Interview with **Stokely Carmichael**
Date: November 7, 1988
Interviewer: Judy Richardson
Camera Rolls: 1032-1040
Sound Rolls: 114-116
Team: A,C,D

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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 #1032]
[sound roll #114]

00:00:12:00

Camera crew member #1:

Camera roll 1032, sound roll 114.

00:00:14:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

Team A.

00:00:20:00

Interviewer:

Can you talk about Malcolm X at Howard in 1962? What effect did his speech have on you?

00:00:26:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Oh, that takes me back quite a bit, you know. We had quite some problems with Howard University, with the administration of students. They had stifled a lot of intellectual activity which could help to liberate the minds of the students and create the type of activities that we needed as student activists, and we thought then of putting together a project called Project Awareness, and we wrote the Project Awareness proposal. Michael Thelwell at that time was with the school newspaper—I think it was called the Hilltop—and he was also part of our group, and we wrote up a big, intellectually sounding, flowing project to bring people to debate with ideas, to bring stimulus to the university, and the administration was so happy they agreed to it because, you know, they said, Finally, they're going to leave all this problems of activism and come and do some real intellectual and academic work, so they signed it, and Thelwell sent out a press release to, I think, *The Washington Post* and other newspapers and also some news releases to the universities—George Washington University, Georgetown University, American University—and they got some comments, and they all said, you know, Wow, Howard is doing this, so *The Washington Post* even ran a big story on Howard: the administration, how liberal they were—

00:01:44:00

Interviewer:

Cut just a second.

00:01:45:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

00:01:46:00

Stokely Carmichael:

I'm coming to it.

00:01:47:00

Interviewer:

I know you're getting there, but—

00:01:47:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK, so, cut that.

[cut]

[slate]

00:01:49:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

00:01:51:00

Interviewer:

How did you respond—

00:01:52:00

Stokely Carmichael:

I'll continue. We—the administration had then been praised by *The Washington Post* after approving the project. Our first debate was Malcolm X versus Bayard Rustin. Of course, it was important. Once the administration saw Malcolm X, I mean, they didn't know what to do. They didn't want him there, but they had just been praised for being liberal, so they were already finished—there was nothing they could do—and Bayard Rustin was brought. The debate was important for us in NAG, the Nonviolent Action Group, at that time, around SNCC, because there were great divisions, and Bayard Rustin and Malcolm X posed these divisions, the approaches towards the solution. Of course, Bayard Rustin's approach was one of total commitment to nonviolence as a philosophy with the aim of integrating into the American capitalist system— almost— well, questioning the capitalist system but not to a profound degree. Malcolm, of course, was the total opposite: not seeing nonviolence as a philosophy; almost denouncing it as a tactic, if you will; calling for violent clash of arms against the American capitalist system; and not for integration into it but separation from it while seeking its destruction, either through our hands or the hands of Allah, as he himself would say it, so the Malcolm X debate and the Bayard Rustin debate had a profound effect upon the Nonviolent Action Group and, consequently, SNCC because of the role that the Nonviolent Action Group played and, of course, consequently the country because of the role that SNCC played in the country.

00:03:25:00

Interviewer:

How did it affect you personally?

00:03:26:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, it was—

00:03:27:00

Interviewer:

If you could go back here and just—

00:03:28:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Yeah—

00:03:29:00

Camera crew member #2:

Let's cut—

[cut]

00:03:30:00

Interviewer:

OK.

[slate]

00:03:31:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

00:03:33:00

Interviewer:

How were you personally affected?

00:03:34:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, in the first place, we had the struggles there about nationalism versus non-nationalism or straight integration, the question of determination: all the problems of the values of the societies were being raised at that time, and this debate helped to clarify for all of us all of those issue and drive a clear line between those of us who really became clear nationalists as opposed to non-nationalists, and from this nationalism here, if you will look in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, you would see that the Nonviolent Action Group from DC brought it in in full flavor. It was from this point that it can be dated where nationalism took its firm root and became dominant inside of the Nonviolent Action Group. It was from Malcolm's debate.

00:04:17:00

Interviewer:

And how did you personally feel?

00:04:19:00

Stokely Carmichael:

I felt—

00:04:20:00

Interviewer:

I mean, what was the effect on you?

00:04:21:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, I worked with Project Awareness, and I remember very well saying to them that I'm going to do all the work that needs to be done before Malcolm X gets here. I will sweep floors, I will lick envelopes, but the night that Malcolm X comes here, I am doing no work. I am sitting in the audience. As a matter of fact, I had reserved seats in front, you know, and the place was packed. At first, they thought they couldn't even get in, but since I was working with Project, I reserved it. I sat in front through the whole debate. I did all the work for the committee, but during the debate, I was in front. As a matter of fact, the Nation of

Islam, in their newspaper, *Muhammad Speaks*, carried my photo—nobody knew who I was at that time—you know, as students who are enthusiastic at Malcolm's report. Malcolm finished them, and for me, after that, anytime they said anything, I just used to send them straight to Malcolm. He gave us all the intellectual arguments and opened up the way for us to show clearly an intellectual basis for a nationalism and an ability to smash all ideas that were in contradiction to it. Malcolm opened up the way, and more importantly, he opened up the way for nonvi—for violence as a legitimate weapon in a struggle for human rights.

00:05:28:00

Interviewer:

At what point did his philosophy begin to really take hold in SNCC?

00:05:31:00

Stokely Carmichael:

His philosophy probably really took hold in SNCC—probably, you will see its beginning by Selma, Alabama, where Silas Norman, who was a project director, along with Brother Harris, the photographer, began to, as a max—, fact, what it was was that from New York—

00:05:54:00

Interviewer:

Actually, cut this.

[cut]

00:05:55:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

[slate]

00:05:56:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

00:05:58:00

Interviewer:

OK, so, when did it begin to take hold? When did Malcolm's ideas begin to take hold?

00:06:01:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, I, well, after his debate against—

00:06:04:00

Interviewer:

Please mention Malcolm's name.

00:06:06:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Mm-hmm. After Malcolm's debate with Bayards [sic] Rustin, where he thoroughly crushed all of Bayard Rustin's ideas—

00:06:12:00

Interviewer:

Begin with Malcolm's ideas began to take hold—

00:06:15:00

Stokely Carmichael:

OK. After the 1962, the debate at Howard University with the Nonviolent Action Group, Malcolm's ideas began to take firm root inside of SNCC through NAG—only in just one way of course—through other contacts. Probably its most systematic introduction into SNCC would come in Selma, Alabama, where Doug and Tina Harris, who were on SNCC's staff in Selma, Alabama, at that time, through their contacts in New York would have, every week, Malcolm's speech from the Audubon taped and sent down to the Selma SNCC office, where copies would be had and would be passed around within the SNCC staff people. So, working outside of Selma in Lowndes County, Bob Mants and myself were to ensure that every week we would get that tape, and we would play Malcolm X throughout the week inside of Lowndes County. Of course, you know, it was here that he was invited by Silas Norman, who was then our project director before I went to Alabama, this would be January of 1965, just before the Selma march. He was invited by SNCC to come in, so—but I think he also has a profound effect upon SNCC because John Harris and, John Harris goes with him and—

00:07:23:00

Interviewer:

OK [unintelligible]—

00:07:24:00

Stokely Carmichael:

OK.

00:07:25:00

Interviewer:

Could you, though, talk about why SNCC invites him to Selma?

00:07:27:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, that's what I was about, because I had to go back because it was '64. That's why I had to go back to—

00:07:32:00

Interviewer:

Right, it's but specific to '65. Why does SNCC invite Malcolm to Selma?

00:07:36:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, they invited him, number one, because SNCC took a trip to Africa in 1964—invited by President Sékou Touré, incidentally, of Guinea, and from Guinea, the SNCC delegation continued. Malcolm X had also taken a trip to Africa and [motorcycle passes] had preceded SNCC on this trip, and through some coincidence, it seemed that the SNCC people followed in Malcolm's footsteps in the same countries, and I remember John Lewis, when giving the report, having to say that—he said, You don't know the effect that Malcolm X has. Every country we went into where Malcolm X spoke, we were asked in, our position in relationship to Malcolm's position. ***So, many people in SNCC who didn't even know who Malcolm was began to sit up and take notice, so here in SNCC, it became—first for it, right, Malcolm X is having effect where you don't even think he's having an effect, so people began to look***

closer. Of course, the closer they looked to Malcolm X, the quicker they got hooked on Malcolm X, so by 1965, Selma, Alabama, was prepared to invite SNCC into Selma to speak. No one in SNCC could oppose it. As a matter of fact, everyone was happy. Of course, the Mississippi Project since 1964 had made contact with Malcolm X—with Mrs. Hamer—and we had sent our youth wing out from the Delta where I was congressional director to have a meeting with Malcolm X, so the meetings and Malcolm X were continuing, but its real profound impact was probably the 1962 debate with Bayard Rustin. I go back to this point because Bayard Rustin had an effect also upon SNCC people.

00:09:05:00

Interviewer:

OK, so, OK, cut. Sorry. That's not something—

[cut]

[camera roll #1033]

00:09:09:00

Camera crew member #2:

Ten-thirty-three. Mark it here.

00:09:12:00

Interviewer:

OK, why does SNCC feel that it's important to go into Lowndes County?

00:09:18:00

Stokely Carmichael:

You know, SNCC's decision to go into Lowndes County comes in the fall of 1964, after the Democratic Convention in Atlantic City, where the majority of SNCC people prior to this had voted a decision, a political decision that SNCC would create a Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and this Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party would challenge the legitimate Democratic Party of Mississippi; would defeat them because of the blatant illegal and unjust stance which the regular Democratic Party took, at that time headed by Eastland, the racist; and they would march in the Democratic Party. There was a minority position that this was not correct: The Democratic Party could not be depended upon. It had no, there was no basis, in fact, on which to depend on it, neither moral nor any other position, but the SNCC majority position was this should be done. Of course, in 1964, when the Democratic

Party responded in the manner in which it responded, and SNCC would not accept that response, the majority of SNCC people—

00:10:17:00

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. Cut, please.

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

00:10:18:00

Interviewer:

If you could say, when they refused to recognize—

00:10:22:00

Stokely Carmichael:

OK.

00:10:23:00

Camera crew member #2:

Still rolling?

