let's finish this story, good. Remember where we were, I remember—

Interviewer #2:

—story, yes.

Interviewer #1:

—where we were, oh, Ken's back.

[door alarm rings]

James Farmer:

How I became a pacifist?

Interviewer #1:

Yes.

Interviewer #2:

Hang on.

Interviewer #1:

We're, we're, we'll finish this story.

Interviewer #2:

Finish with the story about the draft board.

[door alarm rings]

Interviewer #2:

Ken, you in? Ken?

James Farmer:

Hmm?

[door alarm rings]

Interviewer #1:

Thanks.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Hope I didn't interrupt anything.

Interviewer #2:

No, that's OK.

Interviewer #1:

That's all right.

Interviewer #2:

Go ahead. OK, so, so—

James Farmer:

And that, that, that, that alarm, chimes ought to be disconnected too.

Interviewer #2:

We'll, we'll just, we'll not walk out the door so that'll be—

Interviewer #1:

Let's all stay here.

Camera Crew Member #1:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

Forever.

Interviewer #1:

[laughs] We're not leaving.

00:07:11:00-00:07:26:00

Interviewer #2:

So, so, Dr. Farmer, you, you were getting to the point where you actually went and talked to the draft board—

James Farmer:

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Interviewer #2:

—the gentleman who ran it was black, like yourself.

James Farmer:

He was black, in fact the entire draft board was black due to residential segregation in [phone ringing] Washington. See?

Interviewer #2:

Oh.

[cut]

00:07:27:00-00:10:33:00

Interviewer #2:

—that conversation back then, and how that went.

James Farmer:

Oh, yes, yes, yes. I went to Washington from Chicago, called the draft board and told them I would like to come in for a conversation and the chairman said, come right in Mr. Farmer. I did, as I walked in the door, there was a black chairman of the draft board. Well, I had already known that because of his voice, you could always tell the difference between a black person's voice and a white person's voice. But I learned that he was a prominent black attorney in Washington at the time. As I entered the door, he said, come in Mr. Farmer, sit down, have a cigar. I took one of the fancy looking cigars and put it in my pocket. And he said, have two, I took three and sat down. And he said, what, what's that paper in your hand? And I said, that's form forty-seven. Forty-seven, what is that? That was a form for conscientious objectors. Oh yes, he says, I remember now, let me see it. And he took it, scanned it, turned it down on his desk. He said, you have another paper there, what is that? And I told him that was my personal statement. Well, let me see it, and he scanned that, and

said, this statement is entirely irrelevant. What do you mean it's irrelevant? He said, you're a minister of the gospel, you can't be a conscientious objector. I says, you're wrong, I've just finished theological school and I'm not preaching yet. Well, you're a graduate of a theological school and as far as we're concerned, that makes you a minister. So you can't be a conscientious objector. [pause] Hold it a minute.

00:10:34:00-00:10:38:00

Interviewer #2:

OK, yeah, yeah, no. We can do that.

James Farmer:

Hold it a minute.

Interviewer #1:

Take your time.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, that's, that's the nice thing about these things, you can just—

James Farmer:

Yeah.

[cut]

00:10:39:00-00:11:07:00

Interviewer #2:

So let's, let's talk, I mean, you said, you, you started this conversation by saying that, that it's hard enough to be black without being black and a conscientious objector. Is it really part of the African-American tradition, pacifism?

Interviewer #1:

But he didn't finish the story.

Interviewer #2:

I know, but—

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, but—

James Farmer:

Hmm?

Interviewer #1:

—let's finish, should we try and finish this first? Let's see if we can. When you were saying, he, he said to you that you couldn't be a, a conscientious objector because you were a minister—

James Farmer:

[laughs]

Interviewer #1:

—and did, did he then go on and, and—

James Farmer:

Explain why, no.

00:11:08:00-00:15:02:00

Interviewer #1:

—or give you a, he didn't want you to be a conscientious objector, right? He wanted to, to defer you as a minister.

James Farmer:

Yes, he said—

Interviewer #1:

Are we rolling again?

Camera Crew Member:

[inaudible]

James Farmer:

—you'll be, you'll be def-, you'll be deferred, as a minister. I told him I was not a minister and had no intention of being a minister. He said, well, you're a theological student. I said, wrong again, I've finished theological school. He said, what the hell, as far as we're concerned you're a minister and you'll be deferred. And [pause] I asked him if he would place my statement on file. If you wish. Then I got up to leave and as I started out the door, he said, oh Mr. Farmer, just a moment. He said, we've got nothing against COs, it's just that we don't want you guys, we don't wanna have too many on our lists. So, if you can be deferred on any other basis, that will be done. Said, good-bye and good luck. Well, I got the deferment, ministerial deferment, which lasted a couple of years. Many of my pacifist friends, of course, and colleagues blamed me for accepting ministerial deferment. They thought it was a cop out because that was the time when some of my pacifist friends were going to prison for refusing to register or refusing to accept the classification that the draft board gave them. And here I was accepting deferment, which did not raise the question of conscientious objection. I disagreed with them, because with the deferment I was able to remain free and do what I most of all wanted to do, and that was to develop an organization using nonviolent direct action following the Gandhian method and fighting against racial discrimination and segregation. I could not do that in prison, so I felt that my decision was the right one for me. Well, after a year and a half or so, however, I got a card from the draft board once again giving me the 1-A classification—

00:15:03:00-00:17:50:00

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

James Farmer:

—looked at the back of the card and it revealed that there had been a turnover. There was a new person in as chairman. So I called him up and told him that if he checked his files he would find a statement which I had given to him, to the previous chairman and my views remained the same, I would under no circumstances enter the armed forces. By the way, that statement had pointed out that I could not enter the armed forces on two reasons. One, religious, that I was opposed to war, it was killing. Killing, I believed to be murder and war was mass killing that was mass murder. My second reason was that I did not think that I could fight against Hitler's racial theories in a Jim Crow Army. The Army, indeed the entire military force was segregated and how could I participate in that segregation and then fool myself into thinking that I was fighting against Hitler's racial theories. So I told him if he checked his files he'd find the statement and my views remained unchanged. I then went to Washington, to visit my parents, called the draft board and said, I'd like to come in. He said, it won't be necessary Mr. Farmer, we have found your statement and have read it and you will have your ministerial deferment back. I got that back then. Well this was the, the beginning of my efforts to organize a nonviolent, direct action movement against racial discrimination.

