

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH DONALD S. HARRIS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

SHAUN ILLINGWORTH

and

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and

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Shaun Illingworth: This begins an interview with Donald S. Harris in Osprey, Florida, on February 28, 2013, with Shaun Illingworth ...

Steven Lawson: ... Steven Lawson.

Nancy Hewitt: ... Nancy Hewitt.

SI: Mr. Harris, thank you very much for having us here today and thank you for the refreshments.

Donald Harris: Well, thank you very much for coming and I appreciate it.

SI: To begin, can you tell me where and when you were born?

DH: I was born in New York City in 1940.

SI: What were your parents' names, for the record?

DH: Mary Harris, Mary Taylor Harris, and she was from upstate, in Troy, New York. My father was Nathaniel Otis Harris. He was born in Everett, Massachusetts.

SI: Starting with your father's side of the family, what do you know about his family, where his family came from and how they wound up in Massachusetts?

DH: Actually, there is not much information on my father's side of the family. My grandfather, Jesse H. Harris, was born ... in King and Queen County, Virginia and then moved to Massachusetts and was in Malden and Everett and Cambridge for all of his life. His first wife and his second wife were both from Hartford, Connecticut. The first wife was my grandmother and she had four children, my father being one of them, and died in her early thirties. Jesse then married a second wife, a friend of the first wife's from Hartford, Connecticut, and ... they had nine additional children. ... All of those uncles and aunts stayed and remained, with one exception, in New England, and so, they were all in Maine and Massachusetts. One aunt went to Texas. On my mother's side, again, even though she was born in Troy, my grandfather, that is, her father, was from (Fernandina?) County here in Florida, and he met his wife, Margaret Lee, was from Columbia, South Carolina. [Editor's Note: Mr. Harris may mean that his grandfather came from Nassau County, where the county seat is located in Fernandina Beach.] ... He was a minister, a traveling preacher, who eventually went North, through North Carolina for a while, but ended up in Troy, New York. ... Their children, my mother among them, eventually, most of them came to New York City. One went to Ohio, one went to Michigan. ...

SL: What period was this?

DH: This was in the early 1900s, 1920s, '30s, '40s, in there. ... On my mother's side, they followed the route of the Great Migration from the South up the East Coast to New York, and so forth. [Editor's Note: From the 1910s to the 1970s, over six million African-Americans relocated

from the South to Northeastern, Midwestern and Western cities, a shift now known as the Great Migration.]

SI: How did your parents meet?

DH: I don't know, to tell you the truth. I do know that there are pictures of them--they got married in 1938--but there are pictures of them together as early as 1935 at social events. ... My mother seemed to have been a pretty social kind of woman. There are pictures of her in Maine, in Saratoga, [New York], you know, sort of summer vacation kinds of photographs, and many of them, my father is in. ... How they actually met, I don't know.

NH: Interesting.

SL: They seemed to get married later.

DH: Yes, oh, yes. They both got married very late.

SL: That was the first marriage.

DH: Yes, yes. My mother was born in 1900. My father was born in 1893. So, they were old and I was late. [laughter]

SL: Were you the only child?

DH: Yes.

SI: Starting with your mother, what did your parents do for a living when they first got married in the 1930s?

DH: Yes.

SI: Or earlier, in the 1920s and 1930s?

DH: The only job that I know my mother had was working in the Public Administrator's Office for the City of New York, and she was there for, I guess, when she retired, probably thirty years or so. She was one of the longest-serving employees. You know, they gave her an appropriate sendoff and farewell when she retired. She was there throughout the time that I was growing up. Of course, ... the office is way downtown on, right around the corner from City Hall in New York, at 31 Chambers Street, near City Hall.

SL: What did she do for the Public Administrator's Office?

DH: She was a high-powered administrative assistant. You know, she ran part of the office.

SL: She worked all through the marriage, when you were a child.

DH: Oh, yes, oh, absolutely, yes. ... One of the things I recognized early on, and certainly part of the sacrifice both my father and mother went through to get me into and keep me into Fieldston Ethical Culture School, [a private school in New York City], was how hard they had to work. It was an especially long and difficult commute from Mount Vernon to get all the way down to Lower Manhattan, back and forth, every day, and, at that time, it was a bus, subway, change to another subway, and then, walk-- and, in Mount Vernon, it was walking about nine blocks--you know, winter, summer, all of this kind of stuff, and then, come home. So, she was there. My father, when I was young, worked in the Borden Milk factory, which was in Mount Vernon, Westchester, right on the border, in there.

SI: What did he do in the factory?

DH: I don't know, but it was a factory job, ... with uneven shifts, right. I mean, sometimes, it'd be at night, sometimes, daytime. ... I went a couple of times, I remember. You know, if you think about the '40s, they had two big milk bottles on the top of the building. [laughter] Right, you thought that was terrific and whatever. ... You went in, walked around, said hello to everybody. ...

SL: Who took care of you during the day when you got home from school?

DH: Well, that was sort of a catch-as-catch-can kind of thing. At some point, there was somebody taking care of me, but, as I got older, I was home alone; And Fieldston's vacations were never consistent with public school vacations and, of course, Fieldston would do two or two-and-a-half weeks, you know, tremendously long vacations. ... I'd be sitting around; not sitting around, but, I mean, I'd be home alone. So, I'd, you know, get on my bike and go places and, basically, go to playgrounds and hang out, kind of thing.

SI: Can you give us a sense of the neighborhood that you grew up in, what it was like economically, ethnically, that sort of thing?

DH: We moved from Harlem to Mt. Vernon when I was three, perhaps four years old. Mount Vernon, at that time, and still today has the New Haven Railroad, crossing right through it. ... Basically, on the south side, it's black and, on the north side, it's white; Probably less white today than it was then, but still mostly white. So, we were on the south side. ... It was a working-class neighborhood. We were in a wood-frame, three family house. We started out on the first floor, and then, for whatever reason, we moved to the third floor. ... I had cousins who lived directly across the street and other cousins who lived about two blocks down, so, there was family around, and it was a close neighborhood. You know, there were kids. You were in everybody's house. The woman next door, the woman up the street could give you a spanking if you did stuff. [laughter] ... There was no issue. You'd get another spanking when you got home that night, when my mother got home, and another spanking when my father got home. You know, it was that kind of neighborhood. Now, I went back, at some point. ... Actually, later, I'll show you a picture, but there were five guys that we all hung out. ... One was in jail for, you know, twenty to thirty years on armed robbery and something else. Somebody else had gotten killed. They weren't going to Fieldston and they did not have the same kind of opportunity that I did. The kid next door, Billy Hawcott, his father ran a barbershop. His sister had polio and couldn't

walk, so, she was always hanging out the window, and smoked. ... She was, you know, young, relatively, sixteen, seventeen, but, you know, she was thin and just sat there and looked out the window and smoked. ... You know, so, there were those kinds of things going [on]. There was a white ... family across the street--this actually is like a movie [laughter]--where the boy was mentally challenged in some kind of way. So, as the only white family on the block, and the guy was, you know, awkward at best and mentally challenged at worst, you know, that was fodder for negative stuff by us kids, right, and we certainly were into all of that.

NH: Did you go to a neighborhood school when you were young?

DH: No, no. I started at first grade in Ethical Culture School.

NH: Oh, you did, wow.

SL: How was that choice made?

DH: Well, how was it made? Some kind of way, my parents said, "Listen, we've got to do something and make sure our kid has the best possible of opportunities."

SL: Had your parents graduated ...

DH: ... At some point, my father met Algernon Black, who was head of The Ethical Culture Society that founded the Ethical Culture Schools--Fieldston, and Al Black was sort of the person who got me in and I got to know him as I got older, but that was the relationship, and I had a scholarship, I mean, all the way through. [Editor's Note: Algernon D. Black served in a variety of leadership roles (Executive Leader, 1943-1945, Chairman of the Board of Leaders, 1945-1955, and Senior Leader, 1955-1973) within the Society for Ethical Culture, sponsor of the Ethical Culture Fieldston School.]

SL: Were your parents high school graduates?

DH: Yes, high school graduates. My father went to Harvard for one semester and had to drop out to ... help support his family. ... Fast forward a thousand years, when I came out of the South and went to law school, or had a chance to go to law school, I said, "Okay, I want to be C. B. King." He was my model and example and was my lawyer. [Editor's Note: An Albany, Georgia, native, Chevene Bowers "C. B." King practiced law in Albany beginning in the early 1950s and helped lead the Albany Movement in the early 1960s. Throughout the 1960's and beyond, he was the only Civil Rights Movement lawyer in Southwest Georgia] ... I got into several law schools, including Harvard. ... The law school really to go to if you wanted to be a civil rights lawyer was Rutgers, because Arthur Kinoy was there and [William] Bill Kunstler was there and it was doing far more in civil rights law than any other Law School at the time, may still be, ... as far as I know, but the fact that my father had gone to Harvard for, you know, one semester, you know, I thought, "Oh, well, this is going to be terrific," and he thought it was terrific and all. So, I went there and it was about a two-semester event, where Harvard said, "Well, why don't you take a couple of months and think about whether you should return?" ... Before the two months was over, they said, "Well, we've thought about it and we think you

shouldn't return." [laughter] ... So, that's the connection there. [Editor's Note: Arthur Kinoy served as a faculty member at the Rutgers School of Law-Newark from 1964 to 1991. William M. Kunstler did not serve on the Rutgers faculty. Both men served as partners in the same Civil Rights law firm, helped co-found the Center for Constitutional Rights and worked on many prominent cases together, including the trial of the Chicago Seven.]

SI: Your father had served in World War I.

DH: Yes, yes. In the U.S. 9th Calvary. He was in Camp Stotsenberg in the Philippines.

SI: Did he ever talk about his time in the service?

DH: No, no. I guess, as a family, ... there wasn't any terrific, great discussion about, you know, family stuff and who did what. It was, "Everybody, we're going to go to work. You go to school, stay out of trouble. Mind your business. Shut up and let's get on with it." It wasn't negative, but that's the way it was. ... You didn't ask a whole lot of questions, and cousins and relatives had similar experiences. I mean, there wasn't a great deal of conversation and discussion about, you know, "Where did you meet? How did you get married?" ... You know, it was just, you know, "Be quiet." [laughter] ... Going back to my father, you asked, "What did he do?" the other job that he had, and this was the longest one and, certainly, the job that, as I got older and understood things a little bit better, that he had, was he was maitre d' for the Midston House Hotel, which is at 38th [Street] and Madison [Avenue] in New York. ... He would be always working on Christmas or Thanksgiving, or, whenever everybody else was having a terrific holiday or something, he would be at work and come in at, you know, eleven o'clock at night, ten o'clock at night or whatever and having missed it, or, later on, he would have one. He'd have work Christmas and be off Thanksgiving or work Easter and be off, you know, something else. So, he wasn't there on a lot of occasions, but, again, ... it was a very good job. ... I'll show you a picture of him. I mean, he was a stern person, he had his authority. So, he was good at it. He took me there and, you know, I could go to Grand Central and walk up from Grand Central, meet him and have lunch or whatever else. So, I got to see him there and he was proud of that. After he retired from the Midston House, he worked as a semi--I mean, he got some money, but he was basically a volunteer--as an assistant to the minister, rector, at St. Philip's Church. Moran Weston was the minister and he was assistant to Moran Weston and he managed the non-spiritual aspects of the church, including funds. ... They built a senior citizens condo, or building and then, he and Weston fell out for whatever reason one day. [laughter] I don't know, terrible, finished, ... and [my father] never set foot in the church again. [Editor's Note: Reverend M. Moran Weston served as rector of St. Philip's Episcopal Church from the late 1950s until 1982. He was also a noted Civil Rights leader and founder of the Carver Federal Savings Bank, which provided mortgages to first-time African-American homeowners, who often could not qualify for loans from white-controlled banks, and helped fund health care facilities, senior citizens housing and community centers in Harlem and Morningside Heights.]

NH: Wow.

DH: I mean, boom, finished. [Editor's Note: Mr. Harris bangs his fist on the table.]

SL: Were you a church-going family?

DH: Oh, yes, yes, Episcopal. My father's Episcopal. My mother's Baptist, but, yes. ... I was an altar boy and, yes, yes, we went to church.

SI: Can you tell us a little bit about what Ethical Culture School was like?

SL: Where was this? Was it in Manhattan or was this in the Bronx?

DH: This is in the Bronx. This is in the Bronx. ... It has three physical locations. There's the Manhattan [Ethical Culture] at 64th [Street] and Central Park West, which is [kindergarten to sixth grade], I guess, K-6. There's a K-6 in the Bronx [Fieldston Lower] and connected to that is the middle and upper school, which is ... seventh through twelfth [Fieldston Upper]. I've never gone to any other school. [laughter] It's a progressive-education private school for very upper-middle-class and upper-class kids, predominantly Jewish, from New York City. It has diversified slightly, perhaps even better than slightly. It has diversified a bit, but not a whole massive amount. When I was there, there was one black kid in each class. ... There were three black kids in my grade. Three of us graduated. Of the three, one committed suicide. One, after some years, just disappeared, literally. ... A few people did well, but, you know, you came out of there with some baggage, if you happened to be black, or was the one Puerto Rican kid in the whole school. You know, you may or may not make it out in good shape is my point. It was a struggle. You were pretty much on stage and/or isolated, one way or the other.

SI: It was more the pressure of being there, instead of racism.