00:10:24:00

Stokely Carmichael:

See, I wouldn't want to go into that—

00:10:24:00

Interviewer:

No, you can just say—

00:10:26:00

Stokely Carmichael:

OK.

00:10:27:00

Interviewer:

Just instead—

[cut]

[slate]

00:10:27:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it here. OK.

00:10:37:00

Stokely Carmichael:

When the Democratic Party refused to seat the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and in fact seated the racist Democratic Party with the compromise, which it called a compromise, which was unacceptable to SNCC. The majority of people in SNCC had no alternative for SNCC's political strategy. Those who had, in the beginning, opposed the decision to work with the challenge for the Democratic Party but worked with it anyway because they were disciplined to the organization, though outvoted, were the only ones with a pliable alternative, a viable alternative, at that time. They presented an alternative of organizing the African community outside of the Democratic Party: independent political party. Alabama was selected, and Lowndes County as a county which we had not done much work in.

00:11:24:00

Interviewer:

Excuse me. You're going to have to cut.

00:11:26:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

00:11:26:00

Interviewer:

I need that an—

[cut]

[slate]

00:11:28:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it here.

00:11:30:00

Interviewer:

As you go into Lowndes County, what are you organizing, and what are you organizing against?

00:11:34:00

Stokely Carmichael:

As we said, now, after the failure of the Democratic Party to respond properly to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, it was clear for some of us in SNCC that no longer could we talk of any way of connection with the Democratic Party. Not only can we not talk of direction, but we must go into direct organizing in opposition to the Democratic Party. Since Mississippi had the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, those of us in SNCC who were supporting this policy thought of Alabama. Alabama represented for us a, a great climate. ***George Wallace was then the head of the Alabama Democratic Party. The Alabama Democratic Party was racist. Its symbol at that time had a white rooster***—a white cock, a chicken—male chicken, rooster, ***and it had the words of White supremacy. That was the official emblem of the Democratic Party of Alabama, so here it would be easy for us to tell our people, Hey, look this party is not for us. We need our own party.*** So, the conditions there were clear, and we could move in and not only organize our own party but organize in opposition to this White superior—superiority party, this racist party, which had White superiority as its slogan and emblem.

00:12:47:00

Interviewer:

And what was it like first going in? Just thinking that you're one person going in, what was it like?

00:12:52:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, it was different, in the first place, because before—

00:12:55:00

Interviewer:

Sorry. Just say, First going in—

00:12:57:00

Stokely Carmichael:

It was different than in other SNCC projects where you just went in quietly, simply because our decision to go into Selma, Alabama, was approved, I think, by late October, November, of 1964, so we would be in Alabama in 1965, so we decided we would make Alabama early 1965. The Alabama staff, under the direction of Silas Norman at that time, through our work with Doug and Tina Harris, at which they'd already began contact with Malcolm X, so Malcolm X was invited.

00:13:27:00

Interviewer:

Cut, please. I'll tell you what I need—

00:13:28:00

Camera crew member #2:

Is that a cut?

00:13:28:00

Interviewer:

That's a cut.

[cut]

[slate]

00:13:31:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it, please. OK.

00:13:34:00

Interviewer:

OK, talk about the momentum from the march in terms of organizing Lowndes.

00:13:36:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, of course, you know, Martin Luther King is a great mobilizer, one of the greatest mobilizers this century has produced, and Bob Mants and I understood, in contradiction with a lot of other SNCC people at that time, that he was going to pull out the strongest people as the march went right through Lowndes County since the march was Lowndes County from Selma to Montgomery, Dallas County to Montgomery County, go through Lowndes. So what we did was we followed the march, did not participate in the march. We followed the march, and everywhere people from Lowndes County lent their lands, brought food, came out to greet, made some participation in the march. We went to those people, collected their names, sat down there, spoke with them, told them that we are coming after the march to do real organizing, not just passing through. So, we followed the march, Bob Mants and myself, all the way up onto Lowndes County, the end of the county line. By that time, once the march was over, we sat down for the first time with the SNCC organizer going into a county as terrible as Lowndes County because Lowndes County had a population, I'm sure, of close to 85 percent, 85 percent of us, and—

00:14:43:00

Interviewer:

Cut. [laughs]

[cut]

00:14:44:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK, thank you. Mark it here.

[slate]

00:14:48:00

Interviewer:

OK, organizing off the momentum of the march—

00:14:50:00

Stokely Carmichael:

When you look at a county like Lowndes County, which had the history of terrorism that it did, eighty-five percent of the population us, owning no land, all sharecroppers, and what was even more important statistically was that Lowndes County, which was between Selma and Montgomery—and Montgomery seeing activity since 1957 with Martin Luther King's bus boycott and Selma, since the early '60s when SNCC were in Selma, there wasn't one of us registered to vote in Lowndes County. That's how strong the terrorism was there. So, this was the first time that as a SNCC organizer, Bob Mants and myself, we were able to go into a county with a full list of names, thanks to the march that was conducted by Martin Luther King, of the strongest people, those who were unafraid, willing to participate. So, for us the organizing task had been done because, as an organizer, this work can take you sometimes as much as six months when you go into a county to find and to isolate the people, but this was given to us, and it was demographically broken down because the march had gone through the entire breadth of the county. So, when we sat down to work, matter of fact, it was deciding which group we wanted to spend most of our time with, out of all the strongs that we had collected, strong people we had collected, in order to spread out rapidly within the county.

00:16:06:00

Interviewer:

And can you talk about your contact with Mr. Hulett?

00:16:09:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Mr. Hulett was one of those people who represents some of the mentality, political mentality, of those in Lowndes County. He was involved in the movement in Montgomery.

00:16:21:00

Interviewer:

Cut just a second.

00:16:22:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

[cut]

00:16:23:00

Interviewer:

You know, if you could just say—

00:16:24:00

Camera crew member #2:

Yes.

00:16:25:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:16:26:00

Interviewer:

OK, contact with Mr. Hulett—

00:16:28:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Yeah, Mr. Hulett represented some of those—it was worker and farmer or sharecropper, if you will, that is, in Lowndes County, mostly people—it was agricultural county. Most of the people grew agricultural goods, but some of them, to combine their income, were also workers. For example, maybe the husband will work, and the wife and the children will carry on the agricultural work. This was the case of Mr. Hulett, who was a worker in Montgomery

and communicate—, communicated every day, but he worked in the Martin Luther King program. He even body, was a bodyguard of Martin Luther King's house when they dynamited King's house in Montgomery in '56, yet himself and some others who were workers in Montgomery still could not spring a movement in Lowndes County, but since they had this experience and wanting always to get a movement in Lowndes County, the minute we walked in with a program for a movement and they could see the program was a clear program that would work, they immediately seized the program. So, Mr. Hulett represented one of those who had worked in Montgomery, wanted to bring these changes to Lowndes County, but was incapable of working out the program only because of lack of organizational support or organizational skill, so once SNCC came in with the organizational support and skill, he saw clearly. He jumped into it. So, he was, clearly came first, front into the movement quickly because he had the experience from Montgomery and was extremely instrumental in helping to rally the population of Lowndes County towards the cause of the struggle.

00:17:56:00

Interviewer:

Talk about your relationship, now, with Jonathan Daniels, and you had mentioned sitting down with him and people saying that you were a racist and explaining that.

00:18:04:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Jonathan Daniels was a White student, a semi—, seminarian student. I forgot which sect.

00:18:12:00

Interviewer:

Just start again with he was a seminary—

00:18:13:00

Stokely Carmichael:

It was a, say, sem—, White seminarian student.

00:18:15:00

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. If you could say, Jonathan Daniels was—

00:18:18:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Mm-hmm. Jonathan Daniels was a White seminarian student studying for the priesthood, not Catholic. OK. [laughs]

00:18:29:00

Interviewer:

OK. It's all right. Just keep going, yeah.

00:18:30:00

Stokely Carmichael:

All right. I didn't want to make that specific. Anyway, he, like many—

00:18:36:00

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. Can you just begin again with Jonathan Daniels?

00:18:39:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Jonathan Daniels was a White student who was studying at theological seminary, and he, like many White students who were conscious of a responsibility, came to see of what help he could be in advancing the cause of humanity. He came to apply to work with SNCC, and because he'd heard of SNCC, he felt his politics was closely allied with the policies of SNCC, but doing the organizing work we were doing in Lowndes County, Alabama, just made it impossible for a White student to do that type of work. We had no base in Lowndes County, so there was no way to protect him, and if he were working with us, he'd be, clearly, a target of the Ku Klux Klan, and our work then would be just protecting him rather than doing work. He inquired about working in Lowndes County with SNCC, and people had told him, well, he should see me, but that it'd be difficult to talk with me because I was a racist and didn't like White people, etc., etc., but he, of course, had at least courage to find out for himself, and so when we sat down and discussed, he saw clearly the tactics and saw the correctness of the position that SNCC had. He was, hoped, he hoped the conditions could be different, but they were not. At the same time, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which were also conducting some campaigns in Alabama, took a city in Lowndes County, Fort Deposit—not its capital but a city at the end of the county—and began

to do some demonstrations in there around integrating restaurants, etcetera, etcetera, something that SNCC was not involved in at that time in the county.

00:20:15:00

Interviewer:

OK, yeah.

00:20:16:00

Camera crew member #2:

Cut it.

[cut]

00:20:19:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it here.

[slate]

00:20:21:00

Interviewer:

OK, tell me what the—the murder of Jonathan Daniels—the effect that it had on you.

00:20:26:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, Jonathan and I got to know each other quite a bit after our first discussion and he began to see it. We began to discuss, we'd meet quite often in Selma, and whenever I was there, he would seek me out, and we'd spend time together. I had a lot of appreciation for him. He was different from the regular activists that came. He tried to analyze your problems a little bit deeper, and he too were more interested in lasting solutions, rather than the temporary ones. So, we got to like each other, if you will, and when the demonstrations started, even unbeknown to me, he participated in them, so I wasn't aware of the fact that he was arrested until I myself was arrested, although not involved in the demonstration at all, was arrested and found out he was in jail, so I was arrested together. Due to an error made by the police authorities in Lowndes County by placing my arrest with theirs, when in fact they were entirely separated, I was released from prison before them, so I was released probably a

couple of hours before them. I went immediately to Selma to see our lawyers to sign bonds, which I thought would make for their release, and was returning immediately to Selma when halfway to, between Selma and, no, more than halfway, about twenty minutes from the Lowndes County capital, Haynesville [sic], I met a SNCC worker, Willie Vaughn, who informed me that there was just a great shooting—'cause he too was in jail, had just been released, and everybody had scattered—so I immediately went to Haynesville [sic]. The town was quiet. I was alone. I was armed, and there was nothing but blood in front of the store, which was closed. He had informed me that Jonathan had been killed.