00:17:51:00-00:21:56:00

Interviewer #2:

Dr. Farmer, you talked about your concern about not wanting to enter a segregated army, but all, virtually large portions of all of American society were segregated at that point. For, for younger viewers of this program, talk just a little bit about what it meant to be African-American in the 1940s. What were you confronted with, what were you fighting?

James Farmer:

You're quite right that the entire society was segregated then. Not only places of public accommodation, such as restaurants, which in the South were entirely segregated, that is white restaurants would not accommodate any blacks. In the North, it was spotted. Some restaurants served blacks and others would not. There was, there was uncertainty when black persons walking on the streets in Northern cities as to where he or she would be served and where not. Mostly not. And that's what CO-, CORE was, when it was organized to fight against. Segregation in public accommodations: restaurants, theaters, hotels, other amusement centers, swimming pools, and public beaches. We encountered such segregation in the city where I was stationed by the FOR, Chicago, that's where we began our efforts. The efforts were to follow the work of Gandhi. Now, newer pacifists and many of the young pacifists were searching for positive efforts to use nonviolence in positive manners, not just negative. The negative being to refuse to participate in war, but we had to find positive methods. And that's why we began organizing [pause] to find methods to resolve conflict situations with nonviolence. That seemed to me to be the most important thing that I could do. And there were scores of young pacifists who agreed with that. There were few, very few blacks who were pacifists at that time because, yeah, it seemed too difficult to many to be a pacifist when you confronted problems of being black. Most of the yeah, young people who were involved in our efforts to organize a nonviolent movement against segregation and discrimination were white. [unidentified background noise] Most were students at the University of Chicago, undergraduate or graduate students. I wrote a couple of memoranda [pause]—

Camera Crew Member:

[whispering] We have to stop.

00:21:57:00-00:22:00:00

Interviewer #2:

OK, look, we're gonna stop for a second, we—

Interviewer #1:

We've got problems—

Interviewer #2:

—the refrigerator—

Interviewer #1:

—the fan—

[cut]

00:22:01:00-00:24:26:00

James Farmer:

—theological school.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

James Farmer:

I've a bachelor of divinity degree, but I don't think I'm very religious now. I don't go to church regularly. I declined to become ordained and preach after graduating from seminary and my reason then was that I did not think that I could teach, preach the gospel of Christ in a segregated church. And the United Methodist Church was at that time segregated. It was the Methodist Episcopal Church North and Mest-, Methodist Episcopal Church South and the United Church had six jurisdictions, five of them geographical and the sixth not geographical, but racial.

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

James Farmer:

In other words, there were black churches in the United Methodist Episcopal Church, whether they were located in the deepest South or in the furthestmost North, were members of the Central jurisdiction. So how could I preach in the church then? That was, that, that was just the occasion for my, my making the decision not to preach, obviously I could have founded another church that was unsegregated, but the occasion for my choosing not to preach led to the belief that, [pause] the belief which was [pause] challenging my own religiosity, so I would say I'm not religious.

00:24:27:00-00:25:21:00

Interviewer #2:

Even though it had a big part in shaping your values and your perspectives on life?

James Farmer:

In shaping my values, yes, my father was a minister, as well as a professor. He was a scholar, a PhD from Boston University in the days when there, there were very few black PhDs and he was fluent in Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, Latin, French, German, Spanish, as well as English. He was a scholar as well as a preacher, a minister, and he was rather disappointed when I did not choose to follow in his footsteps.

00:25:22:00-00:25:30:00

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Was he disappointed—

Camera Crew Member:

Was somebody smoking?

Interviewer #1:

— when you refused—

Interviewer #2:

That was me.

Interviewer #1:

—would you ref-, was he disappointed that you refused to, fight in World War Two?

James Farmer:

Do what?

00:25:31:00-00:26:04:00

Interviewer #1:

Was he ref-, was he disappointed that you wanted to be a conscientious objector during World War Two?

James Farmer:

Oh, I think so, I think he disagreed, but my father w-, would not try to change my mind. He respected my own views and sometimes we would discuss those views and sometimes he would take what I considered to be the devil's advocate position in discussing them with me, but he never tried to change my views.

Interviewer #2:

Hmm.

00:26:05:00-00:28:20:00

Interviewer #1:

So you did talk to him, did you talk to him at the time when you made that decision and I, did, did people's opinions influence you when you decided to be a conscientious objector, or were you just—

James Farmer:

[laughs]

Interviewer #1:

—you seem quite clear about it.

James Farmer:

Clear? Well, I always challenged, I think all of the pacifist were challenged. Many people considered it to be un-, unpatriotic to be a pacifist. Others considered it to be cowardly, to be a pacifist, to refuse to enter the armed forces. And those views, critical of pacifism were all around us. The pacifists, however, were rather tightly knit, small group of people. We met under the aegis of the Fellowship of Reconciliation or the War Resisters League or several other similar organizations. And since we were anxious to find some pot-, positive ways of expressing our pacifism rather than just negative ways, many were interested in the idea of CORE, of using nonviolence in an attempt to eliminate segregation. I started out to say I wrote the memoranda to Muste [sips liquid]. The memoranda were entitled, Tentative Plans for Brotherhood Mobilization. That's not the, the way that it was titled. What was it?

00:28:21:00-00:28:54:00

Interviewer #1:

Do you want the exact, I've got it.

