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Rev. James Lawson, SCLC and COME, August 21st 1969

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Joan Beifuss- Ok this is August the 21st in the office of Reverend James Lawson, Centenary Methodist church. This is tape 7.

James Lawson- (Muffled)

Joan Beifuss- Ok last time we finished up in 1962b when you came into Memphis but I wanted to come back, can we cut back could you say something about the (muffled) business which was on that sheet that was distributed.

James Lawson- (muffled) What was on the hate sheet I have forgotten now.

Joan Beifuss- I am not very clear on it because (muffled) but the gist of it was they were known communists and Carl Brady was jailed for some thing and you led the appeal to get him out of jail if I remember correctly?

James Lawson- And let's see (muffled). Well the...Well I can't give you the...I can't give you a detailed story on (muffled) but there is at least one book on it that (muffled) himself wrote called between the walls. I used to have that book and I think I finally loaned it some someone by now. I haven't seen it recently. Which is a very excellent book and it (muffled) southerners and Georgians. (muffled) and journalists. And Episcopalians in the St. Augustine difficult background. Some years ago in Louisville where they were living and working and continue to live and work, and they have been stoic members of the (muffled) which is what southern conference and education fund or something like that.

Joan Beifuss- Is that? What is that is that part of southern (muffled) council?

James Lawson- No, SCEF is a much earlier body of southerners organized on a interracial basis and for a long time was thought to have worked for reconciliation and integration of the south. It is the predecessor of the southern regional council. But it has, it tended to be more engaged and members of SCEF tended to take more action or try to influence legislation and try to influence movements and what not. It has membership in at least all the 13 states. But you don't have local chapters but you just have a fund itself and they have a number of staff and (muffled) .

Joan Beifuss- Is this still?

James Lawson- Oh yes still, it is one of the best (muffled) for information on what is going on in the south in the country and Braydon is the editor of it still and Carl Grading (muffled) I guess a decade now at least, a field secretary. (Muffled) Methodist church was once southern precedent or was the president bishop Edgar Love of Baltimore. And I have forgotten now who is the current president at this stage. But in other words this has been made up primarily of churchmen in fact over the years but in any case, well some years ago they became really good friends in Louisville with a young black man and his wife, this is the essence of the story. The black was a recent veteran from the Korean war. A And he had managed to save

money and what not and they wanted a new house. And everywhere he went they couldn't find a house, and every time they found a house that they liked they couldn't buy it not because they didn't have the money but because they were black no one would sell it to them. This was everywhere around Louisville where they looked. Well they were very good friends of the Braydon's and the way in which Anne tells it in her book, t his couple one evening sitting around talking or something simply laid it on the line to their friends that you know it is impossible and how much was their friendship was it real friendship or was it phony, And they apparently said to them the only way we are going to be able to buy a house now is if we can some white person to buy it for us. She says then she and Carl wrestled with this and then agreed to do it. So the next house this couple found that they wanted, they wanted a new house, they found the house that they wanted. They looked it over and that was what they wanted and then they asked the Braydon's to interceded and buy for them which the Braydon's did. Well the realtors did not know this, the developer did not know this until the day this couple prepared to move in and then of course all hell broke less. And eventually the house was bombed, the Braydon's were caught in between this because then of course when the black couple cleared (muffled) the property then the developer and the realtor made it very known that these traitors of the white cause, of racism had bought the house and in turn handed it over to this couple. Well this was, it caused a great deal of confusion because then the people brought in the communist charge that the Braydon's were communists all that kind of junk and as I recall the attorney general in Louisville, it was not a federal charge and the attorney general in Louisville or someone, then got on the carpet for this, they had to fight it through to the supreme court and then I think before I think its contempt charge for which he was put in jail I think was a federal charge and I can't remember now if that was contempt of Congress of what, but that was during that era of great hysteria and all kinds of people being charged.

Joan Beifuss- Oh it was about 58 or 59?

James Lawson- Well I don't remember exactly the years, I would have to look it up too, I would have to go back and look it up. Well any case then when this went on well it was very clear to many of his friends who had knew him for a long time that Carl was not a communist. (muffled) So when the air seemed to clear some an effort began to get him a pardon and to get him out. And we were able to do this.

Joan Beifuss- But it was not a federal chare for bonding the house out?

James Lawson- No it was based upon this whole witch hunt process in Kentucky and as I recall they could not convict him locally but they were able to get the federal courts to turn down all the efforts to convict him locally. Because the charge came out of, it was purely effort of a veteran to find a house. And (muffled) final willingness to go and buy it for him to enable him to buy a house that he wanted, it came out of that. So they were not able to convict him locally of being a communist, charge him with conspiracy I think and what not. And eventually he did go to jail on

some kind of a house committee or some kind of sub committee where he refused to testify or something.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled).

James Lawson- Yeah right, I don't remember the exact details of it but of course I did sign the petition and in fact loaned my name to the committee to ask for a pardon and incidentally for the John Birchers who of course are chiefly sick people anyway, a person cannot get a pardon automatically in this country on a federal case of any kind if a petition for pardon does go to the federal prison, it goes to the justice department for careful examination of the whole case on the part of the justice department. The justice department makes the recommendation to the president to (muffled). It is not political favors and all that unless you have got a lot of money maybe but I think normally pardons are done in that way. The petition is sent, the justice department makes, does the research and the attorney general makes the recommendation. So in this case the attorney general made a favorable recommendation. He was granted the pardon and really I think it is correct that he got out of jail on the pardon. Which in itself was an indication that it was a witch hunt and the state of Kentucky caused the problem and not his guilt.

Joan Beifuss- During this period right before the movement really got cohesive. People like the Bray dons were they in touch with people like the highlander folks who were people like...

James Lawson- Oh I am sure that the Braydons went through the Highlander folks for various kinds of workshops from time to time.

Joan Beifuss- Were the Highlander folks...

James Lawson- It was at Mount Eagle.

Joan Beifuss- Was that part of the education?

James Lawson- No, no.

Joan Beifuss- Who was that sponsor?

James Lawson- Well (muffled) an independent effort, I don't remember the whole story now, but it is the effort of Miles Horton, initially as I recall to create a labor school in the south during the height of the great struggle labor in the south. Initially it was a school that essentially trained people about the labor movement as I recall. One of the founders of the Highland folk school, one of the first sponsors, first chairman of board is Rhino Nebe, it is the most noted of American theologians and people of Nieber's type and quality. And then later on it began to branch out into various kinds of interracial workshops, music workshops, voter registration and various kinds of citizenship training, and educational projects. So after that early period they went into citizenship training sort of education and a variety of other kinds of projects and programs but it began a nonprofit (tape Break)

Joan Beifuss- Ok are we back on?