00:22:21:00

Interviewer:

And how'd you feel about that?

00:22:22:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, you know, I had been around SNCC for a while. He was not the first would I have seen die and had seen those much closer to me die and certainly had not become immune to death, but I'd certainly known that in no way was it to stop or slow down my work. If anything, it was to intensify my work, so I was deeply sorry about his death but only sorry that he was the one who had to go, but then I had to analyze it. Someone had to go, and unfortunately, it was him. It tightened my sense of responsibility and ensured me even more of the correctness of SNCC's position on the relationship of White workers. This effect would be felt deeper in SNCC later on in its time, but it was one of those things which came to affect those of us in SNCC in Alabama staff so strongly that our position was correct: that to bring White workers in was just in fact to court their death and slow down the process of building up a strong nationalist force.

00:23:24:00

Interviewer:

You also mentioned carrying a weapon. At what point does nonviolence, even as a tactic, begin to fall apart in SNCC?

00:23:30:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Oh, well, actually I trace it to a period when—

00:23:33:00

Interviewer:

I’m sorry. If you could say what you’re tracing—

00:23:35:00

Stokely Carmichael:

I’m, the, I’m tracing—[laughs]

00:23:38:00

Interviewer:

OK, start again. Cut.

00:23:41:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The question of—we can go ahead—we can go ahead.

[cut]

[slate]

00:23:42:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The question of—

00:23:43:00

Camera crew member #2:

New slate, new slate here.

00:23:46:00

Camera crew member #1:

Second slate.

[cut]

[slate]

[camera roll #1034]

00:23:47:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, I thought I'm just responding to your questions.

00:23:49:00

Interviewer:

Yes, that's right. At what point does that—does nonviolence, even as a tactic, break down?

00:23:53:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The question of nonviolence as a tactic, or principle even, breaking down in SNCC I myself trace to a debate by Charlie Cobb inside of SNCC. I remember once—and my memory is not clear on the years, but it's in early '60s—he raised the question. He said, OK, I'm a SNCC worker. He said, I'm nonviolent, he said, but I'm working Mississippi, and I have to work with peasant families there—sharecropper families—and these families are not nonviolent, so he gives the example of Miss Hamer. He says, OK, I go to work Miss Hamer's house. Every time I go, there as a SNCC field representative. The terrorist groups shoot into her house, so he said, If these terrorist groups are shooting into a house, even though I'm nonviolent, she's not. They have guns in the house. If they are returning fire—the terrorist groups—what is my position as a SNCC person? Nobody in SNCC answered the question, nobody, and when the question was not answered, it was clear then: every SNCC person should make their own individual decision, and the decisions were clear. Those of us in SNCC never saw—the overwhelming majority of people in SNCC never saw nonviolence as a philosophy as did those in SCLC. For those in SNCC, it was just a tactic. If it could work, fine. If it can't work, we'll try something else. For SCLC, it had to work at all times under all conditions. Nothing else could work, so it never came into the realm. So, for those of us in SNCC who had it as a tactic, guns, we began to carry guns probably even a little bit before this statement, which is in the early '60s, but I'm sure that by 1963, I would say ninety percent of your field staff in SNCC were carrying guns. Of course, not publicly, but I'm—ninety percent of your field staff in Alabama and Mississippi were definitely carrying guns by 1963.

00:25:33:00

Interviewer:

So, would you say that you were also carrying guns in Lowndes County?

00:25:37:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Oh, yes, by Lowndes County, we had guns, no question about it. By Lowndes County, we were carrying guns. It was—it would create problems for some SNCC people who were called—claiming to be conscientious objectors, so their problem was if they're conscientious objectors, they don't, can't be found with a gun, but those of us who were not claiming, claiming conscientious objection, it made no difference. What should be better? Why? You get busted for a gun charge, you won't have to go to the army no how. [laughs]

00:26:00:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut, please. OK.

00:26:03:00

Camera crew member #2:

Cut.

[cut]

00:26:04:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark here.

[slate]

00:26:06:00

Interviewer:

You used to have an answer about the Black Panther Party, some of the White folks called it that. What was that?

00:26:11:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, you know SNCC's research staff, headed by Jack Minnis in Atlanta, was a strong arm for the work in SNCC, and we had requested Jack to do some research on the possibilities of independent political parties in the state of Alabama. Luckily, it was very easy to form a third party in Alabama since the Democratic Party was so sure of its authority it never paid much attention. All you had to do was to call your, give yourself a name. You couldn't call yourself a political party until you had received a certain percentage of votes in the election, but the law stipulated that you had to have a symbol, and perhaps one of the reasons the law stipulated this was because of the high rate of ili—, ili—, illiteracy in Alabama, and so this high rate of illiteracy meant that people could vote by the symbols of the organizations—the political parties, rather than by reading them, so this was the law, so we had to come up with a symbol, so when we decided we had to come up with a symbol for the party, we asked any people to make suggestions. Well, of course everyone was laughing at the symbol of the Democratic Party with the white rooster and the words White supremacy, so Jennifer Lawson, who was on the SNCC staff, if my memory serves me correctly, I think it was. She was the one who came up with the black panther as the symbol. Well, of course, when the black panther came, everybody was happy and laughed. Oh, this black panther will eat up this white cock tomorrow. Let's—so, the, but unfortunately, we had not thought really at that time that the press media would create such a confusion over the symbol of a black panther. As a matter of fact, the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, which was its name, which had the black panther as a symbol, never considered itself the Black Panther Party until the press began to call it the Black Panther Party, and finally, we ourselves began to recognize the fears and the entrenchments we were working with, so we understood the reaction. So, unlike what the press had hoped that we would change the symbol or run away from it. We became more determined in the symbol and became more arrogant about the symbol, so everywhere, instead of calling the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, they would talk about the Black Panther Party hoping to confuse us, so we'd say, Well, any time they call the Lowndes County Freedom Organization the Black Panther Party, it's be—confusion because they don't call the Democratic Party the White Cock Party, so it's clear here it's for confusion. We're going to be the Black Panther Party because anywhere—a Black Panther Party can always beat up a White Cock Party anywhere.

00:28:41:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Thank you.

00:28:44:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, you got one—

[cut]

[slate]

00:28:48:00

Interviewer:

What was the response of folks in Lowndes County to the party and also to running as officers of the county?

00:28:53:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, it was, of course, overwhelming.

00:28:54:00

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. If you could give me—

00:28:56:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Oh, yes, I can. The response by the—by our community to the Lowndes County Freedom Organization, Black Panther Party, to the participating, working it, and to running and—running offices—running as officials in it was not at all difficult. As everywhere, the people are always ready to struggle for freedom. All they need is a program which shows how their organized force can come to solve the obstacles in their path, and they will immediately go for it, and the Lowndes County Freedom Organization represented that to them, so very—

00:29:31:00

Interviewer:

And why is it important that SNCC organized Tent City?

00:29:36:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Tent City was organized, of course. This was just experience that SNCC had had from years before. I think we had done it as early as, if my memory correctly serves me, and you can check it, I think Forman had done it as early in Nash—in Tennessee—outside of Tennessee with—so we'd already set up tent cities before. Tent City was set up because the sharecroppers who were voting were being expelled from their land, and the hope was, by the

terrorist White landholders, that by expelling them, they would leave the county, be incapable of voting, and would represent an intimidation for the rest of the voters. Well, we recognized this, and they had to stay. We had some people there who were strong in character and strong, were not afraid of injustice or terror, and they allowed the expelled sharecroppers to live on their land, so we set up tent cities, again, for those who were expelled to let it be clear to the terrorists that we had no intention of moving from Lowndes County. The fight was going to be joined here, and we were going to win the battle on the terrain of Lowndes County.

00:30:39:00

Interviewer:

Give a sense of the triumph on primary day. Oops.

00:30:43:00

Camera crew member #2:

Get this, sound level now too.

00:30:45:00

Stokely Carmichael:

OK.

00:30:46:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK, camera—

[cut]

[wild sound]

00:30:47:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Remember, now, the first primary day, we lost—

00:30:49:00

Camera crew member #2:

And sound 114.

00:30:50:00

Interviewer:

What I mean is—

00:30:50:00

Stokely Carmichael:

I wasn't there.

00:30:52:00

Camera crew member #2:

Copy?

[camera roll #1035]

[slate]

00:30:56:00
Camera crew member #1:

Ready.

00:30:57:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

00:30:58:00

Interviewer:

When you're elected chairman, what did, what are the folks in SNCC saying by rejecting John and electing you?

00:31:03:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, I think that the struggle in SNCC had been brewing. We have discussed the struggle of Atlantic City Convention and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and here we were already see the pro—, what do you call it when they begin to—polarization that was occurring inside of SNCC. John's policy was one which was good for SNCC in the early days, but ***if you took a clear look at John Lewis, he looked more like a young Martin Luther King, Jr., than anything else,*** a role which he himself was quite happy and pleased with. John was quite honored, and perhaps the biggest compliment he could be paid was after a meeting where he presented SNCC's program, somebody'd come and tell him, Why, you sound just like Martin Luther King, Jr. Why, this was the highest compliment you could pay him, but he was out of touch with SNCC staff. He had not done organizing with SNCC staff. He had brought, come into SNCC as a chairman of SNCC and served always as chairman, and in that role, most of his job was to put— present SNCC's program publicly across. I do not mean to imply here that he did not take part in campaigns in the South or take part in going to jail. No, he took part in it, but again, these were not on long-going programs, and he didn't do long-time organizing. He came from the tradition of mobilization—organization against segregated facilities, not that of organizing in SNCC, so he had lost contact with the SNCC staff, which had gone harder into organizing, and as a result took on more revolutionary policies than did those who were just dealing with short-term goals of desegregating public facilities. Thus, the spread had already developed. The concept of nonviolence had already been passed—surpassed him. The concept of integration and non-nationalism had also surpassed him. So, because of his policies and his space between the SNCC's field workers himself, ***it was clear that he had been alienated from the SNCC staff, so the vote against him represented that, but more importantly, it represented the clear insight of the SNCC organizers that understood that the question of morality upon which King's organization depended to bring about changes in the community were not possible. The SNCC people had seen raw terror and they understood properly this raw terror had nothing to do with morality but had to do clearly with power,*** a question of economic power of the exploitation of our people, and they clearly saw that the route to this liberation came first through political organization of the masses of the people. Thus, because of these clear insights, John's policies were not capable of holding up with the direction SNCC had to go into.