James Farmer:

Yes, what was it?

Interviewer #1:

It's just in, I've got it, it's right in here.

James Farmer:

“Provisional Plans for Brotherhood Mobilization”...

Interviewer #2:

Mmm.

Interviewer #1:

Yes, yes, yes, yes.

James Farmer:

That's right.

Interviewer #2:

Another "Brotherhood Mobilization"

James Farmer:

Yes, that's what, but Provisional.

Interviewer #2:

Do you want me to take this coffee?

Interviewer #1:

[inaudible]

James Farmer:

You can take the coffee away from me.

Interviewer #1:

It's fine if he drinks.

Interviewer #2:

Are you done for now?

James Farmer:

For now, yes.

Interviewer #2:

OK, yes. All right, let us know if you want, it's right here.

James Farmer:

Uh-huh.

Camera Crew Member #1:

There's a sound, but I can't identify it.

James Farmer:

Provisional Plans for [beeping in background] Brotherhood Mobilization [beeping in background]

Interviewer #2:

Something's beeping.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Let's wait and get enough—

James Farmer:

Brotherhood Mobilization was—

Camera Crew Member #2:

—two minutes.

Interviewer #2:

[unintelligible]

James Farmer:

Huh?

Interviewer #2:

Sorry, go ahead, go ahead.

00:28:55:00

James Farmer:

Mob-, mobilization because this was wartime, 1941, Pearl Harbor was in December, 1941. Mobilization was all around us, so this was a different kind of mobilization. Brotherhood because the churches and most religious organizations expressed beliefs in the brotherhood of man. Their scriptures documented the brotherhood of man. So this was to be brotherhood mobilization, mobilization of the entire nation for brotherhood. We hoped it would develop into a mass movement and even-, eventually it would, it would, it would be inclusive, it would outnumber those Americans who were opposed to brotherhood mobilization, those who supported segregation and discrimination. So what I proposed in the memoranda, first memorandum was that we try to withdraw ourselves from the evil of segregation and discrimination by refusing as far as is humanly possible to cooperate with this. We noted with interest and—

[cut]

[end of camera roll]

00:30:51:00-00:31:09:00

Camera Crew Member #2:

Rolling.

Interviewer #1:

All right, so, so, let's pick it up, you were saying that the, the issue was to withdraw from participation in segregation.

James Farmer:

Yes, as far as is humanly possible. We wanted a mass movement of—

Interviewer #2:

We rolling?

Camera Crew Member #2:

We should start that again.

Interviewer #1:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

Start that again. sorry.

Interviewer #1:

Start over again, one more time.

James Farmer:

Hmm?

Interviewer #2:

Just start again, we weren't rolling.

Interviewer #1:

Just say that sentence again.

00:31:10:00-00:34:23:00

James Farmer:

We wanted a mass movement of, of people, black and white who would withdraw themselves from segregation and seek not to participate in it. That would mean a change in lifestyle for many people. Whites would seek to [pause] change in their everyday lives to some extent by not participating in segregation, not patronizing institutions which segregated or discriminated. Blacks would seek to refuse to allow themselves to be segregated. That would mean refusing to, that would mean going into those restaurants which segregated, discriminated, but making a protest and seeking to change their policies of segregation. We were asking people to do a lot. It was en-, not enough to go to church on Sundays and preach about segregation or listen to sermons and nod heads. It was not enough to hold interracial

Sundays. It was not enough for us to talk about the kind of society we wanted, we had to put our lives, our bodies and our lives on the line. We had to use our dir-, our bodies to [pause] obstruct the wheels of injustice. And court arrest and where necessary court death. This was asking a lot of people, but that is what CORE was talking about and thinking about in its earliest days.

00:34:24:00-00:38:19:00

James Farmer:

I proposed that the FOR take the lead and help to develop such an organization. And that is what I proposed in the two memoranda that I was, I sent to A.J. Muste. Muste replied quickly, expressing interest and telling me that he intended to send copies of those memoranda to all the members of the National Council of the FOR, that is the governing body. And he would ask them to consider my recommendation, that the FOR sponsor such an organization and consider it at their next National Council meeting which was to be March or early April of that year, 1942. At the National Council meeting, true to his word, A.J. Muste brought the question up to, to the National Council. Contrary to what one might expect, there was not prompt and easy acceptance of this recommendation. Many pacifists there argued that it was not the pacifist position, they argued that what we were proposing was violent [pause] because we were not talking love. We were talking conflict, we were encouraging conflict and that pacifism should teach love and peace and we were proposing activities that would lead to conflict. At the end of the day at the National Council meeting, the, [pause] the National Council was adjourned without action. The following morning, it was taken up again. This question would not go away. A.J. Muste recommended a motion and in the motion he proposed that the FOR not sponsor such an organization as I suggested, but that they authorize the organization's Race Relation Secretary, who, which was me, to seek to develop such an organization in one city, as a pilot project, and in a year's time the organization would reconsider depending upon the progress that that pilot project had made, positive or negative.