James Lawson- Of course you know the, I tend to say that 90% of the Anticommunism in the United States, is really another form of racism. The reason I say this is because it projects all of our nation's problems upon the outsider the communist. And fails to recognize that obviously any society as large as ours with as rapid growth in the last 50 years. With the urban revolution going on and the urbanization of the nation and technological revolution going on. With such a great variety with the youth revolution going on, 50% of our people today are under 25. Any society this large and with the various historical forces operative is bound to have some difficulties of some kind and for people to pretend that all these concerns are done by agitators and outsiders and communists helps the American people not to look at themselves and therefore to overlook important issues that could very well one day affect the country. I mean the technological revolution with the pollution of rivers. That is not caused by any communists it is caused by the rapid growth of industry and also because we permitted industry to use certain kinds of chemicals without having clearly checked them out to see what the influence of those chemicals would be upon wildlife and upon fish and river and all these other things. The big cities growing and throwing their sewer in the rivers instead of finding some other way of handling their sewer. You know communist caused that. And yet that can, does already in many instances endanger life because some scientists I have noticed, geneticists in particular are saying that the pollutions or the waters around this country could affect future generations of babies.

Bill Thomas- The communist charge however is really, it becomes.....

James Lawson- See I might have a can opener myself...(Tape Break)

Joan Beifuss- Constitute an adequate mistake.

James Lawson- Well I mean if somebody is fairly smart you see they won't come right out and say that Lawson is a communist. They tend to say that associated with communist causes, he is a dupe of a communist, he is a sympathizer, they say these kinds of things you see and so that is the way they play it smart.

Bill Thomas- This is the same thing they did with Dr. King like on the march from Selma Montgomery you saw the big billboards with the highlander folks who

James Lawson- That's right.

Bill Thomas- But this really was disturbing.

James Lawson- Yeah sure.

Bill Thomas- But he charges, what you're saying is that the charges aren't direct enough and they just...

James Lawson- That is correct, this is correct. Now I could be wrong at this point but I think that all the cases where people had been charged with assassination of

character and slander and defamation, there have been any number of cases like this on the communist bit. But I think all the cases that I have known about have occurred in the instance of the person being called directly a communist. Or it being written that he is a communist you see. It is a clear statement of some form without, not dupes or....now it might be a good point that perhaps this indirect attack ought to be challenged. When they say he is a dupe, he supports communist causes and this time of thing maybe this is another point that ought to be challenged in the court, but legal opinion today is that a public figure has a very difficult time charging slander and assassination, defamation. Unless they really get it, fairly direct and that fairly direct is a clear effort to degrade dismiss or destroy the persons public value. I am told that this has been increasingly difficult to do.

Bill Thomas- Do you feel like Jim that the John Birch Society can actually believe this or that it is merely a means, a method? Fighting some cause that they don't want to go any further. Or that is probably not a fair question.

James Lawson- well of course it is my own contention that the John Birch Society harmed the country greatly because they do not, they keep people from being able to really see the real dangers of an authoritarian system whether it is communist or fascist. Whether it is Spain, or Russia, or China. They make so many, they call so many things communist that they cover up the real issues of communism so that people can't really see these. I mean as an illustration you see in Latin America today, the reason Cuba is attractive to Latin America is that Castro has eliminated all the flies. Whether we like how he has done it or not, but in a confident where you have so much massive poverty and disease and the poor don't stand a chance Castro has done this, China has done it. So the real major appeal of Chinese Communism and Cuban Communism, the Latin America to Asia is the fact that somehow these systems have managed to put a bottom on life. Below which no one is now falling, now that is the real appeal. But in the anti-communism of America most Americans are even unaware that this has gone on and why Castro therefore becomes a popular hero in Latin America is because he can say you see well that is not going on in Cuba today. Yeah we don't have as many luxuries as everyone that is affluent in America. But the ordinary man in Cuba no longer is down at the bottom of the ditch. There is a minimum level of health and work and income and food and clothing and shelter below which no one falls from today and give us a few years and that level is coming up each year as we are able to develop our country. Now that is the appeal, now authoritarian yes I every way. But they are doing a job and the little people of the world don't cut the fine lines between the difference of the authoritarianism from the United States or from Great Britain or Russia. It is irrelevant to them, there problems are problems of food and clothing and shelter and of birth. And of short life span, these are their problems and illiteracy. So, he who speaks to those problems speaks to them. So when the Birch Society talks about communism in terms of the kind of philosophical hysteria that they engage in, helps us to ignore then the real fact that Cuban communism makes a gigantic appeal to the great masses of Latin America because of this basic vib3 they put on life. No matter their methods, their methods are irrelevant to the man who is starving. He doesn't care

who feeds him. So if you are going to stop communism, If you are going to stop the appeal of Cuban Communism therefore, at this point Kennedy was absolutely correct. You have to try to help Latin America move in the direction of getting rid of its massive poverty and illiteracy and hunger and disease and what not. You have got to show them a way of doing it. Not just talk about it but show them and get it done.

Bill Thomas- (Muffled)

Joan Beifuss- What about, releasing a great deal of material., anti-King material was picked up, there was always these charges as there were again back, they were communists associated with SCLC. Was there any kind of viable communist movement in the South at all?

James Lawson- Well I am told by labor people that in the early 40's Memphis did have in the labor movement some communist.

Joan Beifuss- That would be the CIO?

James Lawson- Yeah the CI until they were kicked out, now that is what I have been told about Memphis. And I imagine if that was true of Memphis then the only communists that may have been around would have been people in the labor movement in that period when they were at their strength, But then of course they were all booted out. But I had never met any communists. If you asked me to name a communist in the south I don't know of any. I have never met any, and I think I would know one. Yeah I think I do. Especially today American Communists, an actual American Communist would have to be one who follows the Russian or Chinese line no matter its jerky course. And if an American, I mean many of the American Communists with the revelations that Kurshakl made left the (muffled) you know because this was too much over the whole Stalin (muffled). Well anyone who stayed in makes himself obvious with his line. This is the way I think I would know a communist.

Joan Beifuss- Ok then we will get..

Bill Thomas- Let me get one more...

James Lawson- But I have never met any and I don't know of any who have been associated with Southern Christian leadership Conference. Now when you talk about 40 other people, now if you talk about people who were in a cooperative way with some communist front group or something like this, well then that implicates all of the American people because after all the Russians were our allies in World War and the Chinese communists too. I mean that is recognized that all of these folks were our allies in World War 2, then if you are going to talk about united front then all, everyone is implicated even though I was too young to know anything about it. But that is the case, of the actual facts. But of course the ridiculousness of the Birch Society was that it called Eisenhower a communist or a dupe of a communist which is nonsense.