00:33:43:00

Interviewer:

What did you see your, your direction being when you took over? How did you want the organization to move?

00:33:48:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Our direction was clear: a heavy emphasis on nationalism; strong, as strong as Malcolm had it, as strong as we could get it, clear, a strong policy on organizing the mass of the

people, putting first before us the political organization of the masses as the only route to clearly solving our problem; a strong emphasis on the point of the fact that nonviolence, for us, was a tactic and not a philosophy as it was for SCLC. Thus, since it was a tactic, we were at any time, had the right as an organization to choose the appropriate tactics that would lead to the people's liberation. That meant that we were giving ourselves the free choice of taking arms and using violence as a legitimate tactic to arrive at our noble ends: the liberation of our people. So, on these three—just these three beginning clear bases—you can see a clear distinction. It demonstrated itself or manifested itself in clear policies. For example, Lyndon Baines Johnson, who was the president of the country, invited SNCC staff to a White House tea to discuss some something or the other, but John's position was we should go. My position was we didn't talk to this racist pig who was bombing Vietnam, that we had no discussion with him at all, and this was just really the gap, so even John, who before being elected, who before the elections in SNCC had agreed to go to this, when I became chairman of SNCC, I refused absolutely to go, and SNCC sent a very terse message to Johnson, which he will not forget because, by a, by a coincidence, the very same date that he picked for the White House tea with us was the same date that a bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, while the Vietnam War was occurring, so we told him that until he stops dropping bombs, we're not even talking to him.

00:35:35:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[cut]

[slate]

00:35:38:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

00:35:41:00

Interviewer:

OK, talk about the meeting at the Lorraine Motel and the sense of weakness that King is coming in on you, say.

00:35:47:00

Stokely Carmichael:

OK, we're talking about the meeting in the Hotel L—

00:35:52:00

Interviewer:

Just say the meeting at the Lorraine Motel.

00:35:54:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The meeting in the Lorraine Motel immediately after the shooting of Meredith, we have to look at the scenery in the first place. I had just been elected chairman of SNCC. In Mississippi, the route of the march was a route in the 2nd Congressional District. I was chairman of the 2nd Congressional District before going to Lowndes County. Every project in that area I had opened myself. I had spent time in jail in probably every area in there. I knew all the strong people on a personal basis. I had slept in their houses when they were shot into by terrorist groups in the South. All of that area was SNCC area, so we knew this area properly, and we knew this area was ready for Black power among the mass of the people, so here we were clear. The shift also of King from Selma, Alabama, to Meredith March was clearly different. At Selma, Alabama, SCLC walked through as they wanted—did what they wanted exactly as they wanted. SNCC had little chance even though, as I said, SNCC factions were fighting against SCLC, but in the Meredith March, SNCC was in a stronger position. Politically, it had more respect as an organization. It had the militant segment of the—of our community 100 percent behind it, so consequently here, you could see that there was really, really, really—SNCC had a different position, and SNCC recognized it. When we came to the meeting at the motel—Lorraine Motel, after spending time with Meredith, there was Mr. Wilkins of the NAACP, Mr. Young of the National Urban League, Mr. McKissick of the Congress of Racial Equality; there was Dr. King representing SCLC; there was, if my memory serves me correctly, Miss Annie Devine of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Along with Mr. McKissick there were local organizers in CORE—if my memory serves me correctly, I think Dave Dennis, and then there was SNCC staff. We had recognized, the SNCC staff, early in the meeting that any time SNCC, CORE, SCLC, Urban League, and NAACP do a joint project, that King always walks down the middle because SNCC and CORE goes to the left, NAACP and Urban League goes to the right, and then King is allowed to walk down the middle, so we recognized from the beginning if we eliminate from this march NAACP and Urban League, and if you have SNCC and CORE and King, if SNCC and CORE is on the left, King cannot stay on the right. He will be forced to move closer to SNCC and CORE, so for SNCC's policy to become stronger, of course, we needed King to come closer to it and the elimination of Wilkins and Young. Of course, to eliminate them from the march would not be difficult. SNCC was really the only one that could say in the state of Mississippi it had statewide projects. The only other organization having workers on a daily basis—serious workers—in the state of Mississippi was the Congress of Racial Equality, but they were down south, in Canton area and just below the area of the march, but they did have workers there, and their workers, next

to SNCC, were the second, but in comparison to SNCC, they were few. The NAACP had no projects, but they had strong individuals who commanded respect, such as Medgar Evers. In the house in Greenwood, Mississippi, where I slept every night, it was the house of Mr. Green. He was the NAACP leader in Greenwood, Mississippi, and many of our SNCC people—so while we had respect, Amzie Moore was an NAACP man, so the NAACP had strong individuals in the state who were respected, but they had no projects, and these individuals themselves, in order even to move themselves, had to depend upon SNCC, such as Amzie Moore came to depend more upon SNCC than he did upon the NAACP. Consequently, we knew politically we had the area. Thus, our first task was to eliminate Wilkins and Young from the meeting, so through some tactics, we eliminated them from the meeting.

00:39:51:00

Interviewer:

And how did you do that?

00:39:53:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, the tactics were tactics—well, you know, we were young, and history was upon us and pressures were upon us, and perhaps when you reflect in hindsight, as they always say, perhaps the tactics were not the most appropriate or the most correct, but at least at that point they were effective.

00:40:12:00

Interviewer:

Tell me about the tactics.

00:40:12:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The tactics used there was to scream at Mr. Wilkins and Mr. Young and to insult them and to make it appear as if they were lackeys of the White power structure and that their only task in the march was to water it down and to put forth the sentiments and the policies of the White establishment in the country. Both Mr. Young and Mr. Wilkins, before they could get a chance to deny it, were booed out by insults and even some curses, so Mr. Wilkins first, packing up his briefcase, informed us that never would he participate in anything with any people like this and especially with me and walked out the door. We were elated, but there was still Mr. Young left, so we turned our, and directed our attentions to him, and he too soon followed. During the entire speech, Dr. Martin Luther King said absolutely nothing

during this intercourse where we were trying to, through our verbal abuse, intimidate them from participating in the, in the march, and it was verbal abuse to the highest order, of the highest order. When they left and they'd finally gone, I quickly turned to Dr. King, who had never seen me in this light but who had known me for years and couldn't understand exactly what was happening, but we also knew that while King would not attack Young and Wilkins, he would also be happy for them to be out the way because if they're out the way, he would in fact have the lam-, limelight over myself and McKissick, so the tactics were good for him even though he would not participate in them or might even condemn them, but once they left, I turned to him and I said, OK, Dr. King, let's—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Stokely Carmichael:

—get on with our march. [laughs]

00:42:05:00

Camera crew member #1:

Rollout on 1035.

Interviewer:

[unintelligible] [laughs]

[cut]

[camera roll #1036]

[sound roll #115]

Camera crew member #1:

Camera roll 1036, 1036 timecode.

00:42:13:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

00:42:21:00

Camera crew member #1:

OK, I got it.

00:42:22:00

Interviewer:

Got it, OK. What was your personal relationship with Dr. King?

00:42:27:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, anyone who doesn't know Dr. Martin Luther King knows that he loves humanity, so having the opportunity and the honor of knowing Dr. King could only fire more my enthusiasm for him, for the love of the people he had because unlike others who don't know him, but know he loves the people, I had a chance to work with him and actually see this love manifest itself, so I've always had the greatest love and respect for King, if for no other reason, because he loved our people, and because he loved our people, he would not compromise or he would never way become corrupted. This I knew, and for this reason, I appreciate him more than—I always appreciate people simply because they are honest in relationship to people's policy.

00:43:16:00

Interviewer:

Can you talk about going into church and eating dinner at his house?

00:43:19:00

Stokely Carmichael:

So, as a, as a young man in SNCC, even before becoming a—taking a position of leadership in SNCC, Dr. King and I grew on many terms. I received him many places, and SNCC had made me in charge of receptions for him in many, many places. In Washington, DC, while a student then, he came to give a talk at a nonviolent seminar where I represented SNCC. I was also given the task by SNCC to represent SNCC in meetings with him and to be of assistance to him there in Washington, DC, and this would be about '62 or '63. Of course, later on in our works, we bumped shoulders. When I went into Atlanta, I would go and eat at his house. Our relationships were very strong even where we had political disagreements. I'm reminded of the war in Vietnam. You know, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee was the first one to take a position against the war and not only against the war but for the destruction of the draft. Of course, SCLC did not take this position, and at that time I was serving as chairperson of SNCC, and recognizing that we were being isolated politically, I instinctively

understood that once King takes a position against the war in Vietnam, we will no longer be isolated. Thus, my task inside of SNCC politically was to put pressure on King to make him take a stand on the war in Vietnam. We understood from the people that I selected to help in this process that here we were going to use nothing but nonviolence love with him. You know, our statement was We're going to beat them with nonviolence and love. It was clear that his philosophy made it impossible for him not to take a stand against the war in Vietnam. I remember one time, just joking with him, I said, You remember—I forgot the name of the brother, but there was a brother whom he remembered, and the brother was in Vietnam and got shot. I said, You remember so-and-so? He said, Yeah. He said, Where is he? I said, He got shot. He said, What? Where? I said, In Vietnam. I said, Yeah, you didn't tell him not to go in Vietnam, be nonviolent there. You told him to be nonviolent in Mississippi. He didn't get shot there, but he got shot in Vietnam. You should have told him to be nonviolent in Vietnam. That's what your problem—you didn't carry your stuff like you say you're supposed to carry it. These are just examples of the way that I would—but it got to such a point that I remember I was in Atlanta on the night he was going to make his statement, that Sunday he was going to make his statement against the war in Vietnam. ***He called me in Atlanta. He said, whatchoo doing? He said, tomorrow's Sunday. He said, you gonna be a good Christian and go to church? I said, well like a good heathen I'm going to work for the people. I got office paperwork. I'll be working since six o'clock in the morning. He said, Well, I want you to come to church. I said, Come to church where? He said, the Ebenezer. I said, what's happening there? He said, I'm preaching. I said, well, you know, OK, I can always come hear you preach, you know, because even though I don't believe in your stuff, you make me tap my feet, you know. We joked, and he said, well, I really want you to come tomorrow. I said, OK, I'll come. He said, 'cause tomorrow I'm going to make my statement against the war in Vietnam, and I think between us there must have been 35 seconds of silence, and then I said to him, I'm going to be on the front seat of your church,*** and the next morning I got Cleve Sellers. I said, I got good news for you, and we went and we sat on the front row of the church, and he gave one, I consider it to be one of his most profound speeches. You know, unfortunately, King is just becoming commercial, and most people don't know him. They think, for example that his *I Have a Dream* speech is one of his best speeches, but if you know King, *I Have a Dream* is one of his most vulgar speeches. I mean just—

00:46:37:00

Interviewer:

What about the speech, the Vietnam speech?