00:38:20:00-00:44:19:00

James Farmer:

Well I, I immediately started work on developing such a pilot project in Chicago. Many of the young pacifists already knew about the Brotherhood Mobilization plan as I had circulated it and they had read it. So we started our organization plans, we called a meeting at Boyce Fellowship House, which was a cooperative living venture in South Side Chicago, where there were whites and blacks, mostly from the University of Chicago. We called the first meeting and we didn't have to tell what Brotherhood Mobilization was because they'd all read the memos, but we had to discover, had to disc-, discover in discussion how we would go about creating Brotherhood Mobilization. Well, first we elected officers, I was elected Chairman. A young woman, Bernice Fisher was elected Secretary and someone else, a Jimmy Robinson, a young white man, who was a student at the University of Chicago, graduate student, was elected Treasurer. So here we had an organization [laughs] we had

persons elected to office, but what is this organization to be called? We didn't have a title. What are we gonna call it? One member of the organization there leaped to his feet finally and said, I have it, I have it, I have it. We'll call it CORE because that's what it is, the core of things, the core of things to be, the nucleus of what things should be. This student was a [pause] Japanese-American student, he was a Nisei, a second generation Japanese. His idea struck fire. We voted it in right, right away. I think the vote was unanimous. Well then we had our name, at least we had an acronym, C, O, R, E. But what does CORE mean? [laughs] That we did not know, so we began discussing it. Well, C, eh, everything had a Committee, so it was Committee or Congress or something. R E, racial equality because that's what we were about, that's what this organization CORE was about. But what does the O standing for? We spent practically the entire night discussing what the O would mean. It was not just a semantic argument, it was a philosophical discussion. If the organization was Committee then it could be a Committee On, on anything. Just sitting there discussing race, racial equality. But if it were an O, I think I got that wrong, didn't I?

00:44:20:00-00:45:50:00

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

James Farmer:

If, if O stood for On, it could be on, it could disc-, it could be anything, it could be a bridge club. On Racial Equality. If the O stood for Of, it was quite a different thing, because then the objective would have to be a part of the process. In other words, Racial Equality would have to be a part of the organization of CORE and by early morning, as night was fading and dawn was breaking, we took a vote and the side which I'd supported won, it was to be the Committee [sic] Of Racial Equality rather than on racial equality. This then set the philosophy behind the organization. So here, CORE, was set, was organized. It had a staff.

00:45:51:00-00:45:59:00

Interviewer #2:

So, so talk a little bit about—

Camera Crew Member #2:

Can we—

Interviewer #2:

Do we need to shift this?

Camera Crew Member #2:

—rotate his chair around a little bit?

Interviewer #2:

Yes.

Camera Crew Member #2:

He's leaning towards this side, so he's gonna—

Interviewer #2:

He's going to [unintelligible]

Camera Crew Member #2:

This way?

James Farmer:

Hmm?

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, face him more—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Yes.

[cut]

00:46:00:00-00:46:10:00

Interviewer #1:

No, not you, Vicente's gonna do one more take and then we'll tell you when to—

James Farmer:

Oh.

Interviewer #1:

—start. You're OK?

[cut]

Camera Crew Member #1:

What is that?

Camera Crew Member #2:

Hold on.

Camera Crew Member #1:

What's that clicking?

Interviewer #1:

It's Vicente.

00:46:11:00-00:47:36:00

Interviewer #2:

So you were gonna talk to us briefly about what that was like, the first year when you started running actual campaigns—

James Farmer:

Hmm.

Interviewer #2:

—in Chicago.

James Farmer:

Hmm. Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

What, what that felt like in terms of successes and how people responded to the successes and the failures.

James Farmer:

OK. Yeah, well, in Chicago, we had the very first project at a small restaurant seating

comfortably about forty persons, the Jack Sprat Coffee Shop. And this is the way it began. Jimmy Robinson, who was one of the original members of CORE, and I were walking down the street chatting about the experiences of a trip which I'd had recently and Jimmy said, well let's stop in the Jack Sprat Coffee Shop here and continue the conversation over a cup of coffee. I said, fine. It had not occurred to me and I'm sure it had not occurred to him there might be difficulty, might be trouble, there might be discrimination. We walked in and sat at a counter. There were several booths, but we chose the counter.

Camera Crew Member #2:

[inaudible]

Interviewer #2:

Can you hang on for a second?

Camera Crew Member #2:

[inaudible]

Interviewer #1:

I think it's—

[cut]

00:47:37:00-00:51:55:00

Interviewer #1:

—coffee shop.

Interviewer #1:

The coffee shop.

James Farmer:

Oh, coffee shop?

Interviewer #1:

Yeah [laughs]

James Farmer:

Oh, oh, oh I thought—we did have some barber shop [unintelligible]

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Mmm.

James Farmer:

Jimmy ordered coffee. I ordered coffee and doughnuts. The manager said, the doughnuts will be a dollar a piece and he spoke those words angrily. I said, that's very high for doughnuts, don't you think? He said, well that's my price to you. I said to him, I guess you realize that you are violating the state law. There was a state law, civil rights law, and still is in Chicago, as in most Northern cities. This law was little known, seldom used and generally not enforced. He remained quiet. I suppose he feared a court case, so he had us served. [pause] When we finished coffee and the, my doughnuts, I paid the bill with a five dollar bill. The manager gave me the correct change, charging five cents for each doughnut instead of a dollar for two. Well, Jimmy and I talked about it as we left the place and decided that we owed it to this man to return to his place of business some time because obviously he had a problem. We went back the next day, in a party of six, three white, three black. Sat at the counter and the man served us, or had us served by the waitresses and I paid the bill from the money paid to me, given to me by each of the persons with me. We walked out and this man, the manager, raked the money off the counter, rushed to the door behind us, and hurled it out into the street, screaming, take your money and get out, we don't want it! With surprise, we viewed the scene of the money scattered in the street and sidewalks, the paper money fluttering in the air and the coins rolling and flopping.