DH: No, no, absolutely 180 degrees opposite from racism. It was accommodating, you know, "We're all wonderful. We're all in this together. We're all equal." Now, they may ... be living on East 68th Street in a penthouse, [laughter] and that was the difficulty. I'm living in Mount Vernon, in the neighborhood I described, and [they would say], "Oh, why don't you come over on Saturday?" ... I'd go over on Saturday and they're in a doorman building. You get in the elevator. You go up. The elevator opens and it opens into their house. You know, I thought that was extraordinary. I could not believe it. [laughter] I thought it was the strangest thing I'd ever seen in my life. You know, how could the elevator open into your house? So, it was managing in your head all of those kinds of things. As an only child, it is somewhat more complicated, I think, to manage that stuff, because ... you have to select who you talk to about it and it's certainly not going to be--in my case, it wasn't going to be parents. ... It wasn't going to be black kids who weren't going through it. So, you had to figure out how to deal with all of it. Now, I'm not saying, and I think this is important, that it was a bad experience. I had a very good experience. I learned a lot. I was a horrible student, as I was at Rutgers, by the way, just awful, terrible student. ... Part of Fieldston is you have an Ethics class once a week. I thought it was sensational. I don't know why, but I thought ethics was interesting. ... You learned far more about the Holocaust and Jews and the Second World War ... than I ever wanted to know, but that was part of the environment. You didn't learn about African-American history at all, but you learned a lot.

NH: Since you were there in the 1950s, was there any discussion in the ethics class about ...

DH: I'm sure, I'm sure.

NH: ... *Brown v. the Board of Education* or anything like that? [Editor's Note: *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka*, decided by the US Supreme Court in May 1954, legally desegregated public schools in the United States.]

DH: Oh, no, no. I mean, I'm sure there ... was a class or a discussion or an assembly about something, [laughter] but it wasn't part of the fabric of education.

NH: Right.

DH: It wasn't part of the curriculum. It wasn't part of something that, "This is important, too, for you to understand and learn and know."

SL: Did your family still have relatives in the South during this period? Did you have aunts or uncles there?

DH: My father's sister lived in Texas, but my father didn't think he could control himself with whites in the segregated south, so I don't think he ever went south of, I'll say Washington, DC, but I'm not even sure he got to Washington, DC, but we did know people in the South. We knew people who went to the South. ... Everybody on my mother's side, men, had worked as Pullman porters and Red Caps, at some point. So, they had all, depending on who they were, they had grand and great stories to tell about various places they had been. Most of the stories my father ... didn't want me to hear, right. "Oh, don't talk. Don't tell the boy anything. Don't tell the boy." [laughter] ... My father was--okay, ... this is my father. Whatever you've heard about a black barbershop, that's probably it plus, right. So, Billy Howcott's father ran the barbershop. We obviously went to that barbershop. At some point, my father took me, and whatever they were talking about, you know, it's Saturday morning, lots of people, "Don't say that in front of the boy. Don't say it." I mean, he's leaping up, trying to shut up people in the barbershop, [laughter] because I'm sitting there at seven or six years old, whatever it is. ... I'm saying, "Oh, God, you know, why is he doing this? What is happening? Oh, Jesus." [laughter] ... He's trying to, you know, protect me from whatever's going on, and I didn't know what was going on. You know, I hadn't a clue. Whatever they were talking about, ... haven't the vaguest idea. So, as I say, all these uncles, and so forth, everybody was a Pullman porter, a red cap, at some point, traveled all over the country, sat North and South, and they all worked in the post office at some point. So, they had tremendous stories, which they were happy to tell me, in various kinds of ways, and my father was always trying to get them not to tell me. [laughter] ... Should I just jump back and forth with this?

SI: That is fine. Do not worry about being out of order.

DH: When I was in jail, in Americus, [Georgia], and that was about--I had to look this up--about three-and-a-half months, from August to November, I think it was.

SL: 1963.

DH: Yes. So, that was a pretty long time. It was a pretty long time for most people in SNCC, actually, [who had been jailed for activism]. Usually, three days, a week or even two or three weeks and you're out. ... So, my parents are sitting up in New York, having a heart attack, and, fearing that, all of their effort and time and energy to ensure that I became a solid, secure middle-class success was just going down the toilet. ... My mother, who had not traveled to the South, got on a plane, flew to Atlanta, got on another plane, flew to Albany, [Georgia], met C. B. King and drove up from Albany to Americus to visit me in jail. You know, we had, I don't know, half an hour, something like that, but my father couldn't do it. He could not. He was afraid he was going to go off and say or do something, which would have, been some provocation that would [have] screwed him up [laughter] and probably [have] screwed me up even more. ... It was my mother, and she was a fairly shy, timid woman. You know, that took a lot of effort and courage, to do that, but my father just couldn't do it. So, I'd heard, I had stories about the South, but I didn't have a sense of it, really, and I didn't have a sense of anything, really, [while in] high school, you know, Fieldston; go ahead.

SL: You go to Ethical Culture from grades one ... to when?

DH: Through High school.

SL: Fieldston is a continuing education.

DH: Yes, oh, yes.

SL: Okay.

DH: It's the same thing. Ethical Culture is the lower part.

SL: They run continuously.

DH: Yes.

SL: Yes, okay.

NH: Fieldston is the upper school.

DH: Yes.

SL: You were an athlete.

DH: Yes.

SL: At Fieldston.

DH: Yes, yes.

SI: What sports did you play?

DH: Football, basketball, baseball, track.

SL: There, again, were you one of the few minority kids there?

DH: Oh, yes; oh, three of us in a class.

SL: Right.

NH: In high school?

DH: Oh, yes, three of us in the class, and probably, above me, one per class, meaning grade, one per grade.

SL: By the time you got to high school, you were interested in girls. What is the situation then, because most, if not all, of the girls are white? This is, when, about 1955?

DH: Yes, ... I got out in '58.

SL: What ...

DH: Listen, I was in the whatever you want to call it, the "A-group," the most popular group, the socially terrific group.

SL: [laughter] Right; because you were an athlete?

DH: Yes. So, again, it was going to parties on Central Park West or on the East Side. It was getting there and having to go through some crap with a doorman, rarely with somebody's parents, but, you know, occasionally with somebody's parents, not terrible, but, you know, "Errr, who is this?," that kind of stuff; doormen, a lot of stuff. ... Then, through other friends and friends of my parents [I would] go to black things, you know, events, and so forth. So, it was a dual kind of thing, but, far more than the two other people in my grade, I was able to do the crossover thing, far more so. The woman, girl, at the time, had no crossover whatsoever. She didn't go anyplace, you know, didn't do anything, socially, ... with people in school. The boy, not really; I mean, he played football. That was it. ... Because of sports, I was in *The New York Post*, it covered prep school stuff. So, I was in the papers a fair amount for, All-City [sports honors] and that kind of stuff. So, you know, it was pretty nice in that sense. ... There was an undercurrent there, which you had to navigate, and I didn't fully understand it. ... At fifteen, sixteen, seventeen [years old], I was playing ball. When I was on vacation, I went to the playground. I played ball with a team sponsored by a local restaurant and bar, the Riverdale Steak House. I played on a softball team with a whole bunch of twenty-five-year-olds, which my father was very upset about, [laughter] but I could play ball at their level. They accepted me, terrific. We'd go to the Riverdale Steak House afterwards. They'd be drinking beer and trying to keep me ...

SL: This was in high school.

DH: Fifteen, yes, fifteen, sixteen.

SL: When did your family move to Mosholu Avenue in the Bronx, across from Fieldston?

DH: Just before high school. Seventh or eighth grade maybe

SL: That is what I thought.

DH: Beginning of high school, yes. That's what I guess. ... As soon as I got out of high school, they moved back to Harlem, 135th Street, The Riverton.

SL: You must have been one of the few, if only, white families on that street.

NH: Black families.

SL: Black families.

DH: Oh, yes, yes. It was still a working-class neighborhood, to tell you the truth, but there weren't any black people there. It's on the upper edges of Riverdale, on the northern edge of Riverdale, before you hit Yonkers.

SL: You said you were a horrible student. What does that mean?

DH: [laughter] I was a horrible student. ... I couldn't do math. I couldn't read. You know, I struggled in everything. I just had a hard time.

SL: Did they give you tutoring? How did you get through? How did you graduate?

DH: I graduated okay, but, I mean, you know, it was a struggle. I just wasn't good at anything, academically, and I was a horrible student at Rutgers.

NH: How did you decide to go to Rutgers College?

DH: Haven't a clue. [laughter] ... For many other people, it was a matter of, "Well, we'll apply to these schools and I'll select where I want to go."

SL: Right.

DH: For me, and maybe, three or four other people, it was, "We'll apply to these schools and wherever I get in, I'll go." [laughter] It wasn't quite that. ... For some reason, I had a notion, I have no idea why, that I wanted to go to DePauw [University] in Greencastle, Indiana.

SL: DePauw, yes, right.

NH: A good friend of ours is there.

DH: Right. My father said, "Not a chance. You're not going to Indiana in the middle of Southern Indiana. ... Forget it, not possible." [laughter]

SL: Did you think about the City University of New York schools?

DH: No, no. I had a sense of college. I had a sense of college and I had a sense that there was a campus and there was grass and there was that kind of stuff.

SL: Were you recruited for your athletic abilities anywhere?

DH: No, no. I have no idea why I went to Rutgers; [laughter] no idea, but it was fun. ...

SL: Rutgers, in those days, it was hard to get into academically.

DH: I'm coming from a private school.

SL: Okay, but your grades were not very good. [laughter]

DH: But, probably, compared [to others], they were good.

SL: Do you think being African-American had any impact?

DH: I don't think so.

SL: You do not think so.

DH: I don't know.

SL: Yes.

NH: Yes. In 1958, it is hard to imagine Rutgers was thinking about diversity.

SL: Paul Robeson had gone to Rutgers. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Paul Robeson (1898-1976) was an African-American singer, actor and Civil Rights activist. He was valedictorian of his class at Rutgers University in 1919.]

NH: Yes.

SI: Before we get into Rutgers, I wanted to ask about high school. Had you been involved in any other activities, like student government, clubs or anything like that?

DH: [I] don't know.

SI: All right.

DH: Probably, probably, sure.

SI: I just wondered if ...

DH: I was in--it may have been a course, I don't know--I was in the choir. [To Shaun Illingworth] You'd remember what you did in high school. [To Steven Lawson] Do you remember what you did in high school?

SL: Not as much.

DH: Yes, right. You do? [laughter]

SL: I do. I did not do that much.

DH: Oh.

SL: I was not an athlete. You were probably busy with sports. You played football. You played basketball.

DH: Yes, yes.

NH: Baseball.

DH: I played, I played. I mean, when I was a kid, you played, you know.

SL: Right, right.

DH: Even when you're a young kid, you know, go out, come back at five o'clock or come back when it gets dark; "do not ... come in in the middle of the day and bring the dirt in the house," stay outside, and that's what it was. ...

SL: Right. I think you have answered this question before, but I want to say it in a different way, just to get it on the record. In 1955, you were fifteen years old and that is the year that Emmett Till was murdered in Mississippi. [Editor's Note: Emmett L. Till, a fourteen-year-old African-American from Chicago, was tortured, disfigured and murdered on August 28, 1955, while visiting family in Money, Mississippi. Roy Bryant, with his half-brother J. W. Milam, committed the murder after Till spoke to his wife, Carolyn, in their grocery store. At the public viewing in Chicago, tens of thousands of mourners saw Till's mutilated remains, photos of which were also relayed across the nation in the media. Bryant and Milam were acquitted of the slaying, though they openly admitted to committing the murder in an interview later. The brutal murder and the failure to bring Till's killers to justice galvanized many Americans to support Civil Rights action in Mississippi.]

DH: Yes.

SL: He was fourteen. A number of the people in the Civil Rights Movement have pointed to that, but that was not something that you even knew about.

DH: No.

SL: Okay.

DH: No, not at that time.

SL: Not at that time.

DH: Not at that time.

SL: Did you remember Little Rock, Arkansas, the Little Rock desegregation crisis in 1957, the Little Rock Nine? [Editor's Note: In the Fall of 1957, the Little Rock Central High School was forced to desegregate by federal order. Carlotta Walls, Jefferson Thomas, Gloria Ray, Ernest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, Thelma Mothershed, Terrence Roberts, Minnijean Brown and Melba Pattillo, later known as the Little Rock Nine, were scheduled to enter, but Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus went against the order and called on the Arkansas National Guard to bar their entrance. President Dwight D. Eisenhower then federalized the National Guard and deployed the 101st Airborne Division to guard the Little Rock Nine as they entered the high school on September 25, 1957.]

DH: Probably, probably.

SL: But, nothing ...

DH: In a remote kind of way but not really. ... Nothing much was happening up here. [Editor's Note: Mr. Harris points to his head.]

SL: Okay. [laughter]

DH: I'm telling you, very little was happening. [laughter]

SL: I am eager to get to the transformation. That will be the interesting part of this story. [laughter]

DH: Yes, so, I mean, high school was, you know, managed getting through school, play ball, whatever all else, get into college. That's what it was.

SI: Okay. Did you work at all when you were in high school? Did you work in the summer?

DH: Oh, yes, summer jobs. Yes, you had summer jobs all the time. Yes, actually, I was talking about it with my wife this morning. You know, they don't have summer jobs for kids anymore. ... I worked at the Park Department, New York City Park Department, running playgrounds.

There was a [park] over by Mosholu Parkway, up from Van Courtlandt [Avenue], where the elevated train is.

SL: Right.

DH: There was a park that had clay tennis courts.

SL: Right.

DH: I had to get over there at about six o'clock in the morning to roll the tennis courts, for a whole summer. ... We were living in Mosholu Avenue, so, ... I had to go downtown on the west side and come back up, in the East Bronx right, right. [laughter]

SL: Yes.

DH: And get there by six o'clock in the morning. ... That's the kind of stuff [one did], and it was terrific. You stood in line for four hours, waiting to try and get a number, so [that] you could get a ticket to get a job. They said, "Okay, your job is in this park," wherever the hell it is. You know, it was your problem to get there. [laughter] Yes, tough; parked cars at ... Rye Beach one summer, oh, yes, [I had] all sorts of jobs.

SI: When was the first time you came down to Rutgers? Was it your first day of school or did you visit before?