00:46:39:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The Vietnam speech was a powerful speech. King's *I Have a Dream* speech—

00:46:44:00

Interviewer:
No, just about the speech at Ebenezer—

00:46:47:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The speech against the war in Vietnam is a very beautiful speech. I say one of the reasons why I have a great deal of love and respect for King was his love for the people and consequently his honesty. And King was so honest that he could criticize himself publicly, and sometimes, if one would listen to him, the words he used were very sharp. In the speech on Vietnam, he has a quote. If I remember correctly, it says, "There is a point where caution can become cowardice," and here he was speaking about himself because when asked to make a statement on the war in Vietnam, he kept using caution as excuse, and after a while, he began himself, because i, in our, in our propaganda against him, certainly, we never used it, and it had never even dawned on me, but he himself said it: that there comes a point where caution can border on cowardice.

00:47:33:00

Interviewer:

Can you talk about that speech and how you felt and how the crowd responded?

00:47:36:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The speech, as I said, was probably one of his best speeches. He used words in that speech that I could never use. I mean, if I were to use those words, I would be dismissed as irresponsible, but he said, The United States government is one of the greatest purveyors of violence in the world today. He clearly showed now the necessity of non—, of nonviolent principles hooking up, but more importantly, he showed that the struggle of the Af—, of the community, of the—

00:48:04:00

Interviewer:

Cut. [Laughter]

00:48:05:00

Camera crew member #1:

OK, Ten, four, three time boom.

00:48:08:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it. Go on.

00:48:15:00

Interviewer:

OK. Talk about the King speech, speech on Vietnam.

00:48:21:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The King speech on Vietnam—of course, you must understand the setting. It's made in his church, so, I mean, it's his turf. I mean, anything he says here, these people will accept, not for any other reason except for the love they know that he has for them, which he himself has demonstrated over years. They know this from the fact that as a man he could get riches doing many other things—speaking in other bigger churches even—but he totally refused, so when I say that he's in his turf and they will follow him, I don't want to appear that they will just follow him blindly. No, this blind following, which he receives from his congregation, he merits from his service and his love of his congregation. So, you can understand the setting. He can say everything he said. He wants to, number one, first show that nonviolence has to applied everywhere. It cannot be just segregated to the struggle of our people inside the United States. He wants to also show that it must be a vital force in the world politics and in world struggle. He comes to break down the isolation of our struggle in the states and to show that the struggle of discrimination is the same as the struggle of a peasant in a rice paddy, so what he comes to do is to link together the struggle of the Vietnamese and our struggle in a clear sense. He comes to show the necessity to stand up against your own government, to take a proper stand against your government if the government is correct, so he comes now again to show his law—which he's always said that there are two laws, man-made laws and God's law, but this is a higher step because his breaking of man-made laws were breaking of Southern laws, laws in the South, by South state, which everybody had to condemn, but going against your United States government is another issue. As a matter of fact, he depended upon the United States government in its contradiction with the South in his struggle against breaking the laws in the South, but when you go against the United States government, there's nobody upon whom he can call, except God, to help them seriously in his struggle. So, here whether he knew it or not, he was taking the conscience of his people, not just against the Southern sheriff, not just against Bull Connor, but now against the entire policy of the United States government in its foreign relationship to Vietnam. And obviously, Vietnam only represented the top, the entire foreign relationship was the same.

00:50:46:00

Interviewer:

And what was the, the response of the congregation?

00:50:47:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Oh, the response was just like a shepherd leading his flock, you know, going to give them water on green pastures. They responded. You know, I'm often amazed—people say, you know, Oh, Dr. King, he speaks with such big words that poor people can't understand. No, King was a true teacher. I mean, he would teach; he would speak; use all those broad concepts, but they would understand exactly what he was saying, so his church understood precis—precisely the struggle in Vietnam, the necessity of nonviolence to be applied here, the necessity of them to heighten their consciousness against the war in Vietnam, using their experiences from own struggle against racism, and they came to understand properly that this position would put him on a most unpopular position and would lead him into complete confrontation with the forces. They understood completely.

00:51:38:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[cut]

00:51:40:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

00:51:43:00

Interviewer:

OK. There was a disagreement about having Whites on the march. Why did you not want Whites on the march in Meredith?

00:51:50:00

Stokely Carmichael:

On the Meredith March? No, the disagreement was not on having Whites. The disagreement was on having White leadership on the march, and this goes back to a long fight that SNCC had. Matter of fact, John Lewis represented it best at the March on Washington. The March on Washington—if you remember correctly, John Lewis had a line in his speech which a Jewish rabbi who was giving the—also on the platform on the March on Washington—did not agree with, and because he did not agree with this line of the speech, John Lewis had to change the line. Of course, needless to say, when John Lewis came back to SNCC and told SNCC what happened, SNCC lambasted him and Courtland Cox. I remember Courtland Cox was dodging as best as he could and said, Well, we got what we wanted because while the line didn't get in the speech, it got in the newspapers all over the world, and people knew exactly what the line is, so we thought we won, but while we appreciated that, we did not appreciate the fact that anybody could dictate to SNCC what they could say to their people on a march that they themselves had organized. So, the question of White leadership in SNCC was one which had already raised conflict since 1963 on the March in Washington, and SNCC was very clear here because as White liberals can work with SNCC, but they cannot tell SNCC what to do nor what to say. So, to ensure this in a march on Washington, we wanted to make sure that—so White labor unions were excluded.

00:53:13:00

Interviewer:

I'm sorry, if you could go back to ensure this on the Mer—, Meredith March—

00:53:17:00

Stokely Carmichael:

To ensure the Meredith March. There will be no—

[rollout on camera roll]

[wild sound]

00:53:19:00

Stokely Carmichael:

—even conflicts with even White liberals on the direction of the march.

00:53:23:00

Interviewer:

OK.

[cut]

[camera roll #1037]

00:53:24:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK. Oops, I wasn't—

00:53:27:00

Camera crew member #1:

Second six.

[slate]

00:53:30:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

00:53:31:00

Interviewer:

OK. What was the position that you had on Whites being on the Meredith March?

00:53:35:00

Stokely Carmichael:

All right, our position was clear. We had no opposition to them, but certainly—

00:53:38:00

Interviewer:

If you could say no opposition—

00:53:39:00

Stokely Carmichael:

We had no opposition to Whites participating in the Meredith March. It was the level of participation which we were concerned with and that we were concerned that there was to be no White leadership in the march. Of course, here we were clear. The work in Mississippi had been done only by groups, by SNCC and CORE, actually, who were in the forefront, and we knew properly the territory. The White workers which SNCC brought in in the summer project of 1964, before the march, were used and were placed properly in positions which would in no way infect, and we were very strong about this fact because of the inferiority imposed upon our people through exploitation that makes it appear as if we are not capable of leading ourselves. And this is one thing which we wanted to stop, and secondly, we didn't particularly like, not only in the United States, but all over the world, where White liberals without basis have a right to leadership in our positions. For example, you can look sometimes outside of America, and you'll find White people in leadership positions where there's no White base in the organization, so we were wor—, this is a political question. Where are their base? What gives them the right to leadership position? So, we wanted to work all of these out on the Meredith March, and they were worked out properly. There was no White participation until we got into Jackson, Mississippi, whereby at that time, for us the march had been finished; our political work had been done; we released our struggle against them; and we allowed the NAACP to come back. The—Whitney Young was allowed to come back and speak, and I think even Walter Reuther—yes, Walter Reuther also was allowed to come and speak. Of course, to be quite honest about it, the reason that SNCC did make its position that they could come back now was, number one, for us the march had been finished; we had done our work through the route. And, number two, they promised to pay for the bills on the march.

00:55:27:00

Interviewer:

OK. Talk—cut please.

00:55:30:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK, let's cut.

[cut]

00:55:31:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it. Thank you.

[slate]

00:55:33:00

Interviewer:

Talk about the Black Power speech.

00:55:36:00

Stokely Carmichael:

All right. To use the term Black Power, SNCC had already decided this before the march. That must be properly understood. We decided to use the march for an education purpose. Number one, we wanted to put strongly our struggle against the war in Vietnam, so if people will look clearly at the Meredith March, you will see anti-Vietnam popping up here. King wasn't using it then, but you will see it's one of the areas where we started to hit them with it seriously. Our march was to put strong nationalism in, to have direct leadership from us, and, of course, to throw our Black Power for the mass of the people. We prepared the terrain. Every night before we went out, the advanced scout—those who went out a day before—before the town we would be in marching—would go out and prepare things. Willie Ricks was then asked and sent out on the assignment to head up the advance party, and we told him All right, when you go with your advance party—

00:56:26:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

00:56:28:00

Camera crew member #2:

Don't cut—

00:56:29:00

Interviewer:

OK. I'm sorry.

00:56:30:00

Camera crew member #2:

Start again.

00:56:30:00

Interviewer:

Please start again with Ricks.