00:51:56:00-00:57:24:00

James Farmer:

We went into Boyce Fellowship House to discuss what we ought to do next, obviously we had to do something. So what was the next phase of it to be? One black member of the group shouted, I've got it, I've got it, let's go through the Black Belt of Chicago passing out leaflets saying Jack Sprat serves Negroes free of charge. And we all laughed at it [coughs] and then [laughs] after the laughter we got, got down to business of what to do. We all went to, we all, or one of us, I think I was the one who went to a book which had become the, the literal bible of the, our movement. This book was a book entitled "War Without Violence" by Krishnalal Shridharani, an Indian who had been a disciple of Gandhi's, had been with Gandhi on some of his projects, including the famous Salt March. "War Without Violence" outlined the steps in Gan-, Gandhi's movement. First step being investigation, second step, negotiation, third step, education and so on. So, we had to, in following Gandhi we had to negotiate. So I got on the telephone, called the Jack Sprat and told the man who answered that we wanted to come in and talk with him, at least I did. Talk about his policies of discrimination. He

promptly hung up the telephone. I called him again and the same re-, results. [pause] I then wrote him a letter, [pause] still trying to negotiate, [pause] asking him to suggest a date for our negotiations and to reply to that, my letter within a week. There was no reply. We then sent a committee in to try to negotiate on the spot. [pause] They were not successful, he would not talk and ordered them to get out of the place. So we had tried to negotiate and negotiations had been unsuccessful, at least the attempts had been unsuccessful. The next step according to Shridharani, was education. Well, we, we had leaflets distributed in front of Jack Sprat for a couple of days, distributed to customers or passer, passers-by, saying Jack, Jack Sprat discriminates against Negroes. That was the term used for African-Americans. So after that, we sent a group, a couple of people in to seek service. The policies had not changed, they were not, not served. Well, the next step according to Shridharani was direct action. So we had a meeting of this fledgling chapter of CORE to discuss direct action at Jack Sprat. We agreed upon a sit-in.

00:57:25:00-01:01:27:00

James Farmer:

I really think that this was the first sit-in, organized sit-in, in civil rights, in the nation's history. We had about twenty-five or twenty-six persons at this meeting. Jack Sprat seated comfortably about forty, so our group could pretty much fill up the available seats. And that's what we did. But before we went in, we had each person to agree to a CORE discipline for action. And the rules for action, which was the discipline, were that each individual participating in the project would pledge himself or herself to nonviolence in word and deed, even if persons in the restaurant used violent language we were pledged not to reply in kind. And we were to try to keep our attitude nonviolent, try to maintain a spirit of nonviolence, try to smile if appropriate, not mockingly, but to smile with good will. Everybody who participated in this project pledged himself to that discipline and we left Boyce Fellowship House to walk the three or four blocks to Jack Sprat. These were tense moments as we walked and we tried to laugh and to joke, but here was a small group of persons who felt that they were starting a revolution. They were starting something that would change the nation, that would eliminate segregation and other forms of discrimination from the nation eventually, so it was heady wine, we felt it. We walked into Jack Sprat in twos, threes and fours, occupied available seats at the counter and in booths and sat for service. There was a woman in charge on this occasion and she obviously had been briefed by the man who had been there. She studied the situation and then she ordered two white persons who had seated themselves at the counter—

[cut]

[end of camera roll]

01:01:28:00-01:02:12:00

James Farmer:

Mmm.

Camera Crew Member #2:

We're rolling.

Interviewer #2:

Dr. Farmer, the, the, the efforts in the early forties and the Journey of Reconciliation, all the things that CORE did during that decade really set the stage for the explosion that, that took off in 1956, and pacifists were involved with that. You haven't talked much about your work with Bayard Rustin, but I know George [sic - Glenn] Smiley and, and Bayard were advisors, were in Montgomery for awhile. And so, there's, there's a continuity between what you were doing in the forties and, and then when the flame finally starts, isn't there?

James Farmer:

Oh yes, indeed. You want me to move now and do—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Do we feel like—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—yeah, OK we finished the other thing.

01:02:13:00-01:06:39:00

Interviewer #2:

So talk about how, how what you had started—

James Farmer:

Hmm.

Interviewer #2:

—laid the groundwork for what happened—

James Farmer:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—in the fifties.

James Farmer:

What was happening in Chicago in 1942, and later expanded through the North, the East and the West with the nonviolent direct action projects which were successful, in large part, we did not have a sense then, actually, of starting a movement which would break forth in the South, though we debated at each convention of CORE from nineteen-, 1942 onto 1945 or '46 invading the South, in quotes, and each time it was discussed, it was voted down because we felt that the reaction of the Southern people would be pre-, pretty violent in response. We voted it down. Yet it was to come, it was to break forth [motorcycle passes] in the 1960s. And what happened there was that CORE was spreading its wings, so to speak. I had been one of the founders of the organization when I came into the organization as National Director, it was in nineteen sixty-, one-, 1961. And I was asked by the National Action Council to come into CORE in that capacity to put the organization on the map. Though we had begun the nonviolent actions in 1942, by 1961 CORE was not well-known among civil rights organizations. NAACP, of course was well-known, then there was SCLC founded in 1947 by Martin Luther King Jr. and there was SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee which developed out of the Southern student sit-in movement, 1961, and then there was Urban League, which was not really a nonviolent action committee, it was more one of negotiation and education. But those were organizations were better known than CORE, so I was asked to come into the organization, head it up and to try to put the organization on the map.

01:06:40:00-01:12:59:00

James Farmer:

How were we to do that? I began action as National Director on February first, 1961, as I sat at my desk in the office of CORE in a rickety building near the end of Bowery in New York City and also across the park from City Hall, I called a meeting of the staff, staff, small staff numbering about five and raised the question, what will we do? I'm to put the organization on the map, but how shall we do it? One of the staffers, Gordon Carey, who was a young, white fellow from, from Michigan at the time, proposed that we have a second Journey of Reconciliation, only this time, we would concentrate not only upon seating on the buses, but in use of the buses terminal facilities as well, and we would not limit ourselves to the upper South, but would go into the deep South. So this time, the Freedom Ride would be different.