DH: I don't know. I have no idea. ... It wasn't the first day of school. So, I signed up to play freshman football and they said, okay, school started on September 1st, "Come on August 24th," to New Brunswick for freshman football practice. I go down on August 24th and the "real" freshman football players had come on July 2nd, or something like that, and had been working out all summer. [laughter] ... They're, you know, eight feet tall and five hundred pounds, and had better equipment, that's right, had better equipment. That's right. Their stuff was, you know, good stuff. We got all the ratty stuff. So, that was my first impression. [laughter] ... I'm sure I went down for a walk around or an interview maybe, but I don't really remember.

SI: Where did you live your first year?

DH: I can't tell you.

SI: Was it in a dorm?

DH: Yes, it was in a dorm. It was nice, one of the old brick dorms.

SI: In the Quadrangle?

DH: Yes, it was in the Quad someplace. It was nice. It was nice. I lived in Frelinghuysen [Hall] at one point, and then, I lived in Phi Sigma Kappa on College, no, Union [Street]. Where is the street with all the fraternities?

SI: I think it is Union Street.

NH: Union, yes.

DH: Okay.

SL: Some are on College Avenue, too.

SI: There are some on College Avenue.

NH: There are now, but the original ones were back on Union Street. [Editor's Note: The Phi Sigma Kappa house was then located at 32 Union Street.]

DH: Okay. The fraternity was an economic issue, as I recall. It seemed to be cheaper to ... join a fraternity and live in the fraternity house than [to] do the other thing. Bob Harrison, who was also in my class, from Pennsylvania, who is probably the only contact I have with Rutgers. He and I were roommates in Hardenbergh or Frelinghuysen, became friends and still are friends. ... When they had rush week or whatever it's called, you'd get invited to these dinners at the fraternities, right. So, we didn't have any money, so, we'd go and have these dinners, right. ... At some point, you get, you know, three dinners, and then, the last dinner, you get invited to pledge. We didn't know that, so, we just kept going to the dinners. ... I went to this fraternity house. We had dinner and they said, "Go upstairs." ... They give you a little rundown upstairs and you walked downstairs and everybody [shouts], "Yay, terrific," all of this kind of stuff, "Congratulations, a new pledge." So, I was there for the dinner, went upstairs. [laughter] They gave me this stuff and I said, "No, no, I can't join." ... I came downstairs and everybody [said], "Oh," you know, it's quiet. ... And, they, you know, rush you out the door. ... It was funny, because the night it happened to me, the same thing happened to him at a different fraternity. We met back at our room and I said, "You know what happened? They tried to get me." He said, "I had the exact same thing." [laughter] We were just going out to dinner. ... Eventually, I did join Phi Sigma Kappa, ... stayed there for a year. Bob got married and ... he lived, had a place, in the barracks, out at the Heights [Busch Campus in Piscataway]. ... So, for at least a semester, I lived out there with him, on the couch, he and his wife. ...

SL: Was Bob African-American?

DH: Yes, yes, Connellsville, Pennsylvania.

SI: Did you have any non-African-American roommates? Was there a conscious effort to group students by race?

DH: My first roommate was white. Academically, this is what Fieldston did for me. Almost everything that was presented [the] first year, I had already, I had read, studied or worked on in the eleventh or twelfth grades. So, I was sort of skating through the whole thing. My first roommate, first semester, was a white kid from New Hampshire or Vermont. ... Every fraternity wanted him. He was terrifically popular. ... He was what you thought a college student was

supposed be, and I was just, you know, sort of impressed with him. He may have been on some team. ... Come December or January, whenever it was, I came back to the room and he's sitting in the room, crying. I said, "What the hell's wrong?" He'd flunked out. Well, I couldn't believe it. I said, "Here's ... Mr. College [who] had flunked out," and I don't know whether they still do this, but, at least then, they accepted a whole bunch of people as freshmen and made a tremendous cut at the end of the first semester, first year--I mean, really, just take the class down by fifty percent, or something like that. ... I'd missed by a hair. You know, it was a closer margin than it should have been, but, you know, I was okay. So, I got the guy's mattress, put it over on my bed, had ... a single room, "Oh, terrific," and proceeded to work as hard as I could to flunk out by June, and missed it by just ... one percentage point or something, right. [laughter] So, then, I started working. ... I had to work hard, but I sort of got through. ... At some point, back in New York, here's where stuff started changing. I started getting involved with tutoring programs and stuff in the black community and, essentially, then, got hooked into the Northern Student Movement. [Editor's Note: The Northern Student Movement began in the Fall of 1961, established by Peter Countryman and members of the Student Christian Movement in New England, and lasted until 1966. The Northern Student Movement raised funds for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), started tutoring programs in urban areas that let college students mentor Northeastern inner-city youths and sponsored community action projects in African-American neighborhoods in Northern cities. The Northern Student Movement also led boycotts against businesses that discriminated against African-Americans, protested unfair housing conditions, and promoted the teaching of African-American history, among other initiatives.]

SL: The black community where, in New York City?

DH: Harlem.

SL: Harlem.

DH: Harlem, yes, yes. I also got involved with a program on the Lower East Side, University Settlement House. By this time, my parents had moved back to Harlem. I had friends and, you know, I was a city kid. ...

SL: The 1960 sit-ins, you were in your third year at Rutgers. [Editor's Note: On February 1, 1960, four students staged a sit-in to protest the whites-only lunch counter of the Woolworth store in Greensboro, North Carolina. Over the next six months, students across the South embraced the sit-in tactic of nonviolent resistance to protest Jim Crow segregation policies and try to force integration.]

DH: No, no.

SL: This was before that.

DH: Oh, this is before that, first year, first year.

SL: This was 1957-1958.

DH: '59.

NH: 1958-1959.

SL: 1958-1959.

DH: '58-'59, yes. Let me take a [break].

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: May I put it back on?

DH: Sure.

SI: We were just talking a little bit about your fraternity activities.

DH: Oh, we don't need to go into that. Actually, maybe we shouldn't talk about it, [laughter] now that you've mentioned there's things we should blank out. ... One year, I think they made me the recruiter, or, you know, the person who brings in new pledges or something. I remember, you had to shake everybody's hand, you know.

SL: Were you the only black member?

DH: Oh, yes, oh, God, yes. Listen, I don't know what [Rutgers]-New Brunswick is like now, but, since you originally sent me the email, I did find the yearbook and I just looked at, I don't know what year it was, but ... New Brunswick is a very, very white place. ... There's about one or two or three blacks in each grade, class, out of all the people in New Brunswick.

NH: Yes.

DH: There's one or two black girls in Douglass [College] at the time. ... The guys who ... were black were either--oh, (McDaniel?), who's a writer, he was very good, (Jim McDaniel?), I think his name was, terrific writer, wrote novels, and so forth--were either writers or athletes. That was it, boom.

[TAPE PAUSED]

DH: ... Sorry.

NH: No, no.

SL: You were saying how you started getting involved in tutoring in Harlem.

DH: Yes, yes. I'm not sure how or why, but, I started. Then, the more engaged I became, the more connected I got with the Northern Student Movement, which, led eventually, to carrying over some of these activities and programs to Rutgers and New Brunswick.

SL: What was the name of this program that you ran at Rutgers?

DH: It's in the chapter of the book that you sent me. [laughter] I have no idea.

NH: In Richard P. McCormick's introduction in *The Black Student Protest Movement at Rutgers* [(1990)]. [Editor's Note: According to the book, the program was called Education in Action.]

SL: Okay.

DH: Yes.

SI: That is where you worked with local students.

DH: Right.

SI: In New Brunswick.

DH: Right. You should know that.

SL: Yes. I want to hear it from you. [laughter]

DH: No idea.

SL: Was there an NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] chapter on campus back then, or in New Brunswick?

DH: It says so in that chapter. [laughter] It does, it does. I remember being involved in and organizing stuff. What it was, how it was, I don't remember. ...

NH: I was going to ask you if Reverend Abernethy was involved in any of this. [Editor's Note: Reverend Bradford S. Abernethy served as the Chaplain of Rutgers University from 1945 to 1974.]

DH: Don't know.

NH: Because that is where we first came across your connection.

DH: Yes. I don't know, or don't remember.

SL: Do you remember Reverend Abernethy?

DH: Yes.

SL: Okay. [laughter]

DH: Yes.

SL: Can you tell us a little bit about him?

DH: No.

SL: Okay.

DH: Good guy, good guy. I mean, clearly, at some point, I went to him for advice, direction, counsel, whatever. That's all I can remember, but I do remember having contact with him. ... I do have a picture of him. ...

SL: You majored at Rutgers in ...

DH: Physical education and English.

SL: And English.

DH: I liked, you know, going back to the ethics, I liked reading stuff and I thought I could write.

SL: Did any particular faculty member have an impact on you?

DH: I cannot tell you one person ... or class, for that matter, that I remember having. ... I don't think that's a negative about Rutgers, to tell you the truth. I think the whole Rutgers experience allowed me some space and some capacity to grow and move in different directions, but, if you pinned me down to what was the name of the dormitory, I can picture it. Actually, I'll describe it. If you're in the three dormitories along the river, Frelinghuysen [Hall], whatever [Hardenbergh Hall] and whatever [Campbell Hall], and you go toward campus, there's a little [stairway], you go up some steps, you walk through a quadrangle, and then, the next quadrangle, that was where I was, next, yes, little quadrangle, that's where I was. ... At some point, [I was] working with the Northern Student Movement kids in New York who were far more engaged in stuff than I. There's a program called Crossroads Africa, Operation Crossroads Africa, run by ... Reverend James Robinson, who was minister of Church of the Master in Harlem. [Editor's Note: Reverend James H. Robinson established Operation Crossroads Africa in 1958. President John F. Kennedy cited the program as the forerunner of his administration's Peace Corps, founded in 1961 and initially directed by Sargent Shriver.] ... It was a program that, I think, it was started in 1959 or '60 and it took American students to various countries in Africa for the summer to work alongside African students on a project, building a school, constructing a dam, some sort of physical kind of work. ... There was, a leader from the United States side, a leader from the African side, everybody got together. ... The design of it, it was the model for the Peace Corps, you know, Shriver and Kennedy, but this was the program that preceded the Peace Corps. So, for whatever reason, I said, "Oh, that's terrific," and so, I applied and I went on the thing. ... I went to what was then Northern Rhodesia [now Zambia], but, to get there, at that time, we had to

go to Nigeria. We went to Ghana. We went to Gabon. We went to Congo. You know, it took us awhile to get there and go through all these places to get there. ... At some point, maybe after I was accepted, they said, "Listen, we're prepared to send you, but are you prepared to go to a colour bar [segregated] country? Can you manage that?" and I said, "Sure. Can I?" [laughter] Again, I'm nineteen maybe. ... One of the things ... I think I do remember about myself was, at nineteen to twenty-five, or whatever, ... I had absolutely no sense of mortality or fear or anxiety or whatever. You know, whatever it was, I could deal with it, one assumed, sure. So, I went, had a terrific time, paid very little attention to the fact that it was--and was in a situation where you didn't have to pay a whole hell a lot of attention--to the fact it was a colour bar country.

SI: Where were you physically located?

DH: In ...

SI: Were you out in a rural area?

DH: Oh, yes, yes, rural, rural. I'll tell you a funny story, actually. It was Kitwe. Kitwe was the name of the place; A very small town, out in the country, The Copperbelt Region. You know, nobody's ever heard of it. When I was working in the Ford Foundation, Bundy, McGeorge Bundy, was president. [Editor's Note: From 1961 to 1965, McGeorge Bundy served as the National Security Advisor to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. He left government service to become President of the Ford Foundation and served in that capacity until 1979.] He would have a lunch every six weeks or so with the new employees, maximum of five people, he and the five people, and conversation. ... At some point, you know, "Where are you from? What did you do? What do you think?" ... He focuses in and really pushes you. ... I said, "Well, let me try and think of something that, he isn't going to know anything about, so [that] I'm on safe ground." So, some kind of way, I said I had worked in Kitwe or spent time in Kitwe, and I said to myself, "I know he won't know anything about this." "Oh, yes," says Bundy, "Ndola is right in the next village," which is true, right. [laughter] Now, I mean, this is the most remote place on the whole face of the Earth and the man knew. ... Ndola was the place that Dag Hammarskjold's plane crashed when he died, but, you know, my shot with Bundy, killed, right. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Swedish diplomat Dag Hammarskjold, the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, died in a plane crash near Ndola on September 18, 1961, while flying to negotiate a cease-fire in the Congo Crisis.] So, it was rural. No, there was no particular big town or that kind of thing or anything. It was rural. It was a nice project. ... I was the only black in that group. You know, kids were from [University of California] Berkeley and from all over the country. ... I had also gotten involved with some African nationalist ... independence groups in New York as well as going to meetings and to rallies, whatever. So, the black leader from the African side and I go to a UNIP, United National Independence Party, conference, two, three hours away from where we were located. [Editor's Note: Founded in October 1959, Zambia's United National Independence Party was led by Kenneth Kaunda after his release from prison in January 1960. The UNIP formed the first post-independence Zambian government with Kaunda as President, an office he held until 1991.] Everyone else in our group is white, so probably not a terrific thing to do, for them to go. It'd be weird. "Who are they? What's the situation?" but I go, with [Lucas] Luke Chideya. ... It's a political rally, sort of out in the fields, with some lean-tos, and so forth, but the police are there. So, it's this rally of nationalists and