00:56:31:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Brother Willie Ricks was sent out as head—as the advance scout, and sometimes he could have as many as 20 to 40— as we grew bigger, even 20 or 40 people under his direction to spread out, and his task was to take them, spread them out to plantations, speak to the sharecroppers, tell them the march was coming through, but to throw out Black Power and to give little Black Power speeches to get the reaction. I think about three nights before Greenwood—'cause SNCC was deciding Where's the best place for us to launch it? About three nights before Greenwood, I remember about two o'clock in the morning, Ricks came back, and he was giving a report and Cleve Sellers was sitting next to me, I remember, and Ricks was saying, We ought to drop it now. The people are ready for it. I said it the other day, and they dropped their hoes, you know, and I said to Cleve, I said, You know, you sent the wrong man out because we need a clear analysis here and this man is given to exaggerations and talking all sorts of nonsense in hyperbolic terms, and we need a clear analysis. Ricks said, I'm telling you the truth, you know, so I said, I've heard your truth before. You know, we need somebody who can really do this. Well, unfortunately we had no one else who we could send out because the next night, if I remember correctly, I think it was just before Greenwood. Was it Canton? Where we got beaten so badly and—

00:57:44:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

00:57:45:00

Camera crew member #2:

We can cut.

00:57:46:00

Interviewer:

That's right because—

[cut]

[slate]

00:57:47:00

Camera crew member #2:

OK.

00:57:49:00

Interviewer:

OK. Talk about the Black Power speech in Greenwood.

00:57:51:00

Stokely Carmichael:

We knew, as I said, we'd planned to use the march as a political platform, and we understood this political platform would put us in contradiction to King, but we didn't want any hostility with King, and throughout the march, SNCC can clearly show that, at least in my relationship with King, it wasn't the slightest hostility. We had different positions. They were clearly understood and laid out. So, as Ricks were telling us about how great the people were, we were moving into Greenwood. Now, I myself had been in Greenwood, Mississippi, since early '60. I had worked in the project there, and when the head of the 2nd, 2nd Congressional District, this was our base, so, I had spent time in the jail in Greenwood so many times the police knew me. The police chief knew me. Everyone in the town knew me, so we decided Greenwood. It was SNCC's strongest base in the Delta. We couldn't go wrong. Unfortunately for the police, we went to set up some tents there, and the police had decided to arrest me. OK, so, before I was arrested, we were discussing Greenwood. This is where we will launch Black Power. So, when I got arrested Ricks was on the side there when the police—said, Let them arrest you. We'll get you out of jail, and you'll come out and make the speech tonight, and he disappeared. Well, you know how Ricks speaks, so—anyway, I went to jail, but I was bought out, and when I was released it was at night, the speech was going on, and when I came to the speech, I was in line. Ricks came back. He said, We have everything prepared. We are ready for Black Power. We've spoke about it all day. We've primed up the people, and luckily for us, our biggest problem was Martin Luther King because I knew that once Black Power was said, Martin Luther King would have to come—not fight against it but with his best try to give reasonings to water it down, but luckily for us, the night in Greenwood, King had to go to do a taped television thing, I think for Meet the Press, so he had to go to Memphis, so he was not there the night in Greenwood. He had other people there, but they were not a threat to us. King was the real threat to us, and so King was not there. It meant the whole night belonged to us, and we were in Greenwood, in SNCC

territory. As a matter of fact the last time King came to Greenwood, Mississippi, in 1964, as head of the project for SNCC, I was the one who take care of him, met him at the airport, took care of his housing, took care of his feeding, arranged all of his meetings—everything—and provided his bodyguard for him. So, Greenwood, King knew, was SNCC territory if he didn't know anything else, so maybe for that reason, he said, well, he would miss Greenwood, but that was the night. ***Ricks had everybody primed. He said, Just get to your speech.*** We're going against Freedom Now. ***We're going for Black Power. Don't hit too much on Freedom Now, but hit the need for power, so we built up on the need for power, and just when I got there, before I got it, Ricks was there saying, Hit them now. Hit them now. I kept saying, Give me time. Give me time. When we finally got in and we dropped it, Black Power, of course, they had been primed, and they responded immediately, but I myself, to be honest, I didn't expect that enthusiastic response,*** you know, and the enthusiastic response, obviously, not only shocked me but gave me more energy to carry it on further. By the time we got done that night, SCLC was running around everywhere. We knew it was finished. We had made our victory. They could not bring it back. It was over. From now on, it was Black Power. We continued with the slogan. King was immediately rushed back. It was too late. We had a meeting the following morning where King tried his best to ask me not to use the term Black Power, but I told him that really I could not do that, that this was an organizational decision, not mine, and like him, I represent an organization, and I must represent that organization or I resign from the position which I hold, and I was not prepared to do that, so we would have to use the term.

01:01:38:00

Interviewer:

Did you expect the reaction of the press after that?

01:01:40:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Oh, yes, of course, we already expected it.

01:01:44:00

Interviewer:

Sorry, what did you expect?

01:01:45:00

Stokely Carmichael:

We expected the press to be completely against us—to use all sorts of terms—but that was not our problem. King was on the march, and since King was on the march, they could not

attack the march without attacking King, and King could not leave the march, so their hands would be tied only to attack us, leave the march in place, and leave King out there to see how he would relate to it. King obviously could not attack us, and if you will look everywhere, King has never attacked Black Power. He said, I wouldn't use the term. The connotation conjures—

[rollout on sound roll]

[cut]

[sound roll #116]

01:02:24:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

01:02:26:00

Interviewer:

Why did you decide to participate in order to pitch the tents on—in Canton?

01:02:31:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, there were a number of reasons—

01:02:35:00

Camera crew member #2:

Excuse me, excuse me.

01:02:42:00

Camera crew member #2:

Keep rolling.

01:02:43:00

Interviewer:

OK, pitch the tents in Canton—

01:02:44:00

Stokely Carmichael:

There were a number of reasons led to the decision for us to pinch—pitch the tent in Canton. If my memory—if my memory serves me correctly, I think it was on school grounds. Anything—one thing I'm sure of, it was off church grounds, and while the church—

01:03:00:00

Interviewer:

Sorry. If you could cut a second—

01:03:03:00

Camera crew member #2:

Cut.

[cut]

01:03:04:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

01:03:06:00

Interviewer:

Why did you pitch a tent in Canton on a—in one of our school grounds?

01:03:09:00

Stokely Carmichael:

I think the decision to continue to pitch the tent on school grounds were made in line, number one, with the area that we kept feeling that as a people, we really have to have more control over our destiny, and while throughout the struggle in the South, we had those preachers who understood the truth of life. They opened their church doors to the struggle, and you have in your record how many of our churches were bombed and burnt as a result of this, but mainly in the churches, so we wanted to spread out of the churches. We wanted to—other aspects of our life, our schools, etcetera, etcetera. Canton, Mississippi, of course, was worked by the Congress of Racial Equality, and it was a terrorist county. I mean the—the history of terror in that county against CORE workers will make anyone incensed with injustice, so the CORE people had stepped up their people, and they had made this decision. McKissick, who was head of CORE, could not back down. We of SNCC wanted the decision, and the real weight was King, but King recognized, number one, that we did need to push in areas outside of this, and King, of course, was never afraid of confrontation. People get confused. Because he was nonviolent, they try to make him look like a lamb who took anything, but King was never afraid of confrontation. He would confront the enemy any time using nonviolence as a weapon, so the question of confrontation was no question, and King himself—

[roll-out on camera roll]

[wild sound]

Stokely Carmichael:

—felt that, yes, we must move outside of just our churches to get broader support for our struggle.

01:04:35:00

Interviewer:

Cut, OK.

[cut]

[camera roll #1038]

01:04:36:00

Camera crew member #1:

Camera roll 1038; sound 116 continues. This is Team C.

01:04:40:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

01:04:43:00

Interviewer:

How did SNCC help form the Black Panther Party?

01:04:47:00

Stokely Carmichael:

As a matter of fact, SNCC formed it. The—

01:04:49:00

Interviewer:

Right—

01:04:50:00

Stokely Carmichael:

SNCC formed, SNCC was the organization that created the Black Panther Party. We have already spoken of its work in Lowndes County.

01:04:57:00

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. You moved on, I need you to start again.

01:05:00:00

Stokely Carmichael:

You want—just from new scratch—I was trying to save you tape like you've been saying. SNCC, in fact, created the Black Panther Party and it was created in Lowndes County by SNCC staff there. We said it was created; we have said it earlier, in other places, that it was created as a result of the refusal or the unacceptability of the so-called compromise presented by the Democratic Party to the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in Atlantic City.

01:05:29:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

01:05:29:00

Camera crew member #2:

Cut.

[cut]

01:05:31:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

01:05:34:00

Interviewer:

How did SNCC start the Black Panther Party?

01:05:37:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The Black Panther Party was created by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Lowndes County, Alabama. Here they came to organize an independent political party against the Democratic Party, which needed a symbol. The symbol chosen was a black panther. Throughout the year, work was done around this organization in order to make it a legitimate political party. It could only become a legitimate political party after receiving a certain percentage of votes. This was—

01:06:02:00

Interviewer:

Cut, please.

[cut]

[slate]

01:06:07:00

Interviewer:

How did the organization in Lowndes County help form the Black Panther Party?

01:06:12:00

Stokely Carmichael:

After having, in Lowndes County, after having formed the Lowndes County Freedom Organization with the black panther as its symbol, leading towards the formation of a party—you cannot become a party until after election, where a certain percentage of the electoral votes are counted. The terrorist groups—Ku Klux Klan, etcetera—in order to ensure that the Lowndes County Freedom Organization will not become the Black Panther Party, made it clear that they intended to create violence around election time. They began to give examples of this violence. Those of us working with SNCC, recognizing that we had a responsibility here, recognizing that our forces were not strong enough militarily to meet those of the terrorist groups, because even in Alabama, in Klan territory, they will not just depend upon Lowndes County, they will call in the whole Klan from the state of Alabama, so we will need protection here. We decided, through our contacts, to go throughout the large ghettos; New York, Chicago, Boston, California, etcetera, and to—we had contact with a lot of young brothers and sisters who were involved in military action—some have even served in the army—and to collect those who were serious, who would come down to help form a force, ready to meet fire with fire: military force against the Klan. So, these groups came from New York, from Chicago, from California, from Washington, DC, etcetera, etcetera, and when they came, as SNCC people, we had put them in certain areas. They came with guns. They brought heavy guns, much materials, and we also let it be known to the terrorist groups that we were bringing people with guns, and we were gonna meet fire with fire. So, it became clear as we mounted—the police would see new people coming in, and they would see certain areas being stacked up, so it became clear, the Justice Department itself informed them that young thugs—they called them—were coming into Lowndes County. So, many of these young brothers and sisters who came and had to spend at least two weeks in the county, and we didn't want 'em just carrying around guns but integrated in political work, even though their major work was our protection and firearms, integrating the political work. They became contaminated with the idea of the Black Panther Party. What really confused them was the average age, I'm sure, of someone in the Black Panther Party in Lowndes County would have to be about 54 or 55, and, of course, you had people up into their late 70s and 80s, but all the people in Lowndes County were armed, and on the day of election they brought their guns. You know, the law said you have to leave your guns X-number of feet away from the polling place, so all of them—old women brought their guns, and this really shocked these young brothers and sisters who were in Chicago and New York and thought, to see these old people carrying guns. So, the idea of the Black Panther Party actually spreading outside of SNCC was as a result of these young brothers coming. The one who came from

California to take it back was a brother by the name of Mark Comfort. He was the one who took the idea originally back to California, and it was from him that other groups sprang up, and finally, later on, Huey Newton and Bobby Seales [sic] and them came on the scene.