Now, the Journey of Reconciliation to which he referred had been a project sponsored jointly by CORE and the FOR. And this project had tested seating on the buses for discrimination and had limited its activity to the upper South, feeling as CORE had decided in various national conventions that they did not want to stir up violent reactions in the South. So, the Journey of Reconciliation in 1947 had limited itself to the upper South where an interracial group, or rather interracial groups, had rode on [sniffs] buses [sniffs], the whites sitting in the back and blacks sitting in the front. They pledged themselves nonviolence no matter what, what happened, they were not to react with violence or respond with violence and among the riders on the Journey of Reconciliation were Bayard Rustin, George Houser, and others, various others. This sounds like a simple thing now, riding through the upper South, but it was a challenging thing at the time. They might have encountered anything, including beatings. [sniffs] There were arrests in North Carolina where participants were sent to the chain gang, where they put the chains and the weights around the ankle and were put out on the road to make little rocks out of big ones. [pause] And guards were standing there with rifles. [sniffs] They [pause] took their, their arrests and their sentencing with nonviolence, served thirty days on the road gang, or chain gang and others faced verbal assaults as they rode.

01:13:00:00-01:18:15:00

James Farmer:

Well now, that's what Gordon Carey was talking about on this day, February first, 1961 when he said, let's have a second Journey of Reconciliation, but let's expand it this time to go into the deep South, as well as the upper South, and let's go into waiting rooms as well as concentrating only upon seating on the buses. I said, Gordon, that's a great idea, but let's not call it Journey of Reconciliation, second Journey of Reconciliation. Who knows what the Journey of Reconciliation would be? People would, many people would think that we are trying to bring together alienated married couples. So let's call it something else. The watchword these days is, is freedom, so it has to say "freedom" in some way, it has to be the ride to freedom or the Freedom Ride, that's it's, the Freedom Ride, and the entire group agreed that it would be the Freedom Ride and that we would go from Washington D.C. down through Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, down to New Orleans. One young person on the staff, Val Coleman, went out and got a map from the, the gas station and we sat there and put pins in the map. Here, we had great excitement, just as the disciplines in CORE had excitement in Chicago that we were starting a movement [laughs] that we were indeed starting a revolution. Here, February first, 1961, there was a feeling that we were starting something brand new that would change this nation, and this too was very heady wine. We began recruiting. I went across the country [pause] in the South and North, getting recruits. We had to recruit carefully. [pause] We knew that the deep South states would throw anything at us that they could, they would investigate the background of people who were Freedom Riders, trying to find some, something that could be used to [pause] find something that could be used against them, to discredit the movement, the Freedom Ride, so anyone who had been arrested, been convicted of a felony or, was not chosen. Anyone who had any record of drug use was not chosen. Anyone who had a record of Communist activity was not chosen. We did not want to give anyone a, a chance to discredit the movement, so we

recruited carefully.

01:18:16:00-01:25:23:00

James Farmer:

I wrote letters to the White House, to the President, to the Attorney General, to the F.B.I., to the president of Greyhound and the president of Trailways, and the Chairman of the Interstate Commerce Commission. In these letters, I explained what were going to do, how we were going to do it, that is with nonviolence, when we were going to do it and where we were going to do it. And I requested a reply from the persons who received the letters, that is, the President, the Attorney General, J. Edgar Hoover, and so on. I didn't get any replies at all, no replies. Presumably my letters went into the circular file, file thirteen. They did not take it seriously because I was not a well-known civil rights leader at that time, though I had been active in civil rights since 1941 in Chicago, but had not received publicity, much publicity, so they did not take it seriously, they did not take me seriously. We narrowed the recruits down to a choice few, thirteen and we gathered them in Washington, fourteen myself included, and, for a training session. Three days, rigorous training. First, we had a lawyer speak to us, a civil rights attorney, and he told us what the law was nationally, and what the laws were in the various states through which we were going, and what to expect legally. Then we had discussion. That was followed by, [pause] it was followed by a speaker who was talking to us about the probable reactions of people in the states through which we were going to be going, what they were likely to do, what was likely to happen to us. And we had discussions following that lecture. Then we had an activist from the South, I think from the NAACP, address us on what was really gonna happen to us. What he told us is, y'all gonna get yourselves killed, that's what gonna happen. And we discussed [laughs] his talk. After those series of lectures, we had role playing, the well-known socio-drama, where the first [pause] group of persons in the role playing, played the role of Freedom Riders, sitting at the counter of a restaurant and the other half of the group played the role of hoodlums coming in to beat them up. And they were re-, they were, they were [pause] quite realistic, I might say. We felt that they were too realistic, but that's what we wanted really. We wanted, first of all, to learn how to cover up, cover ourselves up when we were knocked onto the floor, cover ourselves up so as to protect vital parts of the body from injury. And we, after this role playing, we had discussions of the action. We then switched roles, having those who had played hoodlums play the role, play the roles of Freedom Riders and vice versa, and then discussions. I'll tell you that after this series of role playings, I felt that the entire group, including myself, was ready for anything that might happen on the Freedom Ride, including the possibility of death.

01:25:24:00-01:32:10:00

James Farmer:

I went to visit my father then, he was terminally ill in hospital in Washington, which was known as Freedman's Hospital, it is now Howard University Hospital. He, I told him, as he lay on his back, what we were going to do and how we were going to do it, and I gave him a copy of our itinerary. He listened with curiosity. He was this great scholar, this PhD, and now