freedom fighters trying to get independence for Northern Rhodesia, which is now Zambia, but the police are there, monitoring the thing. ... At some point, I probably have on sunglasses, I probably have on a T-shirt and jeans and I don't know what else, and I lean up against the police car, and then, I sit on the police car like an uninformed thoughtless tourist. ... An officer comes and says, "Why you sitting [there]?" the policeman, and, of course, he speaks English. I speak English. We have a conversation. He figures out, I guess--I don't know what he figures out--but he figures out I'm not some nationalist about to bludgeon him. So, he gives me a lot of space and leeway and whatnot, and I'm sitting on bumper of the police car like I'm me. That night, or some point that night, the security from the United National Independence Party, and I'm there as a guest with Luke, takes me and puts me in one of these lean-tos and says, "You're going to stay here until we figure out who the hell you are. You're probably a spy from the government." Luke tries to explain, but to no avail. Long story short, Kenneth Kaunda, who I had met in New York at some of these rallies and who is the leading candidate to become president and is the head of UNIP, has to come personally to try and figure out who I am and why I am there. We have a conversation. I said, "Listen, you know, we met in New York," dit-dah, dit-dah. He says, "Yes, I recall," and he's a wonderful, wise, understanding man. "Yes. Well, probably, you should be more careful in how you conduct yourself," and so on, and so forth, and they let me go. Again, you know, I'm sitting in this lean-to, but my mind is finally beginning to fire up. I'm beginning to understand, "Well, you know, you've got to manage yourself a little bit better." My parents are sitting on 135th Street in New York. They don't know anything about this, and I have discovered since that, a week later, I wrote them a letter saying, "Oh, I was locked up," you know, [laughter] and they're saying, "Holy shit. What is wrong with this kid, after we've done all of this stuff? We've sacrificed to death and he's going, you know, trying to kill it all." ... At some point, on that crossroads trip, I was on a plane. Guy sitting next to me was German and he starts talking about stuff happening in the United States, in the South. ... I didn't know what the hell he was talking about, and he's telling me about ... Freedom Rides. He's certainly just talking about the lack of freedoms in the South. ... Probably for an hour or two, whatever that flight was, I was just sitting there embarrassed that this man knew so much more than I did about what was going on in the United States and what was happening with black people. I was just devastated. I really was. So, that was the click, that was the thing. It was [because] he was German, you know, and had he been West Indian, maybe, or, you know, something closer, but, for a German, for Christ sakes, and for whatever reason, ... he did not let up. I mean, he just wanted to know everything, what I thought. And, I didn't have a thought, didn't have a clue. [Editor's Note: Beginning in May 1961, African-American and white "freedom riders" began testing the desegregation of interstate bus travel made legal in the 1960 Supreme Court decisions *Boynton v. Virginia* and *Morgan v. Virginia*. They faced violence, arrests and imprisonment when hostile Southern mobs and local law enforcement refused to honor the ruling. Mr. Harris may have been mistaken in saying that this topic was discussed.]

SL: This would have been the Summer of 1959. Is that when you were in Africa?

DH: '60, ... maybe '61.

SL: Summer of 1960.

DH: 1961

SL: The sit-ins would have already taken place earlier that year.

DH: Probably, yes.

SL: Okay, Summer of 1960, yes.

DH: That sort of thing.

NH: That is incredible.

SL: You come back and, now, how does that motivate you?

DH: That was the real catalyst. So, then, you know, further for the activity in New Brunswick with students, ... black students, on campus, the tutoring program, whatever it was.

SI: Did the tutoring program start after that or before?

DH: I don't know.

SI: Okay.

DH: I don't know.

SL: When did you first become aware of SNCC? [Editor's Note: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) developed from a meeting of student activists held at Shaw University in April 1960 under the leadership of Ella Baker. SNCC became a large Civil Rights organization with both a paid staff of activists and thousands of student volunteers organizing and participating in such key events as sit-ins, freedom rides, voter registration drives, the 1963 March on Washington and Mississippi Freedom Summer.]

DH: You know, I attended something where some SNCC people spoke in New York. It wasn't in New Jersey. I just thought of something. [In] some kind of way, I got Malcolm X to come and speak in New Brunswick. I just thought of that. [laughter] ... We had a conversation before or after he spoke and he made a vague, you know, offer for me to, "I should come and work with him." ... I didn't quite figure out whether he meant, you know, work with him or become a Muslim, [laughter] and I didn't push it, but, then, one time, he called for me at my parents' house. [In an exasperated voice, his father said], "Don't ever have that man call here again. Don't ever." [laughter] ... You know, I mean, it wasn't like now, where you have cell phones. I mean, it's the only number you had. You know, "Where can I get in touch with you?" and that was my number, my parents' house.

SL: Were you still a Rutgers student?

DH: Oh, yes, yes.

SL: This was before 1963.

DH: Oh, yes, oh, yes.

NH: Was it Paul Clemens who was trying to find out ...

DH: Who's Paul Clemens?

SL: He is a colleague.

NH: He is a history professor ...

DH: Oh.

NH: ... Who is updating the history of Rutgers University. Somebody had said that Malcolm X had spoken at the Rutgers Campus and he was trying to track down the information.

DH: Yes, yes.

SI: I know he debated one of the professors at Rutgers. I thought it was in Newark, but it may have been in New Brunswick.

DH: No, it was New Brunswick.

SI: Okay.

DH: Well, he may have gone to Newark as well, but he did come to New Brunswick, and he may have debated somebody. ... [Editor's Note: On November 3, 1961, Rutgers Social Work Professor William Neal Brown debated Malcolm X in the gymnasium of the Rutgers School of Pharmacy in Newark.]

SL: Was he the only person you brought to campus, the only black leader you brought to campus?

DH: I just thought of it right now. [laughter] If you'd asked me yesterday, I would ... have said, "I didn't bring anybody."

SL: In 1960, 1961, 1962, were there civil rights organizers, SNCC people, coming through the North, trying to raise funds and speaking at Rutgers at all?

DH: Not at Rutgers, that I know of.

SL: Okay.

DH: ... But, New York, New York.

SL: Right.

NH: Yes.

DH: I mean, stuff was happening in the city.

SL: How did you get back and forth?

DH: Train.

SL: Did you just take the train?

DH: Take the train, but, remember, I'm from New York, so ...

SL: Right.

DH: Rutgers, one of the--actually, you can tell me whether it's changed--one of the disappointments, I would say, of Rutgers was that so many in-state people went home for the weekend. ...

SL: Right.

DH: If you considered yourself out of town or whatever, it was pretty dead ...

SL: Right.

DH: ... Around on the weekends. Is that still the case?

SI: Pretty much.

SL: Pretty much.

NH: Yes. A lot of people still leave, yes.

DH: I see.

NH: There are still lots of in-state students. There are far more in-state students than anything else.

DH: Oh, sure. Well, you know, I didn't go home. Now, I'd go to New York ... to hang out.

SL: Right.

NH: Right.

DH: Because it's thirty minutes on the train or whatever it was, and a hell of a lot cheaper than I suspect it is now.

NH: Yes.

SL: Yes. [laughter]

DH: ... Yes, you'd go into the city to, you know, to go to the city. ... There'd be rallies, there'd be student organizations, there'd be stuff.

SL: When did you first link up with SNCC to go to Georgia?

DH: At some point, ... I heard people from SNCC talk. ... In the Summer of, I think, '62, June, May of '62, I went someplace to a, what is it called? National, NSA ...

SL: National Student Association. [Editor's Note: Founded in 1947, the National Student Association fostered student activism on college campuses. In the late 1950s, the NSA created the Southern Student Human Relations Seminar, to educate Southern student leaders about Civil Rights, and opened an office in Atlanta.]

DH: NSA meeting, someplace, Ohio possibly, hooked up again with SNCC people and went to Albany from there. [Editor's Note: In the Albany Movement, activists from SNCC and other Civil Rights organizations spurred a grassroots campaign in Albany, Georgia, beginning in the Fall of 1961. SNCC's voter registration efforts continued in Southwest Georgia through 1962 and 1963.]

SL: Was that 1962 or 1963, you think?

DH: '62.

SL: Was that before you had graduated?

DH: Oh, yes, yes. ... So, I went to Albany, stayed June, July, August, and there was a terrific issue about whether I was going to come back and finish or not. ... I said, "Oh, no. Stuff is happening in Southwest Georgia. I've got to stay and the world will crash if I don't stay." ... Of course, my parents were just beyond beside themselves with panic about the whole thing, that I wouldn't finish, and employed some of my former coaches from high school to get me to come back. So, I finally came back. I said, "Okay." ... Again, recognizing what I felt my parents had sacrificed to get me to that point, I felt very much of an obligation, both at Fieldston and Rutgers, to satisfy their request. It was totally about them; it was nothing about me at all. ... So, either--and I really don't remember this, to tell you the truth--either I came back late for that fall semester or I didn't come back until late in the year, so ... while I started out in the Class of '62, I'm actually the Class of '63. I graduated in January or February, of '63 and, within a week of finishing classes and somebody saying, "Yes, you've finished," I went back South.

SL: Did you first ...

DH: Let me just finish this point.

SL: Sorry.

DH: That June, '63, was my graduation. I didn't come back. My parents got in their car, drove to New Brunswick, went to the [stadium], sat up there, wherever one sits, and saw the graduation all by themselves, which, you know, a thousand years later, makes you very sad, but that's what it meant to them. ... I'm sorry I missed that, for them, but I was in the South and, you know, gone by that time. I'm sorry.

SL: In the Summer of 1962 ...

DH: '62, okay.

SL: ... Did you work mostly on voter registration?

DH: Voter registration.

SL: Right.

DH: Albany, [a city in Dougherty County], and Lee County.

SL: Lee County. Was Charles Sherrod there?

DH: Absolutely.

SL: Tell us about your impressions of Charlie Sherrod. [Editor's Note: Charles Sherrod served as SNCC's Project Director for Southwest Georgia from 1961 until the late 1960s. He was also director of the Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education from 1961 to 1987 and directed the New Communities, Inc., cooperative farming initiative from 1969 to 1985.]

DH: What are your impressions of Sherrod? Sherrod is a Virginian, a minister, thoughtful, patient, in many ways introverted, did not train people by having formal training, but [said], "Here's how you have to do it. Shut up, watch, pay attention, listen, you'll get it." One of the original leaders of SNCC, coming out of the Shaw [University] meetings with Ella Baker, he and [J.] Charles Jones and a white woman, whose name escapes me at the moment, were the first, and Cordell Reagon, were the first into Albany on the freedom rides in ... late 1960 [1961], early '61 [1962], a terrific man, terrific man, a good friend. I am still sort of remotely in contact with. ... Sherrod was the head of Southwest Georgia. ... At that time, there was a girl, a woman, yes, obviously, from New York that I knew quite well in Southwest Georgia. There was a white woman, white girl, from Brooklyn, Faith Holsaert, Prathia Hall, John Churchill from Philadelphia, Joan [Joyce?] Barrett, I think, was there, from Philadelphia. ... Philadelphia was also the head of the Northern Students Movement. There was a Philadelphia and New York contingent, if you will, in Southwest Georgia, working with local people, and so forth. ... That first summer, I stayed out in Lee County with a woman called "Mama Dolly" Raines and she

lived out in [a rural area], you know, probably a seventy-five-year-old woman, living by herself on some sort of land, out at the end of a dirt road. ... I guess two, three of us stayed out there and did voter registration in the county, as well as helped out in Albany, and [had] begun working with students from Albany State [College] on direct action, and so forth, and worked with the Albany Movement.

SI: Can you give us a sense of what you would do in a typical day or a typical week?

DH: What, hour-by-hour kind of stuff?

SI: What did voter registration entail? Were you going out to people's houses?

DH: Yes, yes. You go out and, if it's a rural area, you pick someplace that has six, seven, eight houses--not houses like this, but, you know, maybe sharecroppers' houses--that are in relatively close proximity, so [that] you can walk, and go knock on doors and talk to people. So, you may start that at [the] middle of the day, when people are coming back ... to get a meal. You're probably not going to do it early in the morning. You're certainly going to take a break of some sort in the heat of the day, and then, start four to eight [o'clock] kind of timeframe at night, when people are home or back from school, ... you know, not that you're going to do anything with the kids, other than try to get them involved. ... [We] used the four-to-eight timeframe, when people are back in their houses.

SI: When you would talk to these people, how would it usually go? Were they receptive or did you have to convince them?

DH: Oh, people were receptive, but they were reluctant, because they would lose their jobs. They would be physically threatened. They couldn't read or write. There were all manner of reasons why, rationally, they shouldn't try to register to vote. ... The conversation wasn't so much about, you know, what I did two months ago, [Mr. Harris knocks on the table], "Hi, I'm from the Obama Campaign. Are you going to vote next Tuesday?" It was, "Hello. How are you?" I mean, it was a conversation where you may talk for an hour before you even [say], "You know who I am? I'm from the movement. What are you growing?" You know, it's a whole conversation to try and get to know people, reduce people's anxieties and fears, begin to see where they're at in terms of, "Could they read or write? Had they ever tried to register before? Are they in a situation where whoever they work for is going to fire them if they go and try to register?" So, you try and get a sense of what is the situation this person's in and what kind of jeopardy may I, we, be putting them in if we're asking them to, fundamentally, join the movement. "We've got to change things. We're adults who are sixty percent black in this county and you're getting screwed hand over fist." So, it wasn't just a perfunctory kind of, "Yes, no, boom, move." It was, "Okay, well, maybe we're going to talk about it today and we'll come back ... next week." I mean, ... you're building long-term, hopefully, trust and, hopefully, the development of a process, so that those people could take control of their lives and situations, as opposed to, you're doing something, right.

SL: Did you do it in pairs?

DH: Yes and no. ... Certainly, in rural areas, you've got to work in pairs. ...

SL: Did you ever integrate the pairs? In other words, did you work with a white person?

DH: Yes, yes, but I don't think that was [always the case]. You know, people worked together. If it turned out that way, fine. If it didn't, that's fine, too, but it wasn't, "Oh, let's make sure it's an integrated team going in."

SL: Then, in 1963, you were working full-time. You were a staff member now, right, in 1963 for SNCC in Southwest Georgia.

DH: Yes, yes.

SL: Were you the field director for the Voter Education Project in Southwest Georgia? In 1962, they started a Voter Education Project that lasted for two years and they would fund voter registration to groups that would apply for it. [Editor's Note: The Southern Regional Council, a non-profit organization, created the Voter Education Project (VEP) to fund voter registration initiatives run by the NAACP, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), and SNCC, starting in early 1962.]

SL: VEP.