01:09:23:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Great. OK.

[cut]

[slate]

01:09:25:00

Camera crew member #2:

Can you mark it, please? Thanks.

01:09:28:00

Interviewer:

OK, give me a sense, a real descriptive sense, of the Free Huey rally in ’68 and what your expectations are of the alliances between SNCC and the Panther Party then.

01:09:38:00

Stokely Carmichael:

All right. I must remind you that for the SNCC and the Panther alliance, I played a very minimum role in the structural deals. You know, my only position of leadership in SNCC was as its chairperson for one year. I have never run for any position before nor after. I never served on its central committee. I was just a simple field organizer. And after resigning from chair—

01:10:00:00

Interviewer:

Cut, please. This is all wonderful history.—

[cut]

[wild sound]

Interviewer:

—I can't use any of this. So tell me, tell me what you think you're going to say about this event.

01:10:07:00

Camera crew member #2:

Did you cut this here?

01:10:08:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, no—

[cut]

01:10:10:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

01:10:11:00

Interviewer:

What was it like, from your point of view, at the Free Huey Rally in Oakland in '68.

01:10:16:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Oh, the Free Huey rally represents a lot of things for me in the struggle. You know Malcolm X, of course, was lumpen proletariat and came from a criminal life and transformed himself to be a sterling revolutionary, where he, in fact, gave his life for his people's struggle. We should not assume that all people in lumpen proletariat who talk about struggle are Malcolm X. And this error some people make in talking about the Black Panther Party and, in particular, people like Bobby Seales [sic] or Eldridge Cleaver. My excitement at the Free Huey Rally came from the potential that could exist from a merger between the lumpen

proletariat and the intelligentsia—the revolutionary intelligentsia— about people in America, which SNCC represented.

01:11:05:00

Interviewer:

Cut just a second.

[cut]

01:11:08:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it here.

[slate]

01:11:10:00

Interviewer:

OK: Free Huey Rally, Oakland, 1968.

01:11:13:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Oh, I recall always the Free Huey Rally were a lot of enthusiasm. It represented a watershed in our struggle. Here, under the Black Panther Party in California, were young brothers and sisters of our community who make up the lumpen proletariat, that element that uses their protest in activity that brings them into direct conflict with the police force, bordering sometimes on criminal activity, where they began to flock into the Panthers. At the same time the SNCC, who represented the revolutionary intelligentsia—that is to say, those people who have knowledge and were trained and used this knowledge for the people—were able to come together. This bringing together them would produce, for me, Malcolm X and all of them, so it meant you'd have an organization of Malcolm X everywhere, so I looked forward with great enthusiasm. I recognized, however, that the alliance could not work, simply because my own position in SNCC at that time was clear. I, sooner or later, would have to leave that organization within a very short period, one way or the other. At the same time, secondly, the struggle between the Panther leadership at that time—specifically Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale—and the leadership of SNCC—specifically, Jim Forman—were both jockeying for positions of domination. Brother Jamil Al-Amin, then known as Rap Brown, who was Chairman of SNCC, was under great strains and great limitations of movement by the police force.

01:12:46:00

Interviewer:

Cut, please. [coughs]

[cut]

01:12:49:00

Camera crew member #2:

And slate. Mark it.

[slate]

01:12:50:00

Interviewer:

OK. Tell me about the event, the rally.

01:12:55:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The Free Huey Rally in February of 1968 represents, of course, a watershed in the struggle. It helps bring the struggle out of the South, putting it clearly outside of the confines of the South, the North, geographically speaking, here, the West, but politically speaking, the out-of-the-South North, and here you were able to see a combination of youthful brothers and sisters, who would for other reasons be involved maybe in gangs, coming here to put their energies towards political work for the liberation of their people. At the same time, you had experienced strugglers, those in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, who had been seasoned strugglers, and those who, unlike the majority of the members of the Black Panther Party, had acquired great intellectual skills and, unlike many of their counterparts, used these skills for the benefit of the people. So, you had at the Free Huey Rally a blending of, if you will, just in street vernacular, school brothers and brothers on the block, school sisters and sisters on the block, coming together to try and put their organizations in a coalition for higher struggle against the enemy.

01:14:13:00

Interviewer:

And what was that rally like? Describe it for me; the sense of it.

01:14:17:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The sense of the rally could be only described as electrifying, and, of course, if anyone has been around any of these rallies, they will know what that means. I mean, the place was packed, and the people were enthusiastic and are ready to follow the program outlined that would lead to liberation and ready to lead to it, of course. Like all mass meetings in that period of struggle, it had, unfortunately, a sort of feeling as if liberation was instant, as if it will come instantly, rather than preparing people for protracted struggle. Outside of this shortcoming, it was an electrifying event where a mass of the people came. It had a broad—a broad spectrum of people. Ron Dellums, at that time, was present at, on the platform, just to give you an idea of it, so it had a broad spectrum of the entire community supporting the struggle to free Brother Huey Newton.

01:15:13:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[cut]

01:15:16:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

01:15:17:00

Interviewer:

Talk about speaking in Maywood with Fred, Fred Hampton.

01:15:21:00

Stokely Carmichael:

When acting as honorary Prime Minister for the Panther Party, I was asked to—and so my task to help create chapters throughout the country, and in Chicago, there was a SNCC person by the name of Bob Brown, who contacted me to let me know that there was some activity around there and they could start a Panther Party, and they wanted to have some

event there, a speech to begin to kick it off. So, I received an invitation from a na—, a man called Fred Hampton, who at that time was a chairperson of the youth chapter of the NAACP in Maywood. For us, it doesn't make a difference who invites us, and, of course, we're very happy when it's the NAACP because it means closer relationship, so we went to spend some time in Chicago precisely around the Maywood event. Fred Hampton, when I met, was young, full of enthusiasm, bright and really full of struggle, full of enthusiasm for the struggle of our people. Bob Brown discussed it, and some people discussed him joining the Panthers, but personally, and up until now politically, I have always had a hesitation from going and what you would consider ripping people off from one organization and pulling them in your organization. I know that there are enough of our people unorganized, not in any organizations. It's not necessary to us to go to one organization and steal. Better we go from the unorganized mass and pull somebody, so I had some hesitations, but when I arrived and saw Hampton and his enthusiasm, and he himself said that he would like to join the Panther Party. Well, OK, he seems ready for it. Go ahead. So, I think in two weeks, [doorbell rings] he joined the Panther Party, resigned—

[laughter]

[cut]

[camera roll #1039]

01:17:08:00

Camera crew member #1:

Ten-thirty-nine.

01:17:09:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

01:17:13:00

Interviewer:

OK, your Maywood speech, Fred Hampton, the NAACP youth chapter—

01:17:16:00

Stokely Carmichael:

As we said, in our task, there as honorary Prime Minister to create chapters for the Panther Party. We were invited in Chicago by the youth chapter of the, head of the youth chapter of the NAACP, a brother by the name of Fred Hampton. We went to do the event and spend some time around Maywood. Mr. Hampton, brother had given some indication that he might want to join the Panther Party. I had some hesitation as I don't usually like to take people from one organization and put them in another organization. Enough of our people are unorganized. My feeling's always go for the unorganized and pull them into the organization, but he was determined, and I think in some two weeks later, he did join the Black Panther Party. When he joined the Black Panther Party, I was contacted by Bob Brown, who also was working the Black Panther Party but working with our group inside the Black Panther Party, who were working behind the scenes, not getting publicity, and it was [background street sounds] Bob Brown and Hampton, step by step. If my memory serves me correctly, I paid the money for his ticket to California to get orientation there from the Panthers and spoke to both Seales [sic] and Cleaver about him. They didn't know him until he went there, and when he came back to Chicago, through Bob Brown, I was continuing contact with him and working in building up the chapter of the Black Panther Party. I thought that he was a little bit too exuberant and a little bit too excited and enthusiastic without understanding the necessity to build up forces, but he was a dedicated brother. He loved his people, and clearly, he was willing to sacrifice himself.

01:19:00:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Great. OK.

[cut]

01:19:02:00

Camera crew member #1:

Ten-thirty-nine, halfway in. Now this is Team D.

01:19:05:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

01:19:08:00

Interviewer:

You're, you're now a role model in the late '60s as—in some ways, as opposed to Dr. King. What are you saying that he's not that they identify with?

01:19:16:00

Stokely Carmichael:

I'm not sure it is what I'm saying that he is not, in terms of these youth identifying. I think it's more the reaction of the White establishment to King. No one who truly understands the struggle can in any way fault King. King really comes out almost perfect—, perfection. Of course, his political errors are to be understood, but I mean in terms of his commitment, in terms of his total love, in terms of his total dedication to the struggle: one can find no shortcomings here. But unfortunately, the system had learned how to contain nonviolent demonstrations. Having learned how to contain them, it was not necessary for them to respond to them. Thus, King was not failing as much as the White establishment was no longer responding to him, having now thought that they could contain him. Alternative methods were therefore necessary. So, that shift which appeared to be coming from King towards me was not because of me or King, was because nonviolence really was reaching an impassé, an impasse, and since King was so nonviolent as a philosophy—it must be at all times—he could no longer change it. I remember very carefully in Chicago, and if you have the film, it would be powerful if you showed it. After the Chicago rebellions there, he said, and I never—on national TV, If every, and this is his quote, If every negro in America becomes violent, I, Martin Luther King shall remain nonviolent. So, here you could see clearly the shift was not King but that this policy, which had reached an impasse, the alternative policy of by any means necessary was what was attracting the people more than what was being said over King.