as he lay on his back, he studied the itinerary that I had given him with interest, and some fear as to what would happen. He's a Southerner, born in Kingstree, South Carolina, reared in Georgia. He said, well, Son, I think you'll be all right through Virginia, North and South Carolina, maybe even through Georgia, but Alabama, they will certainly take a potshot at you, and I hope they miss. He said, if you get through Alabama, you'll find that Alabama was purgatory and Mississippi is hell. I don't think you'll get through Mississippi and get to New Orleans, Louisiana. I wish, Son, that you wouldn't go on this, what do you call it? Freedom Ride, but I know you will. [pause] So I just pray that you survive. [pause] I then got up to leave and I hugged him, we shook hands, he asked if he could keep a copy of the itinerary, and of course, I gave him a copy. We left his hospital room, [pause] I then went to dinner where I had taken the entire group of Freedom Riders, to dinner, there were very few places in Washington D.C. of 1961 where an interracial group like that could eat. We had dinner at a Chinese restaurant [pause] and [pause] we discussed the ride that was to come. I think all of them had apprehensions, just as I did. We did not know what was going to happen, the word of the last speaker had continued to ring in our ears. There might even be death. After dinner we stood for a final word of prayer and one of the, one of the Riders who was a young minister [pause] led us in prayer. [sighs] We then departed after a little humor, someone there suggested that this was gonna be like the Last Supper [sighs] and we shuddered. I had told the group that they didn't have to go on the Freedom Ride, the only one who was locked into this demonstration was myself. I was locked into it because I was the Director of CORE, this was my project, so I could not get out of going, but they didn't have to go. They didn't have to tell me now whether they were going, they could sleep on it, [pause] and make up their minds. They didn't even have, have to tell me in the morning, they could simply not show up, if that was their decision.

[cut]

[end of camera roll]

01:32:11:00-01:32:27:00

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, and that was where you had that conversation where you weren't going to go—

James Farmer:

Yes, the conversation—

Interviewer #2:

—[unintelligible]

James Farmer:

—with Doris Jean Castle.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

James Farmer:

She was a beautiful young lady. [pause] And—

01:32:28:00-01:34:48:00

Interviewer #2:

You, you had been thinking about not going back—

James Farmer:

Not going, I, I didn't want to go because, frankly I was scared. I could think up a lot of reasons, I had a whole list of reasons why I shouldn't go. My father had just died, two deaths in the week would be too much for the family. And my desk was piled high of correspondence that needed answering, I'd been away for six weeks, all kinds of reasons. But the bottom line was that I was scared. I did not think that the bus from Montgomery to Jackson would arrive in Jackson, and I didn't want to die. That was the reason. So I went down that morning to say good-bye to the group who were boarding the buses, these, the group of which I speak was composed of SNCC members, that is the national, national student movement members from Nashville, Tennessee who had joined the Freedom Ride in Birmingham, and rode to Montgomery with great difficulty and a few members of the CORE chapter in New Orleans, who had come up to join the SNCC people in continuing the ride. And I had doubled back after the funeral of my father and rejoined in Montgomery. I'd flown down to Montgomery and was met there by Fred Shuttlesworth, that's the name I was trying earlier—

Interviewer #1:

Oh.

01:34:49:00-01:36:13

James Farmer:

—to remember. So I was re-, re-, I was joined at the—

Interviewer #2:

[whispers] [unintelligible]

James Farmer:

—met at the airport by Fred, Fred Shuttlesworth and he told me that we might have difficulty getting to the church, that is the First Baptist Church, Abernathy's church [sniffs] because the mob appeared to be moving in on the church, and this was a white mob. Oh, it was a riot. And he said, but we'll do our best to get me to the church because I was supposed to get to the church to join King, Abernathy and others and have a, have a, [pause] a, [pause] to make a speech at the church to the, the group of Freedom Riders and a large audience. [exhales]

01:36:14:00-01:40:57:00

Interviewer #2:

But the, the part when, when we read your book, the moment that really struck us, that really summed up that whole experience—

James Farmer:

[sips drink] [clears throat]

Interviewer #2:

—was when you were seeing the, the riders off that morning and the young girl asked you—

James Farmer:

[coughs] Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—you're coming with us, aren't you James? Tal-, tell us that story.

James Farmer:

Yes, so the next morning, I went down to the bus terminal. What I went for was to see them off because I'd made up my mind and I was not going. Yet, something in the back of my mind hoped that I would change my mind, so I had my suitcase packed and took it with me and asked one of the CORE representatives there to put it in the, the, the, the back, into the trunk of a rental car that CORE had, and I then went to the window, the opened window of the bus where Doris Jean Castle was riding. She was a active CORE member in New Orleans. And I shook her hand and she said, well, Jim, you're going with us aren't you? I gave her all the reasons why I couldn't, including the death of my father, including the mail packed, piled high on my desk at the office [unidentified background clatter] including the necessity for CORE to have somebody there to meet with the President, the Attorney General, and so on, somebody had to be there to see that money was raised to keep the organization going and to keep the Freedom Ride riding. And I had to be there. I said it was

not possible, unfortunately, for everyone to be on the front lines at all times. She looked at me, never took her eyes from my face, or from my eyes and she said Jim, please. And her eyes were like saucers. I said to some CORE person there, get my bag out of the trunk of the car and put it on the bus, I'm going. She shamed me into going. I did not know if we would survive and get to Jackson, but if the bus did not make it to Jackson, how would I have faced those kids' parents, if they knew I had sent them on the trip to Mississippi and had not dared to go with them. So, I sat on the bus and I watched the youngsters who were writing notes, the men placed them in their pockets and the young women placed them in their bras. I stepped across the aisle to see what they were writing, it was names and addresses of next of kin. They had not expected to arrive, either. But, they had fear [pause] but they were determined and that determination transcended the fear.

01:40:58:00-01:43:18:00

Interviewer #1:

In your book, Dr. Farmer, you wrote that CORE was the beneficiary—

James Farmer:

[sips liquid]

Interviewer #1:

—of the emergence of Martin Luther King after a decade and a half of CORE plowing the soil. Would you, would it be fair to say that the opposite was true as well, that King was the beneficiary of CORE?

James Farmer:

Of course.

Interviewer #1:

Can you talk a little bit about that?

James Farmer:

Mm-hmm. CORE had started nonviolence in this country, based of course upon Gandhi's nonviolence. But when nonviolence became popular, 1960, no 1955 and 1956, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Dr. King became famous. He was the beneficiary of CORE activities. CO-, CORE activities in nonviolence, but he rode the nonviolent action into primary prominence. He became the best known man in America, the best known man in the country. And nonviolence came alive and it was an idea whose time had come. So CORE felt that it had, it had made Martin Luther King Jr. famous. The technique of nonviolence that CORE had used from 1942 on [pause] was the technique which Dr. King became famous for.