Bill Thomas- There really was mass hysteria attached to the word communist, so I think maybe our problem and always the problem is how do you dispose of that, and that is anybody's answer I guess, but therefore, how do you dispose of it. You know, do you just ignore it?

James Lawson- Well I have for the most part ignored it except for when people are in a meeting somewhere public meeting or other wise have raised the issue and then I may respond to it in some style. The Birch Society I have largely ignored, I have not, some friends have asked me sometimes to respond by counting each of their 25 points and some of their 25 points they are quite mistaken because they took them out of the local newspapers and are factual inaccurate.

Bill Thomas- I think probably through the cross exchange through somebody involved there...

James Lawson- Well some of them are quite inaccurate and I have thought several times and I would sit down and look at the 25 points that is how many points they have got and give the accurate statement and say what it is but I have not done that and of course the other thing is I have kept files on it and a couple of lawyer friends of mine have kept files on it, and I had determined some years ago that in the right situation if the right kind of attack came I would attack back. Because fortunately I have a very clean record, I have never been associated with any kind of communist group that I know of.

Joan Beifuss- Were these kinds of charges made at the time of Nashville, during the Nashville movement?

James Lawson- Oh yes there was some of this but not extensive as all this the newspapers and banter did some of this communist, agitator.

Bill Thomas- Let's get the chronological thing.

Joan Beifuss- Then we are back to when you came to Memphis in 1960, you were sent here., What kind of church was Centenary when you came in here? Or what kind of a church is it now, is it a middle class negro church or can you categorize it at all?

James Lawson- No, I would say that what I heard when I came Centenary was a traditional church and a (muffled) church and a cold church and all these things I heard from negros primarily. That al the old families belong to Centenary which isn't true. In fact I am not sure of any old families, most of my folks have come to Memphis in the last 15 years. I heard all those things, it was certainly true that Centenary was ingrown although that had not been its past because its past had been, it had a fairly interesting kind of years past. (Muffled) since 1866 for example, the first schools for negros in this city came out of the same movement that established this congregation, is one illustration. The first children centers, daycare centers we called them, was founded at Centenary 50 or 60 years ago.

Joan Beifuss- Was Centenary always a negro congregation?

James Lawson- Yeah. Always been a negro congregation. They were teaching adult literacy classes in Centenary as early as 1923. I found this in old church records. So they have never been ingrown traditionally, but in recent years they have become quite ingrown. In the late 30's, the church at that time had a reputation for being quite prophetic in fact the members had to guard the property several times from threats by men from KKK, or they guarded the property several times because of threats that the KKK made on Memphis on the minister and upon the church. So that was in the late 30's/ So it hadn't, it had a very interesting (muffled) as I say when I came in recent years they have become kind of ingrown and comfortable and were not doing very much of anything. The first scout troop for negro boys started at Centenary 30 or 40 years ago. The first and only troop for a long time in Memphis I understand. So they had that kind of a history. Well these are some of the things that I heard about Centenary when I came her in 62. It became very clear though as I moved among the membership that this wasn't quite the picture in terms of it being an old church and all that kind of stuff, that wasn't true. So I found that it is essentially an urban church in the sense that it has people from all sections of the city. Most of them from the Southside but we had membership from the north side as well, from the far north and the near north. And many are members of the county. And we have cross sections, we have people on welfare.

Bill Thomas- How much is the congregation.

James Lawson- About 800 members. We have people on welfare and small retirement stipends which would be less than \$2,000 a year. And then on the other hand we have probably some of the, the best paid but among some of the best paid negroes in the city are here. We do not have, besides teachers we do not have other professional people, we don't have a lot of business men or doctors or lawyers. And one dentist and one (muffled). So it is not that kind of a church as some people say it has all those professionals but it doesn't.

Joan Beifuss- Are there many negro Methodist, united Methodist negro churches?

James Lawson- No, in Memphis they are actually only, in Memphis they are actually only 6 congregations.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled).

James Lawson- Oh yeah, there are more AME then Methodists.

Joan Beifuss- Ok so when you came in...

James Lawson- So, I came in and I was already active in the civil rights movement of course and so I continued to be active in it. I was sent here primarily because it was felt this is a larger church and Memphis is a larger city and because the bishop wanted to have a minister that somehow tried to deal relevantly with the city. Try to

help the congregation to move to the direction of the mission of the city. This is the essential reason I was sent here.

Joan Beifuss- I want to go back again. Bishop Golden was in the

James Lawson- Bishop Golden was the Central Jurisdiction.

Joan Beifuss- What happened to him?

James Lawson- Well he is now in San Francisco.

Joan Beifuss- Bishop of San Francisco?

James Lawson- Bishop of San Francisco. So that is the reason I was sent in 62, so then I proceeded then to move in that direction getting acquainted with the church and the city., Memphis anytime getting involved when involvement is asked for. And staying involved also in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, in workshops for nonviolence and some of the movements in Birmingham and St. Augustine.

Joan Beifuss- What, ok (muffled) congregation to...

James Lawson- Well, I found a nucleus of people that were all for it right away. There was no, they had no problems with that., After all we had, A.W> Willis was the single lawyer member of the church, so obviously he would be definitely in favor of that kind of outreach and there were others beside him any number of who were quite supportive from the very beginning. And that base of support has steadily expanded so that now the congregation can conceive of itself as having a major responsibility for outreach, for being relevant.

Bill Thomas- I hate to regress any but since you are really into this area of coming to the church and frankly I and Joan have speculated and I and Tom (muffled) have speculated that you seem to have at one time have been so close with SCLC in on the ground floor and really a figure in SCLC and the speculation frankly was whether there was any break there or a change in philosophy and you thought that your efforts lied in a different direction, in other words why not stay with SCLC which seemed to be at that point on the move and doing things and (muffled).

James Lawson- Well that is a long involved story. And...

Joan Beifuss- I don't have a cigarette.

Bill Thomas- I don't know if you want to tell it if it is a long involved story.

James Lawson- Well it is a long involved story and it is longer than I want, it is a longer story than I want to give and it also is on that maybe someone ought to write because it will show some of the weaknesses of SCLC. Turn off that that things and I will answer that question in part for you....(Tape Break)

James Lawson- Of course I am more (muffled) to the idea of staying in one spot.

Joan Beifuss- Ok well can you give generalizations of the miserable thing but can you generalize at all on the civil rights situation in Memphis in 1962 when you came in. At that point what boycott did they have and what not was over with wasn't it?