DH: Yes, we probably had some VEP support in there, some time. I was never working directly for VEP. You know, we may have, as I said, gotten some money from VEP to work on voter registration in a particular county, or something like that, and we did that. ... Basically, the counties, Dougherty County, which is Albany, Dougherty, Tift County, which is Tifton, Terrell County, Lee County, Sumter County, which is Americus--someplace, I'm leaving out--anyway, the counties ... surrounding Dougherty were the main focus. We were spread out from [there], Albany being the largest municipality, if you will, in Southwest Georgia.

SL: What was it like when you got arrested? Tell us a little bit about that, even though you talked about it before. Was that your first arrest, actually, for insurrection? [Editor's Note: Mr. Harris was arrested in Americus, Georgia, on August 8, 1963. The case stirred support on the Rutgers campus and across New Jersey in the Fall of 1963. Mr. Harris was released in November after a federal court declared the law under which he was charged to be unconstitutional.]

DH: Oh, no, no. You know, again, I think what is very prominent in my mind was that ... I had no notion of the fear that I should have had or the level of danger that we were all in. ... At that age, [I was] just totally un-appreciating the depth of the situation we were in, versus the Southern kids, who understood it perfectly, but I was from New York. ... I can remember, at some point, a white cop in Albany and I had a confrontation. I don't remember what it was about, but he and I were talking to each other. ... Whatever it was, he said, [imitating his Southern drawl], "Boy, put a sir on the end of that," and I said, "What?" and he repeated it, and I said, "What?" ... I didn't understand what he was saying. ... The words didn't click. I mean, his accent and twang, and so forth, were such that I wasn't getting it. He thought, of course, that I was disrespecting

him, and so, he drew back to strike. ... He drew back and I drew back. ... We had a little sort of stare down and whatever, but, afterwards, it struck me--what is the name of that [movie]? *Cool Hand Luke*--it was that we have a problem of communication. [laughter] I mean, I didn't understand what the man was talking about. Now, I don't know what I would have done ... had I understood it and he ... tried to make me say, "Sir," but I just didn't know what he was saying. ... So, it was that kind of stuff, you know.

SL: Did you receive training in nonviolence?

DH: Not the same kind that [civil rights activists received later]. Most people, many people, I think, who think about SNCC and the Southern Movement think about Mississippi Freedom Summer [in 1964], which was just droves and droves of kids from the North coming South, black and white, mostly white. [Editor's Note: Stymied by segregationist violence during its activities from 1961 to 1964, SNCC decided to expose the oppression its workers faced in Mississippi by creating the Mississippi Summer Project, later known as Freedom Summer. The project, spearheaded by SNCC's Robert Moses, brought in over a thousand, primarily white, volunteers from the North to register black voters in Mississippi. In mid-June 1964, the volunteers received training at Western College for Women in Ohio in voter registration tactics and voter education. Shortly after the campaign began, three volunteers, James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner, were murdered on June 21, 1964, near Philadelphia, Mississippi. The national outrage sparked by the injustices uncovered by the Mississippi Summer Project and the brazen murder of the activists led to public support for the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.] So, there's a lot of structure and formalized training and trying to manage that. ... In Southwest Georgia, there was, when I went, maybe ten people, maybe less. So, it was a conversation like this, sit around a table and talk. Sherrod believed in nonviolence--Cordell didn't, kids and guys in the Albany Movement didn't. We were, in many, many situations, protected by people who had weapons and who made sure we were safe, because they drove with us or in front of us or in back of us or sat out in a parking lot while a mass meeting was going on and made sure that they had guns showing through the windows and this kind of thing, or, you know, just sitting there with guns, local people. ... Sherrod, I don't think, tried to get us to believe; he probably tried to get us to believe, but he was satisfied if we accepted nonviolence as a tactic, which, if you couldn't deal with that, then, you had to leave, but this is the way we operated. "Here's how you protect yourself. Here's how you have to help protect other people." ... It wasn't a classroom kind of thing. Mississippi, with all of those people, yes, they were formalized and very structured things in the North before they came South, as well as when they came South.

SL: What was it like in jail for three months? How did you sustain yourself?

SI: Can we go back? I want you to tell the story of the night you were arrested, but you said you had been arrested before that.

DH: Yes, couple of times.

SI: Yes. How long would you be incarcerated?

DH: Two, three, four days.

SI: Yes.

SL: What would the charge be?

DH: Oh, you know. [Editor's Note: Mr. Harris gestures to illustrate that the legal charges varied.]

SL: Trespassing?

DH: Yes, something like that. I mean ...

SL: Disturbing the peace?

DH: You know, just to get you off the street, to break down the demonstration, if it was a demonstration. I was arrested in Albany once or twice and I was in Lee County jail. ... The whole jail and courthouse may have been as big as that room right there. ... When I went to Southwest Georgia, four or five years ago, Lee County jail is now ... bigger than a Wal-Mart, I mean, with barbed wire rings, I mean, it's just a massive jail, right. [laughter] I said, "Oh, God, look at what kind of progress the people made, bigger and better jails." [laughter] So, Lee County a couple of times, Americus a couple of times; ... again, the first year or two, SNCC was small, you know, relatively small. Everybody knew each other and there was a real sense of trust and camaraderie and, if something was going on someplace else, people'd get on the phone, "We need people to come over." So, I went to Mississippi a couple of times and, one time, got locked up in Greenwood, [Mississippi], for a day or two. ... They were, for the most part, you know, sort of harassment, get-the-people-off-the-street kind of things. ... After the first time, it really sort of became fairly perfunctory. The first time was sort of, "Oooh, this is interesting. How's it going to work?" and how much are the people going to rough you up or not. ...

SI: Was there a lot of physical abuse when they would arrest you or while you were in jail?

DH: Not much. I mean, I would say not much--you know, different circumstances and different situations, yes, there was, for different people. I personally didn't have too much difficulty. ... Almost all of the previous arrests, outside of the long-term thing in Americus, were, when you're locked up, you're locked up with colleagues, you know, other civil rights people. So, you're, you know, twelve in a cell for three, or something like that. ... As I recall, they weren't great events. They weren't things that made you swoon and fall over and I didn't have a sense that I was going to be there forever or whatever.

SL: Did that change when you were arrested for insurrection?

DH: A little bit, a little bit.

SL: You were not concerned. [laughter]

DH: Yes, yes.

SL: Did you know what that meant when you were first arrested, that it was a charge that carried a death penalty?

DH: No, no. ... Some of the related charges, riot and some of the other charges, were clearer to me. ... Insurrection seemed so preposterous that it was, you know, sort of out of the window. ... I was never in a situation of thinking, "Charges?" because ... you assumed you were going to get out-- didn't matter what the charge was. ... After about two weeks, you know, I said, "Hmm, this is starting [to drag on]; you know, this is probably going to go a little bit longer than [usual]." [laughter] You know, so, then, it starts, you know, ticking on you a little bit, "What's going on here?" What happened on the arrest? I've read accounts of what happened and they're clearer than what I remember, to tell you the truth. There was a mass meeting, not unlike any other mass meeting we held in Americus. ... At some point, Sherrod took a sabbatical from Southwest Georgia and I guess I was halfway the senior person there for a while and we had expanded to Sumter County. A couple of us had gone up to Sumter and stayed at, initially, at Koinonia Farm, which was a quasi-spiritual, ethical settlement by--okay, that's one I'll have to get you the name.

SL: Okay.

DH: Jordan, Jordan, related to Hamilton.

SL: Hamilton Jordan. [Editor's Note: Koinonia Farm (later Koinonia Partners) is a Christian commune founded by Clarence and Florence Jordan in 1942 to foster the values of equal rights, desegregation and nonviolence. The Jordans' nephew, Hamilton Jordan, served as White House Chief of Staff under President Jimmy Carter.]

DH: But, I'll get you the name on that. Anyway, so, we stayed there and it was sort of a cooperative, farm cooperative, that they integrated out in the middle of nowhere, but they had good land and they produced good crops and dit-dah, dit-dah, dit-dah, said, sure, we can [stay], you know. We stayed there. ... It was probably four, five miles outside of Americus. ... Over time, once people figured out who we were in Americus, the drive between Americus and the farm became increasingly perilous. That four or five miles became trickier and trickier, ... because, you know, you're just, boom, out there in the country by yourself. Once you turn into Koinonia, you're fine, but, before you got there, you're on your own.

SI: Would you see cars waiting for you up ahead and you would turn off the road?

DH: They'd follow, yes. There might be a car on the side, and then, it starts following you. You know, you've got somebody two cars or one car, you know, dead behind you, lights shining and honking the horn or, you know, that kind of stuff. You know, nothing happened, but there were lots of threats and a lot of yelling and carrying on. So, we went up and started. You know, this is a town of probably, oh, let's say, ten, twelve thousand, maybe smaller, to tell you the truth. A construction company--you follow football?--oh, Jesus, I just forgot his name. He played for the Dallas Cowboys, and then, he was a coach of the Dallas Cowboys. His father ran--there were

four boys--they ran a lumberyard and he was an end on the Dallas Cowboys for a number of years, and then, he became manager. I'll get you that name.

SI: We will put that in. [Editor's Note: Mr. Harris may be referring to Dan Reeves, who grew up in Americus and played, primarily as a running back, for the Dallas Cowboys from 1965 to 1972, then as an assistant coach of the team from 1972 to 1980. He later served as head coach of the Denver Broncos, New York Giants and the Atlanta Falcons.]

DH: Not that that's important. ... This is a small town, so, a couple of us went in and, eventually, you know, ... you start having conversations with the people. You get a minister to say, "Okay, you can have a meeting in our church on Tuesday nights at seven o'clock," or Thursday nights, or whatever. [We would] start having meetings and, mostly, it's kids at first, and then, you start getting others. Eventually, you move around to other churches and build up and build up. ... Then, the issue was trying to manage the kids, because, of course, the kids wanted to go out and, you know, have a demonstration the first day. ... There, you might try some, you know, training, ... because these are young kids. They were young, thirteen, twelve, thirteen, fourteen--not that we were that old, [laughter] but, I mean, comparatively, they were young. So, you'd start working on voter registration, but there was a great push from the young people to deal with public accommodations. Segregation in the movie theater was one. You know, kids are deeply into, you know, "Let's go to the movies. Let's demonstrate at the movies." A swimming pool, we got locked up [laughter] fooling around, trying to integrate the swimming pool one time, as I recall. We had, in Americus, the very good fortune ... of the funeral director, who was frequently ... somebody in the higher income [bracket], more stable kind of, and independent, kind of economic situation, joined us or was supportive and gave us cover and use of his facilities, and it was the mother, the son, the sister, you know. I mean, it was a big family, but they gave us a lot of support. So, the thing gained some momentum and strength fairly quickly and, you know, things were progressing along. ... I guess it was some sort of mix of voter registration, on the one hand, and direct action on another. At some point, we had this meeting at; I think it was Friendship Baptist Church. Whenever I went back there, a couple of years ago, there's the old church right here and a new, terrific, you know, very flash building, but they've kept the old one as a homeless shelter, which is very nice. So, you know, I really don't know what the hell happened. I mean, we had the mass meeting. It was over. We came out. We may have had planned a march to downtown, which is four or five blocks, but maybe not. I don't remember. ... The cops were out there and just decided to break the whole thing up and there were four of us, Ralph Allen, John Perdew, Zev Aelony, who's a CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] guy, and, frankly, how he was in the mix, I don't really remember, [laughter] but he was from CORE, and myself, were the clear "outside agitators," we were called. ... So, the cops just came down, boom, boom, boom, boom, and broke the thing up. ... They used billy clubs and cattle prods, electric shock things, and, very quickly, we were ... taken off to jail. ... As a result of that, there was just a continuous wave of demonstrations in Americus, mostly kids, you know, and up to about a thousand kids were jailed, so much so that they were pushing them out. ... They didn't have space for them in Americus. They were pushing them out and the kids were in Lee County and other jails in other counties. Now, we're sitting in jail, didn't know that much about the whole thing, to tell you the truth. The only visitors we had were C. B. King, our attorney, and, at some point, Bill Kunstler came to see me. ... There was sort of a conflict between [Kunstler and King]. Well, you know, let's say I was months or more in jail and Bill

came. ... Of course, my parents were trying to do whatever they could to try and get me out. They got the NAACP Legal Defense Fund involved and, even though C. B. was tangentially related to the Legal Defense Fund, they wanted, you know, Kunstler's from New York, so, they got Kunstler. Kunstler came down. He said, "I'm going to take over the case," and I said, "You're not taking over shit," pardon my language. "C. B. is my lawyer. Whatever you want to do, you talk to C. B." ... Of course, that created all sorts of confusion and shockwaves, but C. B. had, in every other instance, except when I was locked up in Greenwood, Mississippi, been my, you know, *our*, lawyer and a wonderful lawyer at that. So, I certainly, at that point, even though I knew Bill and knew who he was [he said], "Yes, your parents want me to do this and we can do that," and dit-dah, dit-dah, dit-dah, I said, you know, "Not a chance. I mean, C. B. is it." ... So, I guess after that, my mother came down. That's when my mother came down. Yes, so, that was it. What was jail like? Ralph, Zev and John are white. Those three guys are white. To varying degrees, they had a fair amount of difficulty, because we were put in with the regular prison population. Zev was--he's since passed--I wouldn't say he was a Hassidic Jew, but he was Orthodox [Jewish] to the point where he was visibly different, okay. ... He wouldn't be particularly noticeable on the streets of New York, but he'd be very visibly different in rural Sumter County.

SL: Did he wear braids?

DH: Not that he had braids or a yarmulke.

SL: No yarmulke?

DH: He may have, but I don't think so, but he was just visibly different. So, he had a tough time.

SL: Were you all in the same cell or were you segregated?

DH: Segregated.

SL: Yes.