01:21:04:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Great.

01:21:05:00

Camera crew member #2:

Cut.

[cut]

[slate]

01:21:08:00

Interviewer:

OK, what do young Blacks identify with at this point?

01:21:11:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, I don't think so much that it was what King was saying. I think, number one, it was the impasse which—

01:21:16:00

Interviewer:

Sorry. If you can, begin to say, young Blacks are identifying something—

01:21:21:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The young forces in the, in our community at that time were, in fact, trying now, as best as they could, to help make their contribution to the struggle. King's philosophy of nonviolence was, in fact, becoming a stumbling block. That is to say, the enemies had learned how to contain nonviolent demonstrations, and their effect was, for all practical purposes, noneffective. Because of King's refusal to use nonviolence as a tactic and because he clung to it as a principle, consequently incapable of changing from it, he found himself as an impassé, at an impasse. The younger forces in our community were looking for means to achieve the objectives, and since nonviolence was no longer effective, they were looking for any means necessary. Thus, those were advocating any means necessary were the ones that they were attracted to.

01:22:15:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Perfect.

[cut]

[slate]

01:22:20:00

Interviewer:

OK, a sense, that you said, that the real funeral was the rebellions and what that drive was like. Could you describe that?

01:22:27:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Well, of course, you know, when King was assassinated in April of 1968, he just followed the whole long line of assassinations within a short period: people like Medgar Evers, people like Martin Luther King, etc., etc., just speaking—

01:22:42:00

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. People like Medgar Evers—

01:22:45:00

Stokely Carmichael:

It's people like Medgar Evers who was, well you have him on the program, I'm sure.

01:22:49:00

Interviewer:

I'm sorry. Cut just a second.

[cut]

[slate]

01:22:54:00

Interviewer:

OK, a sense that the rebellions were really the funeral and going down from DC and seeing the fires—

01:22:59:00

Stokely Carmichael:

When King was assassinated in April of '68, it really followed after a long line of assassinations of people like Medgar Evers, people like Malcolm X, and others like William

Lee—Herbert Lee, etcetera, so those had known about—so, Martin Luther King's assassination really came, since the '60s, at the end of a large number of assassinations, so it represented a culmination, that is to say, and through of all of these assassinations, no one was punished. The culprits were never caught or, when caught, were not punished, etcetera, so the anger of the masses here had to be seriously appreciated. Our people were steaming with anger, and in addition to that, King was just the wrong person to assassinate at that time. I understand that J. Edgar Hoover had a decision to make.

01:23:50:00

Interviewer:

OK, cut, please. I'm not—

[cut]

01:23:52:00

Camera crew member #2:

And slate. Go.

[slate]

01:23:54:00

Stokely Carmichael:

So, with the assassination of King after this long line of assassination by others, the steaming anger of the people was clear, and I think the anger was even more so because anyone could have been killed except King since King was so perfect in his advocation of nonviolence. That is to say, for the people, if they'd killed myself or someone else who was actually advocating self-defense, this could be comprehended, but King himself was preaching total nonviolence and living total nonviolence, so for the people, whether you were violent or nonviolent, if you were opposed to any aspect of the government— that you too were putting yourself in danger. Consequently, the time for a mass urban revolt was sensed, and those of us who recognize it—recognizing myself, personally, that if no reaction came for the death of King, then these racist pigs in the country, will feel that they can kill anybody with impunity, so there must be some actions. Some revenge must be made here at King's funeral to stay their hands against killing those who come to take a leadership position in fighting for the people. I'm not afraid of death, but certainly I wouldn't want my death to go cheaply. I think that the enemy must pay for my death. So, since I was alive after King's death, all energies were directed towards creating, as quickly as possible, as much revenge by the people against King's position. Just in passing, on your Black Panther program: it would be clear to know just about every city in this country had a rebellion except in Oakland, where the Black

Panther Party, under the leadership of Eldridge Cleaver, in conjunction with the police department, quelled the population.

01:25:32:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

01:25:34:00

Stokely Carmichael:

I know you had to cut, but that one was on topic—

[rollout on camera roll]

Interviewer:

OK.

01:25:36:00

Stokely Carmichael:

You see, you think it's just like a script, but sometimes you forget the script.

01:25:40:00

Interviewer:

This is true, but not when you already said it. [laughs]

01:25:43:00

Stokely Carmichael:

Let's make sure we got it.

[cut]

[camera roll #1040]

01:25:45:00

Camera crew member #2:

This is camera roll 1040; sound 116 continues. This is Tim D. Team D.

01:25:49:00

Camera crew member #2:

Mark it.

[slate]

01:25:53:00

Interviewer:

OK. Since rebellions being the real funeral and taking it to the South.

01:25:56:00

Stokely Carmichael:

When Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated in April of ‘68, his assassination came after the long line of assassination of others, such as Medgar Evers, such as Malcolm X, such as Herbert Lee, whom people may or may not have known, but the conscious element in our community certainly were aware of it. Of course, we must add that all of these assassinations went unpunished by the culprits, so—

01:26:23:00

Interviewer:

Now, we have you saying this a number—

01:26:24:00

Camera crew member #2:

Cut.

[cut]

01:26:25:00

Camera crew member #2:

Ready. Mark it.

[slate]

01:26:28:00

Stokely Carmichael:

For us, the—

01:26:30:00

Camera crew member #2:

Oh, sorry about that. I wasn't ready. OK.

01:26:33:00

Stokely Carmichael:

For us, the real funeral for Dr. King would come in a pyre, a funeral pyre: the burning of the fires of the cities. So the teeming anger of the people, I felt at that time, must be directed, clearly, against the hands of racism so that they will know that future people who take this position will not be assassinated without some revenge against the American capitalist system. So, consequently, we directed all our energies towards making sure that the people properly vented their feelings and buried them properly through rebellions, and I remember, while driving from Atlanta— from Washington, DC, to Atlanta, I saw smoke for the entire trip in the car. They were, everywhere, putting Dr. King to rest, giving him his proper burial. When I arrived in Atlanta for the funeral, for all practical purposes, it was anticlimactic. I'd already seen the funeral from Washington to Atlanta.

01:27:31:00

Interviewer:

Cut. Thank you.

[cut]

01:27:33:00

Stokely Carmichael:

I have to make it clear, now, I didn't think it was going to blow up in violence like that—

01:27:36:00

Interviewer:

Oh, no, that's fine.

01:27:37:00

Camera crew member #2:

Rolling and speed. Mark it.

[slate]

01:27:38:00

Interviewer:

Did you think the Poor People's Campaign would successful?

01:27:43:00

Stokely Carmichael:

I was almost certain that the Poor People's Campaign could not achieve its objectives. I was certain that it would be a failure, but I didn't see it in failure the way some people saw it: that everything will explode and there will be violence. No, I had recognized that Dr. Martin Luther King, through his history, was capable of controlling all the violent elements when he was in charge by himself of demonstrations, and certainly SCLC was in total command of the Poor People's Campaign. All other organizations that were working with them were certainly under them in strength, in influence, etcetera, etcetera, so I didn't see it, but certainly I knew there would be a failure. All it meant to me was that Dr. King would have to readjust his policies and strategies and move a little bit more in a radical position, but I was almost certain of a failure.

01:28:27:00

Interviewer:

And can you talk about that meeting with the Black United Front?

01:28:30:00

Stokely Carmichael:

All right. Of course, before the Poor People's Campaign came into Washington, DC, even the press started its stupidity, trying to pose King and some of us in the city in direct opposition to each other. The first Black United Front which was organized in the country,

was organized by SNCC people. I worked on that staff there in Washington, DC, and that United Front was organized just before King came into Washington, DC, for his Poor People's Campaign. I remember his advance scouts were Jesse Jackson and Andrew Young, and that when they came for the meeting, I explained to them that we had a United Front and that it would easy if SCLC, through Dr. King, would just come and present the program, and it would solve all problems. They were both rather sure that Dr. King didn't have to come. Just among ourselves joking, I think it was Jesse who said, You know the Lord isn't coming to y'all. That's what we used to joke—just a joke, and I told him, Well, I'm sure he's gonna come. Well, of course he had to come before the United Front, and in the United Front, we had all segments of organizations from the NAACP—

01:29:37:00

Interviewer:

OK. Cut, please.

[cut]

[slate]

01:29:42:00

Stokely Carmichael:

The Black United Front had all elements inside of it, from the NAACP on the conservative side all the way to forces that were advocating the burning of America. Consequently, it had the entire political spectrum. It was clearly understood that those who did not see that they could participate in the Poor People's Campaign because of its nonviolent philosophy should stay away from it, so the Black United Front gave a clear assuro—, assuro—, assuro—, assurance, a clear assurance, you know, it's my French and English when I'm speaking, a clear assurance to Dr. Martin Luther King that those who did not believe in the campaign's tactic of nonviolence or its philosophy would be nowhere around it. Only those who believed in it would come to support it.

01:29:42:00

Interviewer:

And can you describe, in the conference of that meeting, what happened in that meeting?

01:30:41:00

Stokely Carmichael:

In the meeting before the Black United Front, Dr. King came. He explained and outlined precisely the proposals for the Poor People's Campaign, its objectives, what it hoped to achieve, how he aimed to build it; the entire program. There were some questions from members of the Black United Front to Dr. King. He answered some. I think, if I remember, Jesse and Andy Young also fielded some of the questions; and then, if my memory serves me correctly, because you're talking now about 20 years ago, I think that we did make a resolution in which in this resolution we assured Dr. King that no group which did not accept the philosophy or the tactic of nonviolence around the Poor People's Campaign would in anywhere, any way be associated with it. If they could do things to help in the background which had nothing to do with conflict of their interest here, then they would be happy to support it. Dr. King was extremely happy, quite contented, thought he had achieved a great victory and was prepared to move on with the Poor People's Campaign.

01:31:47:00

Interviewer:

Cut.

[cut]

[end of interview]

01:31:51:00