James Lawson- Yes the boycott they had downtown was over with, with not very much success incidentally. In fact, actually as I look back in 62 when I came to town Memphis was much further behind a number of other cities.

Joan Beifuss- Could you make any determination why? Or did you at the time?

James Lawson- Well for one thing you see, where gains had been made in 60 in terms of restaurants and all it came through the sit in movement. In other words it came through a concrete, it came through a confrontation process. As in Nashville for example we stay in, we marched, there was large arrests, there was some violence perpetrated upon us and there was an economic boycott that was over 90% effective in the downtown area. And that result is that the mayor and the police realized they could not handle it and the business men recognized they couldn't handle it through a biracial committee which they set up because we wouldn't recognize the committee. So then finally the business men had to come directly and deal with us and together then we worked out a program. Now the point I'm making is that in 60 where changes occur in over 150 cities over across the southeast. It occurred through essentially the technique of confrontation. That is a form of drama that speaks more clearly to black people or to poor people or whatever you want to call it, it speaks more clearly to them and helps them to unify. Well, the sit in, in Memphis was a (muffled) in. It moved in terms of the library and became a court case rather than consistent direct action. So consequently what happened downtown was the scattered picketing of a few people, a very few people. They did not have large numbers and if they had as many people as we had marching every day last year during the sanitation strike it would have been alright but they had only a handful of people.

Joan Beifuss- Well now why couldn't they call on students from Lemoyne say?

James Lawson- Well just what happened I don't know but in any case the organizing process spot that you could have the kinds of numbers so that you could have confrontation did not occur. This incidentally has been one of the mistakes, of many groups around the country that have used picketing and that have given up on it when it didn't work. Because picketing as such is not any good, or poster walking as I prefer to call it, it is (muffled) unless it can help to create the confrontation. And that means that you can't have in the downtown area a handful of people carrying posters. you have to have hundreds and thousands of people or you have to move from there to going and sitting in or some other strategy but you have to use, you have to mix your weapons, but you have to be certain that the weapon you use in terms of nonviolence is appropriate to the kind of confrontation that will help you to get our ends accomplished and if you don't, I mean that is a loss, (muffled) incidentally too.

Joan Beifuss- So what happened..

James Lawson- SO what I am saying in Memphis is apparently you didn't have the sit-ins that went into the stores, the department stores and apparently then you did not have picketing that created a real confrontation and therefore the boycott was never really effective on the big department stores. The word never really got out.

Joan Beifuss- So everything ended up in legal suit then initiated by the NAACP?

James Lawson- Well no then what happened eventually the boycotts and all went off and later, the boycotts went off. Now it may have been that the boycotts did succeed finally in getting Goldsmith and Loenstein's to open their restaurants I am not sure about that, they may have eventually opened up before this, I don't remember for sure. I will have to check back. They may have but I think here they did not because it was in 62 or 63 that then the first group of restaurants in the city opened and that was done through threats of picketing. And boycotting and it may have been even later than that because it seems to me that we also tried in 64 and the civil rights bill was coming up in about (muffled) or 65 then. We tried to get merchants to leave before that bill came into affect and we might have. (muffled) but I know that my wife and I for example went to restaurants for the first time in Memphis as we did in Nashville and we also went to the movie theatres for the first time. I mean we were among those couples who went to the restaurants, in the collected restaurants to go to open up their opening.

Joan Beifuss- Well as I understand it that the Memphis community...

James Lawson- Relations committee was in on that.

Joan Beifuss- And actually what changes came about came about because they kind of set up the situation.

James Lawson- Well in actual fact we used the Nashville plan in Memphis, I suggested it. It was a very simple plan and that was the opening be a controlled opening at a given day they open and we send some negroes to each of the restaurants and that then the manager does his work with his employees in preparation for that day and then we have someone who will sit down and go to eat or go to the movie.

Bill Thomas- And that is what did happen?

James Lawson- That is what happened. It was a week and different days different groups of us went out and went to these places and ate.

Joan Beifuss- Who was in 62 who did you find leading the Memphis community?

James Lawson- Essentially the NAACP.

Joan Beifuss- What about the Shelby Democratic club?

James Lawson- Not in terms of civil rights. It was involved because some of the same [people, from NAACP bore Shelby County Democratic Club board were about the same people, which was in my judgment a real mistake but....

Bill Thomas- Do you think the lack of a confrontation, of a really public show kind of a confrontation is partially responsible of lulling Memphis into the idea that it didn't have problems?

James Lawson- This is correct. Absolutely, sure. I said after the first few months of being here I used to tell Vasco and Maxine and others to get rid of MCRC, Memphis community relation committee. They asked me to come sometimes which I did but it was my thesis that committee was a kind of a power structure committee which really did not help anything. Because it served as a buffer between the legitimate needs of people, black people in Memphis and the merchants and politicians and those who weren't going to do anything. In that what we really need to do is to get rid of it entirely and then in terms of direct action move systematically and insist that whoever we move on they talk directly to us and nobody else and leave the other people out of it. I said that persistently and no one listened.

Joan Beifuss- But what gains were made when (muffled).

James Lawson- No it was made because of threats of boycotts, it was made because of boycotts and it was made because of picketing and I mean on the banks for example, the banks didn't move until someone jumped the gun and the NAACP. I didn't know about it because I wasn't at the meeting they jumped the gun and low and behold I look up and downtown there were 4 or 5 people out in front of the first national bank picketing. A.W. and I said well that is not the way to do it, you can't stop First National for a few people. So we got it and organized and we took a hundred people down the first federal bank and then we took a hundred people inside of elite federal in their new building we took and filled up all the chairs and we sat on the floor and we put people outside. And after we did this one week, the bankers were calling for a big conference to talk about it and they then proceeded to work on the first employment. Now MCRC did nothing they took no initiative except we said we are going to do this or we did it and then they took initiative and then it worked. And that was exactly my point, you see there is no value to us and that is why they are useless today because Vasco and Maxine and Jesse and a number of others now take this position that I had 6 or 7 years ago.

Joan Beifuss- in fact the committee it seemed to have been rather in the middle of things at one point and then all of a sudden it kind of disappeared.

James Lawson- It disappeared because no one would go to them. I wouldn't, I would never go to them for anything.

Bill Thomas- I believe the myth is from the general outside understanding, and that is all it is because those meetings were never publicized.

James Lawson- That's right never public.

Bill Thomas- But the myth has been started and it says that...