DH: Segregated. So, that's what I'm saying. They had [difficulties], to different degrees, and part of Zev's stuff was that he was just, [to the other inmates], different and strange and looked funny and had a strange name. ... John and Ralph had different stuff. You know, I was in with the regular prison population--you know, a guy who beat up his wife or robbed a bank or stole a car. ... I'm in there with regular guys in jail. I was, you know, strange to them, but I was the right kind of guy, freedom fighter, heroic is probably a little bit strong, but, you know, somebody to be respected to some degree. So, I didn't have a terrifically bad time, from that standpoint. What I would say is that jail is a very [demeaning place]. You know, the longer you're there, ... people become less humane the longer you're there. So, the regular stuff that goes on in prison went on there. ... You haven't got anything to do, so, you think of things that are not very nice to do. You take toilet paper, you wrap it around somebody's arms and legs, ... while they're sleeping, and you set it on fire and the guy wakes up and he's on fire. ... That's pretty good for a while, but, then, somebody says, "Well, let's do it with lighter fluid." Okay, so, you put [lighter

fluid on a sleeping person]. So, if you wake up and the toilet paper [is on fire], you pull it off. ... If it's lighter fluid, there's nothing to do. ... It's those kinds of things, which are, quote, "fun" and I wasn't immune from that. So, I mean, yes, I was a good guy, but, if you're going to be a good guy, you've got to be one of the boys and you're either going to play with us or you're not. ... I mean, there was stuff that happened, you know.

SL: Did you try to organize at all?

DH: No, no.

SL: Did you talk about the struggle?

DH: No, no.

SL: No. You were just more concerned about getting through the day.

DH: I wasn't concerned. I was just, you know, "We're not going anyplace. We're all in here for a while." [laughter]

SL: Did you understand that this was a capital offense or did that not occur to you?

DH: I understood that it was a capital offense. ... Not for a minute did I think it was going to get to that stage.

SL: C. B. King told you that.

DH: No.

SL: No?

DH: No, I just [knew it]. Not for a minute, literally not for one minute, did I ever [think it would get to that point]--I knew I was going to get out.

SL: Did you know ...

DH: Now, it started to get to be a long time, but I knew that I was going to get out. I was not in there for twenty years or ten years ...

SL: Right.

SL: Did you know that Rutgers was trying to collect money to send for your support or did that news not get to you?

DH: I did subsequently. You know, you're not getting information. [laughter] ... Very few people are sending you cards and letters. [laughter] I mean, you know, I would get something from my parents. ... I think two things happened that were very important. One, my parents,

again, you know, pooled all of their energies and strength and resources and started fundraising and organizing people, Fieldston parents, ... one of whom was a very good friend. The wife of the publisher, Simon & Schuster, was terrifically helpful. [Editor's Note: Mr. Harris is most likely referring to Andrea Heinemann Simon, widow of Richard L. Simon, who co-founded Simon & Schuster. Mrs. Simon was known for her support of the Civil Rights movement and her husband, who passed away in 1960, had been an alumnus of the Ethical Culture School.] So, they were organizing. Students who I had been in school with, and younger students, were organizing at Rutgers. ... Of course, the legal activity, you know, associated with SNCC was operating as well, but you're sitting in there--you don't know what's going on. C. B. comes to see you once every two, three weeks. You know, you have a half-an-hour conversation with him and, boom, he's gone. He's got other stuff to do.

SI: Did your mother come just that one time or did she stay?

DH: One time, one time for a half an hour, with C. B., I'm sure, and, you know, that was it, boom.

SL: Did they try you at all or was this on appeal to get your incarceration thrown out? Was there actually a trial for insurrection?

DH: No, oh, no, never got that far. ... We went to court maybe--to a courtroom--maybe three times. The third time, we got out, or we're, you know, on our way out.

SL: That was in federal court.

DH: We went to local court to get indicted. We had some sort of hearing, after a month or six weeks. You know, you're sitting up in court there and you don't know what they're doing and, boom, we're back in jail. ... Then, at the end, there was another hearing. I don't think we--no, we didn't go to federal court.

SL: Okay.

DH: There's no federal court in Americus. So, it got to federal court. We went to the local court and it was thrown out. ... So, then, we had a day or two and they released us, but, yes, there was a tremendous amount of activity going on in Denver, where John Perdew was from. ... His parents did a lot in Denver. My parents did [contact politicians], you know, Harrison Williams [U.S. Senator from New Jersey], was contacted, [along with] whoever else was the other Senator [Clifford Case], at the time. I don't remember. ... Certainly, Harrison Williams, I've seen articles where he is in support. My uncle in Ohio got an Ohio Congressman involved--all this kind of stuff. [Editor's Note: Harrison A. "Pete" Williams, Jr., a Democrat, served New Jersey in the US Senate from 1959 to 1982. Clifford P. Case, a Republican, served New Jersey in the US Senate from 1955 to 1979.]

SL: In New York?

DH: Oh, yes, yes.

SL: A Senator?

DH: Javits.

SL: Javits.

DH: Jake Javits, and others.

SL: Keating, Ken Keating. [Editor's Note: Jacob K. Javits, a Republican, served New York in the US Senate from 1957 to 1981. Kenneth B. Keating, a Republican, served New York in the US Senate from 1959 to 1965.]

DH: Yes, yes. So, there was as much political pressure as, I guess, could be exerted. ... Following, I certainly did go back to Rutgers and, I think, make a speech or did something and saw Abernethy at that time. [Editor's Note: Rutgers University's Special Collections and University Archives' online collection "History of College Life--Civil Rights and Vietnam" features a letter written by Don Harris to Bradford Abernethy in 1963.]

NH: I think there is a letter from your father to Abernethy, when you were still in prison.

DH: Oh, okay.

NH: About organizing things. Somebody said that Charles Sherrod actually came to speak at a rally at Rutgers while you were in prison.

DH: Oh, that could be. I think I remember that.

NH: Yes, I think that is in one of the *Targum* articles.

DH: Yes, yes.

SL: Did Sherrod come back to Southwest Georgia? You said he had been on a sabbatical while this was going on. Did he come back while this was going on?

DH: He was away and he came back. What the timeframe was, I don't remember.

SL: Right. When you were released from jail, you stayed, right? You continued to do your work in Southwest Georgia.

DH: Yes, yes. I came up North and did some speaking on behalf of SNCC, ... but, yes, I continued. One of the things, in retrospect, I really never appropriately thanked many people, because I didn't figure out, until years later, how much people had done. Fieldston and Fieldston parents, parents of people that were in my class, contributed money, but I didn't have a sense of the extent of that. When I came back, I came back, obviously, to see my parents for a week or so, make some speeches, travel around, and then, went back. ... I probably made a speech at

Fieldston, probably made a speech at Rutgers and some other places, just generally raising funds for SNCC, but I did not, until years later and saw some letters that my parents had written and, you know, ... was I aware of the extent and the amount and the time and effort that my parents had put in and, you know, how desperate it all must have seemed, you know, from afar, versus where we were, and, as I said, not for a minute did it cross my mind that ... you were going to the gallows. I mean, that was not in the cards--naïve.

SL: Right.

DH: Naïve, but, I mean, it was just [that] that's where I was in terms of my head and age. ...

SL: Let us stop now.

NH: Yes.

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: Let us begin again.

DH: Yes, one of the things I will say about SNCC, and I think it's important to say about SNCC, is, certainly, when I went in in '62, and before the organization overwhelmed itself with the Mississippi Summer Freedom Project, it was small enough and there was an extraordinary relationship among the people. Hopefully, you've had a sense of that as you've researched and talked, but, I mean, the level of trust and confidence and belief and camaraderie, in part because of the danger. I mean, yes, there was some danger there and we knew it. Some of us thought we were immune to it. ... It brought us together in a belief in what we were doing, a belief in each other and an unconditional trust that no one would corrupt ... what we were trying to achieve. ... I think, if you look back at SNCC, as an organization, there was never, ever a claim of internal corruption, of somebody selling out or somebody doing something for personal gain or that kind of thing, I mean, which is extraordinary, if you think about it. ... I just wanted to say that and I think that's important. So, in 19--, I think it was '64, yes, it was '64, I don't know, at some meeting, ... there was a discussion. Harry Belafonte had offered us, some people, a chance to take a trip to Guinea and meet with the youth ... movement in Guinea and get a little rest and a change of scene. ... There were going to be, I don't know, twelve, fourteen or "X" number of places. By this time, I'd started thinking a little. You know, the things had cranked up a little bit and I'm beginning to have some [ideas]. Now, nobody else had been to Africa; I'd been to Africa. I said, ... "This is what you want to do." [laughter] ... It was very clear in my mind that this was a trip you should get on, and so, I don't know if I connived or what, I don't remember, but I do remember, when I heard [about] the trip, I said, "Oh, I've got to go on this." [laughter] When I got on it, when I was selected, among the other people to go, it turned out, it was October, or September, probably. [Editor's Note: Singer Harry Belafonte arranged to have Civil Rights workers spend three weeks in Guinea at the invitation of his friend and the nation's president, Sekou Toure. The group left the United States on September 11, 1964, and included Fannie Lou Hamer, Bob and Dona Moses, James Forman, Julian Bond, John Lewis, William Hansen, Ruby Doris Robinson, Prathia Hall and Matthew Jones, as well as Mr. Harris.]

SL: It would have been after Freedom Summer.

DH: It was in the fall.

SL: Yes, the fall after Freedom Summer.

DH: And so, independence in Zambia was October 28th, or thereabouts. [Editor's Note: Zambia formally declared its independence from the United Kingdom on October 24, 1964.] So, I said, "Okay, I'm going to raise me some money and, if you're three-quarters of the way there, even though it's another two thousand miles, [laughter] I'm going to get the rest of the way to Lusaka." ... I don't know how, John and I had, by that time, become very good friends, close, personal friends.

SL: This is John Lewis. [Editor's Note: John Lewis served as chairman of SNCC from 1963 to 1966. Lewis, a Democrat, has represented Georgia's Fifth Congressional District in the US House of Representatives since 1987.]

DH: John Lewis. ... So, I clearly discussed it with John and said it was probably a good thing for him, the Chairman of SNCC. ... He started thinking about it. My cousin, one of my mother's brother's daughters, had married a Ghanaian. They lived in Accra. So, long story short, John and I raised some separate money and planned this trip afterwards. So, we did the trip with the group to Guinea and Harry. ... Incredibly--really, going back to stuff in Southwest Georgia or Mississippi, or whenever, to this trip, we were all doing what we thought was God's work and weren't thinking about history and were suspicious of people with cameras--so, there were no cameras, right. [laughter] You've got sixteen people going to Guinea to meet the President of Guinea, not one camera on the trip, not one. [laughter] There was a little snippet in some HBO film of Harry's ...

SL: Right.

DH: ... But, it's literally about thirty seconds of that trip, but that's all. [Editor's Note: Mr. Harris may be referring to *Sing Your Song*, a 2011 documentary on Harry Belafonte's career in the entertainment industry and his activities as a Civil Rights activist that aired on HBO.] So, we go on the trip and we met all sorts of people, did all sorts of fabulous things, saw the National Ballet of Guinea perform at night, outside, under the stars, you know, I mean, spectacular kind of stuff that you'd want to keep forever, and you do keep forever in your head, but not the first photograph. [laughter] So, we're about to leave Guinea. Whatever little money we have, I get hooked up with somebody in a market and he tricks us, tricks me, out of the money. You know, [it was] some sort of money-change deal and, of course, he gives me Guinea francs or whatever the hell it was, which wasn't worth, you know, a subway token. So, we have plane tickets from Conakry, Liberia, Accra, Zambia, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Cairo, back through Europe, fine. We've probably got thirty, forty to fifty dollars between us, total. So, again, you know, it's sort of, okay, boom, we get on the plane and start going. [In] Liberia, I don't know what we did. You know, we had SNCC related events and press conferences and meetings with various officials, in almost every stop. ... In Ghana, my cousin was there. We met with all manner of people out at Legon and the University of Ghana and a lot of expats [expatriates]. Malcolm X

had been there two weeks before we got there, and so, we were judged by young people and people who were in local movements against whatever Malcolm had said. ... We attended an event and John and I talked afterwards and we came out a little weak compared to Malcolm. [laughter] ... We talked and we had to pay attention to that. We had to manage that--not that we changed what we said or what we stood for or what we believed or anything, but we had to just pay attention to it. ... Now, John was far more on the nonviolence, *Beloved Community* side than I was. So, we just had to manage that and it was interesting, but I remember having to pay attention to how we presented ourselves, based on the fact that he had been there so recently, and [the locals said], "Here's what he said. What are you saying?" kind of stuff. Then, remarkably, on the flight to Lusaka, to Zambia independence, there's a guy that I met ... when I was there in '61, who's a professor at some university by now. He's going back. So, I said, "Harry, we've got fifty dollars here. ... Can you give us a ride in?" "Sure, okay." So, he gave us a ride in from the airport, so that, you know, we saved that right there. ... In some kind of way, he may have hooked us up. He may not, but we ended up staying with people. "Oh, these are the people from the United States, from SNCC, youth movement, Southern Movement, whatever. They haven't got a place to stay." Terrific, boom--people put us up and fed us and whatever all else, and we were guests at the independence ceremonies and met with people and did whatever. I saw people that I still had some contacts from when I was there before, not many. ... Several of the people I knew had moved to very significant positions and, of course, Kaunda was about to be ... inaugurated president. So, I really couldn't even get to them anymore, at that point, but I had enough contacts to be able to keep us afloat and get through, you know, how ever long we were there. And, we were the only "student Civil Rights Leaders from America" at the for independence ceremonies. For some reason, I got sunstroke and I had to drink some yellow stuff, a big, tall bottle of yellow, strange stuff. I don't know why I got sunstroke or what the circumstance was, but I remember I missed a couple of events because I had to stay laying down for a day or two. We go to Nairobi. ... I'm not going to remember this. I don't remember whether we were in the same hotel as Malcolm X or not.

SL: Was this just you and John Lewis?

DH: Just John and me.

SL: Yes.

DH: Just John and me. I think we were in different hotels; In any case, we just came across each other one day. We just passed each other in a lobby or someplace and [said], "Hey. How you doing? What's happening?" dit-dah, dit-dah, dit-dah. "Listen, let's get together." "Okay," come to his hotel room.