01:43:19:00-01:44:05:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. So, go ahead and have a drink while I ask you a little bit more.

James Farmer:

[sips liquid]

Interviewer #1:

Did, so do you feel, was that mutually beneficial then? Did CORE, was CORE risen with King, as King used your techniques? Was that [unintelligible]?

James Farmer:

It became mutually beneficial when the Freedom Rides got really under way, then CORE was a beneficiary of King's development of the technique of nonviolence. King developed nonviolence, developed prominence from CORE action and then CORE developed prominence from the action from which he had taken, using nonviolence.

01:44:06:00-01:45:08:00

Interviewer #1:

Do you think that if there had been no nonviolent movement,—

James Farmer:

[sips liquid]

Interviewer #1:

—if there had been no James Farmer, no CORE, no [pause]

James Farmer:

King.

Interviewer #1:

—Bayard Rustin, would the civil rights movement, I know this is just a what if, but—

James Farmer:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

—what do you think would have happened?

Interviewer #2:

What would have happened? How—

Interviewer #1:

How, how—

Interviewer #2:

—without that core of—

Interviewer #1:

—would the civil rights

Interviewer #2:

—principles?

James Farmer:

[pause] I think that the movement would have spo-, it wouldn't have been a movement, first of all. Civil rights activity would have stalled and would have remained the activity of the NAACP and the Urban League from day one. With and-, without the technique of nonviolence, it would not have gotten beyond day one.

01:45:09:00-01:45:34:00

Interviewer #1:

Could you say that as a, without my, we won't, they won't hear my question, so I think it's not, I don't have all of—

James Farmer:

Hmm.

Interviewer #1:

—you saying all of it.

James Farmer:

Hmm, what?

Interviewer #2:

Could you say, without the, the technique of nonviolence it would have stalled—

James Farmer:

It would have stalled—

Interviewer #1:

—but start from the beginning, and say the whole thing.

James Farmer:

I don't remember what I said.

Interviewer #1:

You said, you said, if it weren't for the technique of nonviolence, the civil rights—

Interviewer #2:

She just wanted you to say it over one more time.

01:45:35:00-01:46:05:00

James Farmer:

If it weren't for the technique of nonviolence, the civil rights movement would have remained stalled, using the age old techniques of legal action, without something new, a new spark being used to thrust it into the ar-, air.

01:45:06:00-01:

Interviewer #1:

Are you still a pacifist?

James Farmer:

Am I what?

Interviewer #1:

A pacifist?

James Farmer:

No.

Interviewer #1:

You're not?

01:46:09:00-01:46:39:00

Interviewer #2:

Did you ever, there was a period when you, when you would defined yourself as a pacifist.

James Farmer:

Oh yes.

Interviewer #2:

In 1941.

James Farmer:

Oh yes, yes. 1941 and 1942, in fact until the '50s. I don't know what stopped me from being a pacifist. Probably had something to do with South Africa when I became knowledgeable 'bout, about the problems in South Africa.

01:46:40:00-01:46:37:00

Interviewer #2:

Well there's—

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Interviewer #2:

—there's a sense you get from some people, especially people who were involved in South Africa, or even people in Europe that, that they look on American pacifists as people who have the luxury of being pacifists because they've never had to confront certain realities. Do you, do you buy that?

James Farmer:

Oh yes. Sure, that's true. However, the pacifists who helped to set up CO-, CORE and who participate in CORE activity were not enjoying that luxury and were not accepting it, because they participated in action which was equally as dangerous as going to war.

01:46:38:00-01:46:24:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #2:

So, so, so to take nonviolent action or to be a pacifist doesn't imply cowardice, it implies courage on some level. Doesn't it?

James Farmer:

Yes. One could be a coward and that could be the reason the person became a pacifist, but that is not true of most pacifists. Most pacifists felt that it was equally dan-, as dangerous to be a pacifist. And they spelled that out by looking for positive action which they could take, such as CORE was taking.

01:48:25:00-01:49:50:00

Interviewer #2:

I think this might be a good place to stop.

Interviewer #1:

I, let, maybe just one wrap-up question, which is, what would, what do you think was, what do you look back on as the greatest success in your career, in—

James Farmer:

In my career?

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

James Farmer:

[laughs] Well, for one thing, I'm still alive. And second, the Freedom Ride. I would like to be remembered for having originated the Freedom Ride and having led it through Mississippi to Jackson, and to Jackson jails. I want to be remembered for that. Also I want to be remembered for having started CORE. Though I did not do it alone, there, there were others who worked with me, we worked jointly, but I do not want my role in it to be forgotten.

01:49:51:00-01:51:39:00

Interviewer #2:

Do, do you, do you think you and the others who formed CORE and went on the Freedom Rides, do you think you changed this country?

James Farmer:

Oh, we did. We did. You know, when I finished seminary, my father asked me if I wanted him to get in touch with the district superintendent to have myself initiated into the Methodist Church there and given a church to pastor. I told the old scholar that I was not going to pastor a church, that I was not going to be a minister. He looked shocked and said, well Son, what are you going to do? And I answered that with the rashness, brashness of a twenty-year-old and said, I'm going to end segregation in our time. My father looked even more shocked then, and I'm sure he believed that was a brash statement of one who had not faced the realities of life.

01:51:40:00-01:52:07:00

Interviewer #2:

But le-, yet, looking back, do you feel you contributed to that?

James Farmer:

I think I contributed to ending segregation, we wiped out Jim Crow, which was a form of segregation, the most punishing form of segregation, and I contributed greatly to that.

01:52:08:00-01:52:12:00

Interviewer #2:

OK, we need some room tone then?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Mm-hmm—

[cut]

[end of interview]

01:52:12:00