James Lawson- But that myth exists only in the white community. No negro leadership, no negro leadership who knows about it says this. But I have been in those meetings when they have argued about this and no negro leaders said this no Vasco or not even Howard's Price said that.

Bill Thomas- But some of the things you hear that Memphis had integrated the schools without trouble, that they got negro policemen, they got negro policemen...

James Lawson- It means nothing.

Bill Thomas- But this is a myth, I am quoting.

James Lawson- It is a myth, because they didn't really do anything, I mean they really didn't do anything. I mean the schools are not integrated, they are more segregated today than they were ten years ago. And more than that you have less quality education today because of the great confusion and if you just follow the press over the teacher's business not once has the board of education said that we are trying to move our schools towards better schools. Not once have they tried to say we are moving in this direction because we want quality education for all the children of Memphis. It is justified, everything it has done in this teacher move based upon the fact that we got a court order and Stimbert has even to go so far as to say that it wasn't the best way to do it and probably the teachers and the parents need to oppose it. The best way to do what? The board hasn't given leadership on it. Not one bit. And this is the vast dissection that goes on in Memphis see. Because here is a board of education, over 150, 140,000 children and a vast budget 94 million dollars and what not and in a crucial issue of education in a time of racial tension and strife it provides no leadership for trying to provide, show how we can have quality education and fulfill the constitution of the united states, none. See it is all a myth.

Bill Thomas- (Muffled).

James Lawson- See what I am saying and I know the myth, now let me say this. I think MCRC and the white power structure accomplished only one thing, that in my judgment is a good model for the nation, for the state. That is, early in the game I understand business men went to Armor and said we cont want the violence that has gone on in Nashville, where the school was bombed in 57 and elsewhere where there was more than that, Little Rock, those were the two instances. And so, we have got to have maybe very clear in this city that we are not going to tolerate any violence from anyone black or white it doesn't matter, so Armor made that clear. Which is a good model because where public authority makes it very clear that we are not going to have any violence from anyone and then mobilizes the police to do it that way, this is (muffled) that in Memphis we have been able to have a great variety of demonstrations with a minimum of mob attacks because the police haven't permitted it. You see which didn't happen in a lot of other cities. Now the only exception to this has been that in early 60 the police arrested the students so

you didn't have, the police became the mob, you didn't have to have whites gather because they went in and arrested everyone right away. But when merchants though would not back up those arrests with prosecution, then they stopped doing that. They said you sign the warrant first and then we will arrest. So they didn't let themselves get in that bag when the cases were dropped because the merchants didn't show up, so the police department stopped making the arrests and then they did break up one or two of our marches in the sanitation strike. Where they acted as a mob, but other than that you see we have marched many many times you see the NAACP all around the city and we have had even peace marches and the police departments kept potential...

Joan Beifuss- I kind of want to go back to that committee because you want to integrate your movement here, it seems to me it is a whole lot better to let this committee peddle around with the business men and get the whole thing set up and choose your (muffled)n the first time then just have to go through that confrontation or at that time it seems.

James Lawson- Well all I am saying is that when that happened, we deliberately, the NAACP began to spread the rumor we were going to begin picketing on the restaurants and the theatres. When that happened MCRC came running.

Joan Beifuss- But in fact they had an MCRC to come running.

James Lawson- But they didn't need to because we could have gone directly to the merchants because that is with whom it had to be worked out with eventually anyway.

Bill Thomas- Yeah I believe while this whole thing is so important...

James Lawson- You don't need them.

Bill Thomas- Is that you know the existing feeling that there was at the time in the sanitation...

Joan Beifuss- (muffled).

Bill Thomas- Well yeah.

James Lawson- Yeah sure.

Bill Thomas- It is a myth,.

James Lawson- Well we didn't use them in the sanitation strike.

Joan Beifuss- But you talked to them.

James Lawson- Yeah because Vasco resigned with a very long letter which I still had and which he had sent and which he told me personally you know Jim I am persuaded you were right and I should have done it 4 years ago.

Bill Thomas- Why is it so important is it that there is a persistent feeling that of the various organizations that might have been effective that this was one of them, but all of a sudden you see they are not effective and so I think you know to expel the men to reveal it that they were never effective you know is worthwhile. Now the only question is, you know I agree, that is probably true and I never did understand and this is the question I guess, why you know that the negro in Memphis would accept such tokenism as they apparently did for so long from that sort of thing.

James Lawson- Because negroes after all let's recognize the fact that negroes like most white Americans have not, did not see confrontation or direct action as a viable means of option. This was not the way we thought. The NAACP leadership thought primarily in terms of influencing legislation and court action, not in terms of organizing people around certain objectives to get those objectives done.

Bill Thomas- And yet here this is, 1962 to 1964 in that area of time when really a national spotlight was on confrontation.

James Lawson- Oh yes, of course.

Bill Thomas- And so why did this city where all others, a bunch of others...

James Lawson- And most of the cities it was being done by non NAACP people and Memphis was a NAACP town, one of the largest chapters and no matter good people and they are very good people in my own judgment among the best in my country.

Bill Thomas- But they were on a different tactic.

James Lawson- That's right they were on a different tact and a different wavelength and they did not, I mean for a time in this city when I came here the only people who were really, who really went for direct action and got out there and organized immediately in that direction spontaneously and willingly were Jesse and, Jesse Turner and A.W. Willis and myself. And the major ventures they have had we essentially organized. In 65 they gave me their distinguished service award for direct action and all. A.W. And Jesse and I were prepared to march anytime and to mobilize for sitting in a bank or what not and we did so but other board people were not of that mind of temperament, now much of this has changed or improved a bit.

Bill Thomas- Let's go ahead and completely this little thing on the committee. And that relations hip, then at the time of the garbage strike what was that situation, was there a committee on this side, there certainly was on that side or they thought there was.

Joan Beifuss- Or a different way the weekend I think of February 18th, with the meetings at Lemoyne College and then Ned Cook tried to get to Lobe was that a kind of an attempt to resurrect this Memphis community relations?

James Lawson- No I don't necessarily think so, it wasn't from my point of view, now during all my campaigns wherever I have been I relied upon white friends for information and understanding and also had them do certain kinds of jobs for us, this was true during the sanitation strike but I did not call any of the people in that committee.

Joan Beifuss- I am sorry what do you mean.

James Lawson- I didn't call any of the people in that committee for any purposes.

Joan Beifuss- Oh the MCRC.

James Lawson- That is right, I had certain people who did certain things and I did talk to Ned Cook about negotiations then through what's his name, Dave...

Joan Beifuss- Caywood?