SL: This was with Malcolm X.

DH: Malcolm, yes; tomorrow at two o'clock, or this afternoon at three o'clock or whatever.

SL: Did he remember you from the earlier meeting?

DH: Oh, absolutely, absolutely, and he knew John.

SL: Right.

DH: ... It wasn't a big introduction. So, we went and we had a terrific conversation, you know, about, "What are you doing? What are we doing? Where are you in your head in the movement? Here's where we think we are." By background and very significantly, I'm having a terrific time. I mean, I'm going to independence ... in Zambia, I'm going to Kenya, it's meeting people, having a good time. It's not familiar, but I've been there to Africa before. ... I'm having a great time. John is having a great time, too, but somewhat more preoccupied by the fact that he's chairman of SNCC and he's eight thousand miles away from where he's supposed to be chairman, and he had been away for four or five weeks and would not get back to Atlanta for several more weeks. I'm less preoccupied about not being in Southwest Georgia. I'm having a terrific time. The subtext is, while we are away, there's the beginning rumblings of, "Listen, John's been a little too passive, too whatever. We need to start thinking about getting a new chairman." So, this is going on in Atlanta. John is not quite aware of it, but aware that, you know, you're away too long, stuff happens. I'm not aware of it at all and couldn't care less and having a terrific time. So, we have a good conversation with Malcolm. I mean, I can't tell you the details, but what I can say is, he talked about where he was, which was changing from hard Black Muslim dogma to, "We have to internationalize. We have to globalize. Freedom movements are connected. They must be inclusive, rather than exclusive," ... that kind of thing. We were, "We're in the process of internationalizing. We're talking with youth groups in Guinea. We met people in Legon right after you were there in Ghana. ... We're going from here to Cairo to spend time with," Shirley [Graham] Du Bois's kid, Shirley Du Bois's son, David Dubois.

SL: I do not know.

NH: Yes.

SL: I do not know. You can add this. [Editor's Note: Mr. Harris is referring to David Graham Du Bois, a journalist and professor, who was the stepson of W. E. B. Du Bois.]

NH: Yes.

SL: I do not know the name.

DH: Jesus; anyway, Shirley Du Bois, W. E. B. Du Bois' wife ...

NH: Wife.

DH: Wife, child by a second marriage.

SL: She was Graham.

DH: Yes, Shirley Graham.

NH: Shirley Graham Du Bois.

DH: It'll come to me. So, we have a great two-hour conversation, "Terrific. Good to see you. See you back in the States," boom, gone. We do whatever else we do in Nairobi and go to Addis [Ababa]. In Addis, John, I think, makes a call back to Atlanta, gets a sense that things are even worse than he may have thought before and wants to go to the US embassy to hear or watch--not watch, I guess, hear--the US election results. It's November. We have a sort of [argument], "What the hell do you need to see the election results for right away? We're here. ... This is what the people want to do for us. We need to go see this." ... So, we have a scrap. I say, "You go see your election results. I'm going," wherever I'm going. So, we split up and pout for a day or two. ... I did whatever our agenda was and he ... did his agenda with the US ambassador and embassy types. ... So, then, we travel to Egypt and in some way got in from the Cairo airport, but we're going to stay with him. You know, we're desperate on money by this time. In some kind of way, we're going to stay with David Du Bois. ... We get to his house. Nobody's there and [we] sort of try and talk to people, "You know [him]?" "Yes, he's here. He'll be back at some point." So, we sit out in a café for maybe thirty hours, drinking tea. ... He finally comes back, but we've been sitting out in the street for literally thirty hours. ... At that time, in 1964, all of the countries that hadn't achieved independence by then had offices and expat offices in Cairo. ... We had, you know, maybe a weeklong [schedule] of meetings with all of them. ... The whole issue for us was trying to get a resolution before the United Nations that the United States was treating African-Americans [and] others against the UN Human Rights Convention, and so, we were trying to promote that. So, we had, you know, a great time, meeting with groups and trying to explain the situation in the United States, asking for their support. Of course, they weren't even countries, [laughter] so, they couldn't even [vote in the UN], but they had representation. ... It was all in the movement and the spirit and everybody was energized. It was a lot of work and it was terrific. Then, we came back. I stayed in New York. John went straight to Atlanta. ... His chairmanship [of SNCC] was shaky, on its way downhill at that point. ... I'm not sure, had he returned with the group from Guinea, whether he would have been in any better shape, to tell you the truth, but it was the beginning of the movement with Stokely and the group from Washington, DC, to change, you know, both the structure and the tone and the direction of SNCC. [Editor's Note: Civil Rights activist Stokely Carmichael unseated John Lewis as chairman of SNCC in 1966 and led the organization towards the Black Power philosophy. He severed ties with SNCC in 1967 to join the Black Panther Party.] ... So, that was the beginnings of it, but it was happening, interestingly, while we were sitting in a hotel room talking with Malcolm about the directions we were going and the direction was internationalizing on both of our parts. ... I think John was far more aware of, you know, had a sense of an undercurrent than I did.

SL: By the way, how did you stay out of the military during those years? You had a student deferment, I assume, at Rutgers.

DH: Yes.

SL: However, once you graduated ...

DH: I worked at it, lots of letters, pacifist. ... No, no, take that out, I was not. No, no, you can leave it on, but the pacifist is wrong. That's all I'm saying. ... [laughter]

SL: Conscientious objector?

DH: Yes, yes, exactly, exactly. ... I have seen, not recently, but, you know, some years ago, a letter that I wrote.

NH: The draft board?

DH: Draft board, saying why I shouldn't be drafted, which was horrible, but, that's what was filed away.

SL: Did they respond to it?

DH: You know, I just stayed out. I mean, oddly, I was in, I hadn't thought of this until you mentioned it, the ROTC.

NH: Yes.

SI: Yes.

DH: ... I have no idea why I was in that. [laughter] You know, the uniforms were sort of spiffy and I have a picture of my mother and I. ...

SL: Was it mandatory in those days at Rutgers?

DH: No.

SL: To be in ROTC?

SI: I think it went out just about the time you were graduating, so, it probably was mandatory. [Editor's Note: ROTC service became voluntary during the 1959-1960 school year. Prior to that, service during the freshman and sophomore years was compulsory.]

SL: It probably was mandatory.

DH: Oh, really?

SI: When you went in.

DH: Oh.

SI: As a land-grant college.

DH: Oh, okay.

SL: That is probably what it was.

DH: Okay. Yes, I mean, I couldn't see. I certainly couldn't go in the Air Force, but, oh, no, I was not [in the service].

SL: You leave the movement in what year, 1965? You leave Georgia, Southwest Georgia.

DH: Yes. ... You must have asked, Shaun, what did we do? At some point, I was out in "the rural," as they say, walking down a dirt road and I said to myself, "This is about it. I can't take this too much further." I didn't want to walk that much further. You know, it just wasn't going anyplace. I mean, I wasn't going to spend the rest of my life trying to register rural people to vote, whereas some people in SNCC were prepared, are prepared, to spend basically the rest of their life organizing, in that way, Sherrod being one of them. [He] organized a tremendous Southwest Georgia Project and [is] getting, I've forgotten the exact number right off the top of my head, but, you know, just last year, the Congress approved thirty million dollars ... for black farmers who had been cheated.

SL: Right.

NH: Farmer cooperatives.

DH: Right, yes.

SL: Yes.

DH: Now, that took years and years and years and years to achieve.

SL: Shirley Sherrod was very active in that.

DH: Yes.

NH: Yes.

DH: Yes, but Sherrod started the thing, then, they got married. ... She worked for, of course, the Department of Agriculture. [Editor's Note: Mr. Harris is referring to the settlement of a class-action lawsuit against the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that was reopened later by Congress. The USDA has paid out an estimated one billion dollars to compensate for decades of discrimination against African American farmers, including Charles and Shirley Sherrod, co-founders of New Communities.]

NH: [laughter] Yes.

DH: But, you know, I just didn't see it in that way, for me. ... So, it's '65. You know, I don't even remember when [March], but, at some point, I just came back and that's when I started, down there, applying to law school. I wanted, as I said, I wanted to be C. B. King. ...

SI: You had met your wife before. You had been corresponding or in touch.

DH: We're both from New York.

SI: Okay.

DH: So, you know, we'd known who each other was from probably tenth grade, eleventh grade, and, seen each other periodically.

SL: Where? There are a lot of people in New York [laughter] and she is from Hastings-[on-Hudson] and you are from Mount Vernon and the Bronx.

DH: Yes.

SL: Where were you connected?

DH: You know, you're talking about the black community now.

SL: Was this in Harlem?

DH: The black community in New York. She's going to college, I'm going to college, we're the same age, ... you know, you're going to bump into each other.

SL: Right.

DH: The number of working-class, middle-class black kids who are going to college are going to hit each other at some point in the same city. I mean, that was it.

SL: Did you know who her parents were before you met her? Did you know of Kenneth and Mamie Clark? [Editor's Note: Dr. Kenneth B. Clark (1914-2005) and Dr. Mamie Phipps Clark (1917-1983) were renowned educational psychologists and Civil Rights leaders. Their research disproved racist theories that black and white children had different mental abilities and demonstrated the negative impact segregation had on the self-image of African-American children. The Clarks' work played a role in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that desegregated the American public education system. They founded the Northside Center for Child Development in Harlem, which Mr. Harris' wife, Kate Clark Harris, directed in the mid to late 1980s.]

DH: I knew she had parents and [had] probably seen her parents.

SL: Because you said, earlier, you were not aware of a lot of the 1950s events going on.

DH: No, I knew her parents.

SL: Yes.

DH: That's all, and that's all they were.

SL: Right, right.

DH: A friend of ours, then and now, [her] father was [photographer, filmmaker, writer and musician] Gordon Parks. I knew Gordon Parks. It was the girl's father. He wasn't Gordon Parks. [laughter] You know, that's who people were. I mean, they weren't famous.

SL: Right.

NH: Yes.

DH: All right, they weren't important. Robert C. Weaver, I knew Bobby Weaver, the kid. [Editor's Note: Robert C. Weaver was the first US Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and the first African-American appointed to a cabinet level position.]

SL: Yes.

DH: So, yes, you knew who it was, but, I mean, ... it's his father, rather than an important person.

SI: How soon after coming back from the South did you get married?

DH: We got married in May, 1965--we were going together before ... John and I and the SNCC people went to Africa, because there was some pressure about, "Well, what's going to happen?" that kind of thing, from her parents. ... I said, "Oh, not to worry. This is an eleven-day trip. We'll be back in eleven days." ... Of course, we were over there for, you know, four months, right, [laughter] ... or I was over there for four months. ... We had met and were dating and all that. She was standing at the airport almost when I got, off the plane, and I said, "Oh, Jesus, that's a lot of heat here." [laughter] ... It was happening before that trip, yes.

SL: Where did you live when you got married?

DH: ... Columbia [University] owned houses on 125th Street and Riverside Drive.

SL: Yes, right.

DH: That were new at that time, just ... north of Riverside Church. ... We lived in there for a while, then, we moved to Cambridge, [Massachusetts]. ...

SL: Where did you go after you left Harvard?

DH: We were in Boston. I worked for a program called ABC, ... A Better Chance, a prep school program that took--takes, still going on,--takes disadvantaged urban kids, at that time, put them through a rigorous summer program, and then, into private boarding schools, and so, I

worked with that for a couple of years. My claim to fame, is, I was the one who reviewed and accepted Deval Patrick's application and sent him to Concord [Milton Academy], I think it was. [laughter] I didn't find that out until after he became Governor. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Deval Patrick, a Democrat, has served as Governor of Massachusetts since 2007. He is the first African-American to hold that office.] Yes, so, that was ABC. I worked for ABC for a while, then, ... came to New York, worked at the Ford Foundation for, let's say three years, in education, had an opportunity to work with Mario Fantini, Marilyn Gittell, Marv Feldman, and, tangentially, Kate's father. ... I was getting sort of into education a bit, on decentralization [with] Kate's father, but Fantini and Marilyn Gittell on community control of the schools.

SL: Okay. I know where this is going. [Editor's Note: Dr. Lawson is referring to the experiment in community control in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville school district during the 1967-1968 school year. Initiated at the recommendation of a panel chaired by McGeorge Bundy, the experiment in decentralization was funded by the Ford Foundation. Rhody McCoy served as the first superintendent of the Ocean-Hill Brownsville district in Brooklyn, which served a primarily African-American community.]

DH: Kenneth wasn't on the community control of the schools side, but we were, Rhody McCoy, from Brooklyn and whoever from [Intermediate School] 201 in Harlem [David Spencer?]; so, did that. ... [I] met and worked with some people at the Rockefeller Foundation, in the process. At that point, I started going back to school, decided to get a degree in urban education. Marilyn was at City University at the time. So, suddenly, school is remarkably easy and, you know, no issue, right. Now, I'm working. I have ... a kid or two. I'm going to school. For some reason, I sign up for a statistics course, cannot do math, do not understand the stuff. An [snaps his fingers], "A." I said, "Well, damn, I can do this stuff." ... The teacher, ... he compiled statistics for, did the data for, the New York City Police Department. So, it's practical stuff. It wasn't [abstract], you know, and I think that's what began to do it for me, you know, "Here's how the stuff is used. Here's what it's about. Here's why [and] how you apply this, as opposed to whatever you were doing in high school and whatever you're doing in college, and Harvard, for that matter. Yes, at Harvard, for that matter--I would put them in that category as well. ... At that time, it was all sort of airy-fairy kind of stuff, although there were some very good professors, and so forth. So, I went to City University, got up to the point of getting the degree and had to write a paper, but never wrote the paper, but I was happy. I figured out what I needed to figure out. ... Then, [Walter] Mondale, some kind of way, I believe that the people at Ford [Foundation], set something up ... with me for Mondale--I mean, in retrospect, nobody ever said anything--but ... it all just sort of fell in my lap, "Come work with [Senator] Mondale in Washington." He was starting a committee on education, and so, the committee was supposed to go for six months. It went for three years. ... I worked with Mondale and we had every educator of every stripe, from college professors to kindergarten teachers, from rural areas to cities to whatever all else in at some point in hearings, as well as, you know, all manner of other people, specialists, and did that for about three years. [Editor's Note: Walter F. Mondale, Democrat, served as a US Senator from Minnesota from 1964 to 1976. He served as Vice President of the United States from 1977 to 1981 under President Jimmy Carter.]