James Lawson- Caywood. And in fact Dave was the chief white person upon whom I, from whom I got certain things, and certain contacts and explorations in terms of negotiations, I did it occurred that I did move heavily with Blanchard who wasn't a member of that committee, with Ned Cook on trying to get some thing down around (muffled). And doing that Lemoyne college thing I had been working during that period with Ned Cook primarily.

Joan Beifuss- Ok well I am going to cut back again, back to 62, did you leave here and go to Birmingham?

James Lawson- In 63? Yes, I came most of the time. During all of this I was doing traveling in and out of certain places.

Joan Beifuss- So you were in Birmingham?

James Lawson- Oh yes.

Joan Beifuss- How many times have you been arrested?

James Lawson- In the south let's see I have been...

Joan Beifuss- Or what jails have you been in?

James Lawson- Well West Virginia, Mississippi, Nashville, Birmingham, that's all.

Joan Beifuss- So then the (muffled) event at Selma did you go then?

James Lawson- No, I did not actually go into Selma, I never went to Selma. I talked extensively to people on the phone in Selma but I did not, I never went myself.

Joan Beifuss- Did you go to the Washington march in 64?

James Lawson- No.

Joan Beifuss- How about the Shelby Democratic Club. Did you find that the political, it seems to have been such a feeling here that what was accomplished politically by the Shelby County Democratic Club (muffled) was kind of a phenomenal thing?

James Lawson- Well I certainly felt and still do that what the Shelby County Club set out to do was one of the most important experiments in this area of politics in the country. One of the earliest and one of the most important. The simple thrust of it was one that I have always agreed, namely, that negro politics should be tied to the issues of racial justice and poverty, issues that will enhance the negro. That this should be the role of the politician and it should be the role of any political group among negroes. This is the (muffled) it was an effort to tie together the idea of politics with things that count for the advancement of the negro, just plain and simple. What they did I think was very important. You didn't have very many groups around the country that would support a candidate one time and turn on him the second time because he failed to fulfill his promises, which the Shelby Democratic Club did. It made what they were trying to do a far more sophisticated effort than most people realized but following difficulty to get across the people too, ordinary people (muffled). In Memphis where you have such a high level of really adult illiteracy. Where you don't have that good of an educational system in the mid-south and not produce people who have that much understanding (muffled). So, I have always thought that was very important.

Bill Thomas- That is pretty interesting when you came you felt that Memphis was behind, because I am pretty sure at that time that white Memphis thought it was ahead.

James Lawson- Oh yeah sure.

Bill Thomas- Was there ever, why no communication across this line or...

James Lawson- Well whites wouldn't listen and in addition this is where the failure of MCRC because the whites in that group tended to think of themselves as moderates and liberals. And when negroes talked to them frankly and earnestly as I did, as I know Vasco did and as I know Jesse Turner did, as A.W. Willis did, as Russell Sugarmon did, on any number of occasions it went in one ear and out the other and they couldn't believe it. I mean as early as 1964 A.W. Willis and I wrote, you know we drafted essentially and wrote a basic document with which Russell, Jesse Turner, Maxine Smith, Vasco all concurred. A document in which we asked MCRC number one to, we asked it to publicly support the civil rights bill of 1964. We asked for, we had all this documented and I still have copies of that. We asked for the committee re-examining the purpose and engaging in open meetings and proceeding to let people know what the issues were. And we tried to define what the real issues of racism in Memphis were. Now we did real hard work on this, we prepared documents. We mimeographed those documents so that every member would have a copy. We presented it to the committee, and that is the last we heard of it. Lucius Birch got up afterwards, that is the first time I have met Lucius Birch and made one of the most impassioned pleas I have ever heard anywhere on the committee

taking that document seriously, saying that the document is absolutely right and urging the committee to recognize the good sense of it and to proceed to take it and use it as a basis for starting a new period of work. That is the last I heard of it.

Bill Thomas- (muffled) and it is still available.

James Lawson- Yeah I am sure it is and I saw mine when I was reorganizing my office a few months ago and if you remind me sometime I will put a note on it and call my secretary.

Bill Thomas- We will have it on the tape so.

James Lawson- We will look at it and see if we can find it for you.

Bill Thomas- That would be great.

Joan Beifuss- (Muffled)

James Lawson- Huh?

Joan Beifuss- How do people get onto MCRC?

James Lawson- They were invited. Now initially when MCRC started they wouldn't let the NAACP in on it. That is right they started.

Bill Thomas- Well who did they talk to?

James Lawson- Well they talked to people like Hollis Price and Jack McDaniels and George Lee I mean Lt. Lee. These are the people they had on there, Elder Hunt. And then when Jesse Turner and others were obviously going to be doing things they didn't like they invited them to come on with the purposes of seducing them. But initially they didn't want any NAACP officers anywhere around. They are radical.

Bill Thomas- Ok is there any other thing...

James Lawson- Of course you know we have not admit though that this is a part of the American character in a way because there is a real marveling, and I say this from my own judgment, that with all of the emphasis that we have placed upon the American dream and the American opportunity and all, we Americans have tended to be very innocent. We have tended in spite of a very vicious periods of our history, slavery or the civil war or the treatment of the Indian, or even the treatment of our workers with the developing industrial revolution. 16 hours days, child labor and all that kind of stuff. Even in all that we have still maintain a kind of innocence that we never have had problems in America, America has always been a perfect land from our own point of view that is. And that tends to keep us from ever really being able to admit, admit real problems. And this is really the importance to the nation of black history and black studies. Because a man cannot, a man or a people cannot really build on the past or deal with the present if they have a mythological path on there. There are some in the south for example, that are trying to pretend the civil

war was a nice thing and not a bloody (muffled). Killing the nation. It was an honorable thing and that the heroes were you know tremendous models for all young men to follow. You know as long as the south pretended this instead of recognizing the civil war as a tragic national experience. The worst kind of an experience for any people. You know we had this and we can recognize that the south is never going to be able to look at its present and see where it has come from and proceed to move on. In this segregation business you see of one of the great problems in Memphis is many of the white people say well everyone has equal opportunity now. Literally is not true. Because until very recently the idea of equal opportunity was a foreign idea in Memphis. And just like the illustration that Martin King used to use. You have two runners and you put one of them in a hole under the track and you say now you know that is where you are going to stay and you put big stones across the hole so he can't climb out. While the other runner has the free use of the track, he is up there practicing everyday. After three or four years you bring the guy out of the hole and you say now you are equal man go on and run. Well now who is going to win those races? Well this is the situation because we can't admit that at one time we had a segregation system that exploited and brutalized and restricted and excluded, we can't then deal with how do you make equal opportunity a reality because we still live by....so we say everyone has an equal chance now. But how about this guy who has been held back 25 years, how is he equal to the guy who has had a full chance to run, he is not, he doesn't have equal opportunity.

Joan Beifuss- What about the confusion with Ingram when the war on poverty came in here? What was that 66?

James Lawson- Was that 66? It was 69.

Joan Beifuss- Was there an attempt by Ingram to control the war on poverty or what? (Muffled)

James Lawson- I guess that was either 65 or 66. When was that bill passed finally 65? Well to Ingram's credit he was one of the only major politicians either in the city commission or the county court who recognized at least that the war on poverty's program from the federal government offered Memphis to be able to do a few things and the rest of them that are, that is why they were willing to let him have the baby and let him do whatever he wanted with it. Now precisely what the city commission voted to do and let Ingram go ahead and organize it. And of course therefore, Ingram organized it along the ways that would be feasibly politically. He had initially no black leadership on it who could be identified with civil rights or with negro concerns. Many came to a workshop at Lemoyne that the urban league had organized, and I was maybe chairmen of the workshop on the ground to bring out the proposals and to carry the findings which we did.

Joan Beifuss- This was a workshop on...

James Lawson- On poverty. On poverty. Based upon that he came to the final session where I made the report for the committee and based upon that he said outside the door that (muffled) expecting to ask you to be on it. Well that was spur of the moment because it was a pretty well attended workshop. And then because A.W. Willis had been elected to the legislature and had put through, and created the state, put through the measures for creating a state office and all. He then invited A.W. to be on it. Well we got on and realized there was very little real representation from the poor and the black. That the OEO guidelines were not being followed for the community action committee and so we tried to raise the issue within the committee and the committee based upon the leadership we gave to it went along with it and they appointed a philosophy committee to work out a particular approach and they appointed a committee to draw rules and regulations. Which you know could have directed it towards that direction but the actual fact was that Ingram did not want the philosophical committee or the committee report after the committee had agreed that this should be done, we met in his office of course. And then as we you know as we talked to people and he finally wrote each of us a letter and told us that we were no longer in the committee. Because he understood that he had thought he had appointed us to represent the NAACP and apparently the NAACP did not accept this which is (muffled). Well so we went on to work then with Washington and with the OEO office in Washington and with others then we go the guidelines and we tried to educate people about these guidelines.

Joan Beifuss- I am confused you bypassed them and (muffled).

James Lawson- Oh yes.

Joan Beifuss- Ingram (muffled) another committee?

James Lawson- No. He just kicked us off. And he kept the other committee and the other thing about the committee is that it made it chiefly a public servants. Almost entirely of public servants, so there were very few people who were not in Ingram's employment and or debt. I mean this is another interesting thing. Well I mean we went with Washington and we began to work with Washington seeing not insist that the committee would not be approved (muffled) for failure to follow the guidelines.

Joan Beifuss- Is this you and (muffled).

James Lawson- No, A.W. Willis and I were leading the struggle, publicly. We did a lot of the calling too. There were other people who came into it but I think he and I fought (muffled). And I mean he appointed a couple of executive directors if you remember Francis Coles, Ethel Benson, someone else, oh his secretary. But everything was blocked because we had it blocked essentially in Washington. And we finally worked out with the OEO guidelines, we drew up a document of what this meant and A.W. worked politically on it and then we went to the chamber of commerce. This was a time when Memphis was being considered (Muffled). And we scared the heck out of the chamber because we told them we were going to picket them on Monday when the team came in to look at sites. And they called a hasty

Saturday night meeting and we met with them in part of our, part of what we said to them was that the OEO (muffled) let Ingram had it and if you don't want us to picket you then put pressure on to see it that the OEO guidelines are followed in the creation of the committee and it should be taken out from underneath brother Ingram. And the way no do this is to go to the county court and the city commission and work with them and get them to draw up a new resolution. Well, all of that conjoined and OEO as they had warned the committee here could get nothing here from them because (muffled) would not accept anything. And (muffled) Mapsouth proposal got lost up there 4 times we sent them in to Ingram's office and they got lost and we had to rewrite them and then send them back and (muffled). Well eventually then the newspapers and the chamber came (muffled) and there had been a, I have forgotten the breaking point but eventually then George (muffled) was at a point where he could suggest a kind of program and this was essentially the kind of program that we were supporting in fact I had gone to A.W. and then when this happened the county court and the city commission passed a resolution with that kind of (muffled) and creating the war on poverty committee.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled)

James Lawson- No, no then the committee hired him.

Joan Beifuss- So then the committee operated (muffled).

James Lawson- Oh yeah sight. We reached the place where Gryder could time it right and he suggested a way of getting out of the mess and that would give wide publicity in both favors because this program was printed in its entirety. That became the basis then for the city commission and the (muffled). As a joint war on poverty with Shelby county and the city of Memphis and Shelby county. Which was then that proposal essentially became the ordinance that the two bodies passed. That then created an independent war on poverty committee with the county court appointed (muffled) and the mayor's office supporting from within. But with others representing NAACP catholic (muffled) labor, health and welfare agencies. I mean all this was spelled out in that (muffled) it represented so many, and then so many people elected from poverty pockets, so that became a total. So that created an independent committee at which the first meeting David Cunningham was elected the chairman and that committee, you see that committee proceeded to work towards hiring and they immediately, they hired (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Now Mapsouth was one of the areas of the war on poverty committee?

James Lawson- Yes Mapsouth is a delicate agency of the war on poverty committee.

Joan Beifuss- But Mapsouth is the largest (muffled).

James Lawson- Well then didn't do it we done it, we were existing before they were.

Joan Beifuss- Mapsouth existed before ...

James Lawson- Oh sure, oh yeah, we were a chartered organization before the mayor got his idea to appoint his committee. We had our charter and had our first election I think in January that year. Powerful committee. We are the oldest poverty group in the city.

Joan Beifuss- So the war on poverty committee is really...

James Lawson- (Muffled) But see we were a south Memphis group and the community action idea was that you had to have a multi-racial public and private groups all that committee across the city you see, that was one of the OEO guidelines you see. And of course we didn't try not follow that guideline because we were thinking in terms of south Memphis only. SO but the fight was to get he community committee to follow the guidelines and not let the mayor appoint his own committee that would then become his own little political (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- What was the mayor's reaction to.....what was Ingram's reaction?

James Lawson- Oh he sort of washed his hands of the war on poverty committee and didn't take much interest after that in the case of poverty. When he had nothing to gain he sort of washed his hands of it and left he committee to itself.

Joan Beifuss- (Muffled). The following summer, the summer of 67 when Coby Smith, Cabbage...