SL: You mentioned Mondale, which makes me think back just for a second. Did you go, in 1964, to Atlantic City for the [Democratic National] Convention challenge? [Editor's Note: In

April 1964, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was established as a progressive alternative to the state's all-white Democratic Party. Building up a base for the MFDP was a major goal of the Mississippi Summer Project. In August, the MFDP attempted to have its delegates to the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, seated as the legitimate delegates. After protests and a series of televised testimonies by Fannie Lou Hamer and others before the Convention Credentials Committee, support started to swing to the MFDP, but the Democratic national leadership feared alienating Southern whites in the upcoming Presidential election. Vice President Hubert Humphrey and Walter Mondale helped craft a compromise which would have given the MFDP two at-large seats, with no voting power, while leaving the all-white delegation in place. The MFDP rejected the compromise and continued to protest their treatment.]

DH: No.

SL: Okay.

DH: No, no.

SL: Because Mondale was one of the brokers of the compromise.

DH: Yes, yes.

SL: That is why I wanted to know.

DH: No, no. ...

[TAPE PAUSED]

SI: You were talking about joining Kenneth Gibson's Mayor's Education Task Force in Newark, New Jersey. [Editor's Note: Kenneth A. Gibson served as Mayor of Newark from 1970 to 1986, the first African-American to hold the office. He was also elected President of the US Conference of Mayors in 1976.]

DH: ... From Mondale, I left to come to Newark, to work for Ken Gibson at the Mayor's Education Task Force and, over time, became one of his assistants on, just regular stuff, but worked in Newark for about three years, took a break, came back for another six months or so later on. At that time, Mondale, when he was running for Vice-President, I was sort of on the staff as Northeastern kind of organizer for him and, when he'd come up to the Northeast, I'd be part of the advance team ... I'd take, you know, a bit of time off from Ken Gibson to go do that. Ken, being a Democrat, was happy to, you know, let me go for brief periods ...

SL: How did you go from 1964, when John Lewis wanted to watch the election returns and you did not care ... [laughter]

DH: Yes.

SL: ... To now campaigning for Walter Mondale and Jimmy Carter in 1976?

DH: Yes, yes.

SL: What was your thinking there? Do you remember?

DH: I don't think it's, you know, "I'm going to make this arc." I think it's a process, I mean, an evolving process, and, certainly, the pathway was not, "I'm going to go work in Washington for a politician," [it was], "I'm going to work in education for somebody who happens to be a politician." Once getting to Washington, one of the very great things was, when I interviewed for the job, I had a conversation with Mondale's staff, which I didn't know what I was asking for or what they were asking of me, it seemed to go okay, and then I had a very comfortable, relaxed conversation with Mondale when I met him. I guess I wasn't fully appreciative of how important Senators were or at least what influence they had. So, I was very relaxed. We had a great conversation, as I recall. ... I said, "Yes, I'll come do it." Six months, it was going to be short term, whatever. The money was going to be very good. ... I was commuting. It was short term. Mondale ... had one of the best, most efficient, professional staffs on the Hill, bar none. I didn't know that. I mean, it was a work environment. I came in. "Here's what you're supposed to do." I started doing it, to the best I could. You know, eventually, my level of production improved and increased. One of Mondale's very strange ... things he did was, "Listen, I have to make a speech three months from now. Shaun, why don't you think about it and give me some thoughts, bullet points, on a piece of paper?" About two weeks later, "Steve, listen, I've been thinking about this speech a little bit. Here's a couple of ideas I have. Steve, why don't you put together a first draft?" I mean, he didn't say shit to you, right. [laughter] You're still working on your stuff. [laughter] A couple [weeks later], "Nancy, listen, here's what I really want to say at this thing. See if you can start [on it]." [laughter] Now, at some point, you know, you're Shaun, you're saying, "What the hell? Here's all of these people working [on it]. ... I'm killing myself." ... Now, he has advanced from where he thought he was here to where Nancy is, right--so, you're still back here. She's writing, you know, ... two weeks ahead of you on this draft, but it was competitive in that sense, so, you had to catch up fast. ... It was a terrific staff, terrific staff. Now, you fall into that without knowing what you're doing. You end up up here. ... It wasn't a stretch, whereas [if] you'd come in and somebody says, "Listen, this is the toughest environment you're ever going to be in. You're going to be struggling," I didn't know that. I just sort of walked in and that's what it was. So, Mondale was a great thing, but I wasn't there for the long-term politics.

SL: Right.

DH: Now, once I got there, saw him operate--and [Edward] Brooke was on the committee, Birch Bayh was on the committee, I don't know, a lot of good people were on the committee, so, you saw smart people, good politicians--I learned a tremendous amount. [Editor's Note: Edward William Brooke, III, a Republican, served as US Senator from Massachusetts from 1967 to 1979. Birch Bayh, a Democrat, served as US Senator from Indiana from 1963 to 1981.] Billy Stafford, from SNCC, Walter Stafford, worked in the Atlanta office mostly, ... anyway, was on the Hill also, he worked for a Pennsylvania Republican [Senator Richard Schweiker]. ... He and I were the closest of friends until he died a couple of years ago, in some ways, closer than John [Lewis]

and I. Billy attended every birthday, every graduation, every marriage, every funeral ... in my family, kids, you know, all of that kind of stuff. Yes, John attended a lot of those as well, [laughter] but Billy, ... he was in New York when we were there.

SL: When Mondale and Carter won, was there any overture for you to work for their administration?

DH: Kate wanted me to go back and work, and John went ... back and worked at Peace Corps.

SL: VISTA.

DH: VISTA?

SL: He was the assistant director or associate director.

DH: Was it VISTA? [Editor's Note: In 1977, President Jimmy Carter appointed John Lewis to direct the federal volunteer agency ACTION, which included VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) and the Peace Corps.]

SL: I thought it was VISTA.

DH: Yes, may have been. Kate wanted me to go back. ... I wasn't that [interested], I don't know, for whatever reason, and I wasn't that hot on just a position in the administration. If you're on a committee staff, you have close and immediate contact with the Senator. You're designing questions. You're telling him, "Go this direction. Go that direction." You know more information about stuff than he does, presumably, and so, you're guiding the whole thing. Now, that's pretty close contact; to Gibson, same kind of staff relationship, eventually. You know, first, it was [being on the] task force, but it was contact with him, "Mayor, here's what you should do." ... It was appointments to the board of education and, when it became broader, appointments to other kinds of things. ... Newark is, and remains, and remains, as the current mayor [Cory Booker] has figured out, a very insular place. ... I've been living in Westchester with three kids and Kate, at that time. I'm driving back and forth to Newark, New Jersey, to the mayor's office, as an outsider. ... "First, who the hell are you? You're not from New Jersey. Why aren't you living here? You don't talk like us," you know, whatever all else. ... There's the whole outsider thing, again, all over again. So, it was overcoming that. ... It was a relationship with, "Here's ... our guy, our mayor, and here's somebody whispering in his ear--an outsider--influencing, perhaps, who's going to be appointed to this position or some position he's going to take on whatever local issue." Now, he became President [of] ... the national Conference of Mayors. Okay, so, I was working with him on that. And one of the other staff guys and I got Ken, to go back to the international issues: we started writing papers and sending them to Andy Young [US Ambassador to the United Nations from 1977 to 1979] at the UN. I mean, ... my notion was to broaden him outside of this Mayor of Newark, to make him a force, a political force. I mean, I was going in that direction.

SL: Was this before or after Mondale?

DH: After.

SL: Okay. From Mondale, you go to Gibson.

DH: Yes, yes. One other thing that was important, now that I think of it--probably in '64, C. B. King ran for Congress, ... I believe it's the Second Congressional District of Georgia, and it was a way to spur voter registration and voting. ... I ran that campaign and we had no money and no resources, but, it was part of a strategy to [get people to] join. ... C. B. was gracious and good enough to give us his time and energy. So, I ran that and, ... as I recall, ... I don't think you can check it--yes, you could, I'm sure there are records--but there were six candidates and I think we ran fourth, by six votes. I mean, we missed third by ... under ten votes, I'll say that, under ten, and I thought that was terrific myself. ... All the other candidates, obviously, were white and we missed third by six votes, under ten votes.

SL: Was this in the Democratic primary?

DH: Yes, yes.

SL: Unlike Mississippi, you did not think about a separate Democratic Party, like the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

DH: No, no.

SL: You never thought about that.

DH: ... I don't think we had the statewide vision that Mississippi had. We were focused on, counties and districts, and the Black Belt.

SL: Right.

DH: And we didn't have connections, as much as we should have, to Savannah, what was happening in Savannah, or even what was happening in Atlanta. I mean, everybody was sort of unto their own kind of stuff.

SL: How do you get to Philip Morris?

DH: At some point, three years or so into [working with] Ken, again, it struck me that this wasn't the long-term road, whatever. ... What I did have on the side was, I started going back to Columbia ...

SL: Teachers College.

DH: Teachers College, at night. ... Again, school was simple, but one of the reasons it was simple then was, I'd go into class and here's Professor So-and-So, who had come to see me when I was a program officer at [the] Ford Foundation, right. ... I said, "What the hell?" [laughter] ... There were a lot of people that I knew. Now, it wasn't that they were making stuff easy for me,

but it wasn't complicated. An extraordinary learning thing for me was, and this was Columbia Teachers College, I've forgotten, it may have been the dean, for all I know, ... [and] three of the most revered education professors in the country, came to the Ford Foundation with a big proposal. ... Ford was--and, certainly, our department was, at that time, public education--was pretty democratic. I mean, you know, whoever came in and however the proposals got distributed, this thing came to me and I said, "Okay." "They're coming in on Tuesday at ten o'clock, meet with them." I go and meet with them. They start talking about stuff that I couldn't even imagine and they're going on and on, and so forth. After a while, I said, "Listen, I don't understand what you're talking about. I really don't, but, if your proposal is going to progress in here, you've got to explain it to me, because I have to write some stuff up. ... If you don't explain it to me, I can't write it up, you're not going to go anyplace." ... It was as shocking to me that I said it as it was to them hearing it, but the whole tenor of the meeting changed and I said, "Well, I can manage with these people. You know, I can do this." And, before that, I really didn't know that I could or didn't know that I could say that ...

NH: Yes.

DH: ... And have it happen. ... They changed and I said, "Oh, I understand. You know, if you say it in regular language, I can get it and whatever." ... At that time, certainly, at the Ford Foundation, that's the way it worked. I mean, once you submitted a proposal, that person was your internal advocate and, if they were a bad advocate, you were in deep trouble. ... Sometimes, a professor went all the way up to Bundy. I was an Assistant Program Officer when I went in there, and I wouldn't have gone to Bundy and to Harold Howe [Ford Foundation Vice President from 1971 to 1981] with a proposal by myself. Ed Meade, who was the head of the department, would have gone with me, but I would have had to present it. ... Ed would support me or fill in, but I was the guy who was going to have to carry the load for these guys. Now, they'd be aware that it's Teachers College and "Professor Whoever" and "Dean Whoever," but it was still me. ... To me, that was a great breakthrough, just in the way I saw people and thought about myself, as well as, from an academic point of view, that I could do the academic work if I stopped fighting myself and the past academic setbacks. ... So, that's Columbia. From there, as I said, it wasn't really leading to long term in Newark. I started thinking about where to go. I called a friend in PepsiCo, who was the first black vice-president in PepsiCo. ... Some way, I guess, I thought he had a job for me and he did, but then he said, "It's not going to work out here, but I have a friend at Philip Morris. I'm sending your paper over there." So, I went over there, had an interview. ... It was '78. Cigarettes weren't, and tobacco companies weren't, terrible at the time. I walked in the door smoking a non-Philip Morris brand, [laughter] met with the senior vice-president, assistant to the chairman of the board. I pulled out the wrong kind of cigarettes. He almost had a heart attack. [laughter] [Editor's Note: Mr. Harris makes a groaning noise.] [He] starts giving me all these Philip Morris products, but, eventually, I got the job. ... They put you through, I think it was like, five interviews in the same [day], so, by the last interview, you're really [tired and] you haven't got the energy or the strength to focus, [laughter] but, for some reason, I got the job. ... Then, very shortly thereafter, [probably about a year] this same senior vice-president, assistant to the chairman, comes to me and says, "Listen," probably about nine months into it, he says, "I'm giving you a new assignment." I said, "What's that?" He says, "I want you to be assistant to George Weissman," who was chairman of the board of Philip Morris. So, again, it goes back to this staff [work], and so, it was staff work for the chairman of the

board. So, for three-and-a-half years, I was his gofer, but I also saw everything from the chairman's office, you know, saw a lot of stuff, sat in on as well as represented the chairman at meetings, and was privy to a lot of stuff. ... At three years, Weissman is retiring, so, I said to him, one day, I said to him, "Listen, how's this going to work when you retire?" right. [laughter] I mean, you know, without putting too fine a point on it, "How does the process work?" ... He said, "Listen, you do your job. Do not pay attention to what all is going on around you. Do not take sides and you'll be fine," and so, I tried to do that, even though there was a lot ... to pay attention to going on around me and I was okay and eventually I had an opportunity to move to the international company. So, there you go.

SL: Maybe that is a good place to stop.

SI: Yes.

NH: Yes, that is fascinating.

SI: Thank you.

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Reviewed by Kathryn Tracy Rizzi 5/30/13

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 6/7/13

Reviewed by Donald Harris 5/8/2017