James Lawson- Yeah.

Joan Beifuss- Where did the power for hiring Coby and Cabbage?

James Lawson- Mapsouth.

Joan Beifuss- Mapsouth and that was what you were the head of the citizen's committee Mapsouth?

James Lawson- Yeah. Right.

Joan Beifuss- Was that the first the Coby Cabbage thing was that the..

James Lawson- The first major encounter with the war on poverty committee?

Joan Beifuss- No the first major encounter with the black militants or the growing black militants, overt black militants in Memphis.

James Lawson- Well maybe so, of course, both of them at that time were, were anathema because they were identified as SNICK people as I recall. They were SNICK people and also it came about because their identification as militants came about because Cabbage and John Smith, had spoken bad to police officers. That is how that came about.

Joan Beifuss- Now wait a minute I think we are jumping a bit. I suppose (muffled).

Bill Thomas- There is two events, (muffled) If you want o go ahead we are game. The two things I think we are interested in is Major Evers which I think after you came here and Meredith and what your involvement if any and your relationship might have been. Now should we go with that?

James Lawson- Well Metger Evers I can say very briefly you know I knew Edger Evers and I didn't know him that well and had sessions with him of course in 61 I was in, I was the chairmen of the freedom ride coordinating committee and all so that I had several (muffled)n then in 61. But in meeting since that time or from that time on but I didn't really maintain a very close relationship with him, so that is all about I can say. (Muffled)

Joan Beifuss- What about the (muffled) summer in 64? (Muffled) in Mississippi?

James Lawson- Well here again I did workshops for them but I didn't really go in and stay there or anything like that?

Joan Beifuss- Were you in touch with...

James Lawson- Yeah butt not with Metger because that was really much more (muffled) in a way (muffled) so of dragged Metger along, because it was a rather radical departure you know through freedom schools, voting registration, this kind of thing you know, it was a little bit stronger (muffled). When you look at this whole picture you know one of the things that is not said at all. I can understand part of the problem but I think at the same time black people need to admit it and that is at the time of King's development 55 on, the urban league and the NAACP were committed to certain styles of life that really were not relevant and were essentially middle class ventures. And of course this was part of my problem with people like Roy Wilkins, because he remembers very well you know that I am the guy who has persistently said this, and I said maybe one day I will write it but it would have to be an acknowledgement that the black intellectuals and people that were concerned with the rights of negros and all were not very aware of social revolution in the world. He was an (muffled) of West Africa and he studies in the United States, he goes back to Ghana and proceeds to apply direct action in order to develop independence. And apparently no one in America is looking at it and seeing if that has anything to say to us and this is the truth of he matter. Now what this has meant is that it permitted then some very horrible mistakes very frankly. Memphis, how many tens of thousands of dollars have we spent in Memphis on school desegregation through the courts. You know that business is expensive. We spent a million and half dollars in Little rock alone in the legal defense fund which is being a non profit organization you certain amount of money from all kinds of lawyers and certain people. But there is no justification for that kind of money in my mind. I mean where is the issue you have the law on the books and in fact I maintained that this has tended to help serve to ignite the hysterical reaction to the courts. Because the courts cannot really do the job of education they can only rule in the light of the constitution, they have no power, where is the power? The power is in the board of education, and in the community, You have got the decision, it is not ever going to be

reversed so now the job is to go and organize communities in such a fashion as you get the job done. Congress isn't going to do it and the administration is not going to do it. So where should civil rights groups or groups who are concerned about these problems where should they be moving. Not continue to take cases through the federal courts. We want to deal for schools in Memphis give e ten staff workers. And I will organize and stop the schools from functioning until the board is willing to sit down and start working systematically to deal with the question of quality education, that is all you do and you can do that with, you can do it within a year and half and 60,000 dollars. That's all, black s have 54,000 children in the schools. So I mean what I am saying the fundamental mistakes have been made, we have wasted money that we don't have and at the same time we could, I think we can be accused in the civil rights struggle of causing the weakening from the court. I would say this very frankly because our system is a balanced system, court Congress, administration. Alright the court has been the salvation of civil liberties because they persistently try to defend the right of the criminal and the right of the black and the right of the poor. But the court is not a legislative body obviously all they can do is interpret the constitution. And even then you have got to get administration who is going to carry it out and do it or you have to get a congress. Or you had neither of these two. Well why keep going to the court to keep trying to get the court to reiterate what it has once already very clearly established. What it has no power to enforce it. So you know what you have to have now is ether action to make the administration come up or congress or go on the grassroots level. And as far as I am concerned from the grassroots level you have a better chance to do it form that angle than from Congress or from the administration. We simply haven't done this. At this point you know I say persistently, well you know blacks say nowadays that we tried nonviolence and Wilkins and them say we are still no violent, well both of them are wrong, Wilkins is not nonviolent. He has never planned demonstrations. He has never sought to encourage his local chapters to begin the study and understand direct action tactics and methods and begin to use them. There is no such directive anywhere in the (muffled). In the contrary at various times when particular young people have engaged in direct action the national offices said don't do it. The sit-in movement of 1960 could have started in 1958 because in 1958 the youth chapter of the NAACP in Oklahoma City started a sit in a drug store and the Roman Catholic Priest incidentally and a school teacher were the counselors of that group. I made a trip into Oklahoma City and me them and worked with them. That was in 1958, August, if you go back and look at the newspapers they got national coverage. Because they had kids ranging from about age 9 to about 20.

Bill Thomas- (muffled)

James Lawson- Well now the official history in the NAACP they take credit for having started the sit-in movement, but in 1958 when that happened they ordered that factor to cease and those people in that chapter ignored them. In 1960 in both Tennessee and Virginia, I know, that where student chapters of the NAACP called the state office and the national office to say should we sit-in and join and they were

told no. In the Washington march of 1963 Roy Wilkins was opposed to it and when it became so big he came on back in.

Joan Beifuss- Well what about the students in summer of 64 the students in Mississippi and the NAACP was in.

James Lawson- Yeah but that was because of the local state grants where you had Aaron Henry he has always been an activist, he is also always been on the board of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. And the actual fact the Mississippi NAACP has long been sort of the dark sheep the maverick of the national. Charles Evers is only tolerated. This is actual fact, he is only tolerated he is not...

Joan Beifuss- Ok well then again summer of 64 when the kids went to Mississippi and a large number of kids were SNICK, did you still have any ties with SNICK at that time?

James Lawson- Well yeah as I say I did some of the orientation sessions for the (muffled) Mississippi center, up in Miami? Oxford University and Miami. And of course followed some of them into Mississippi but only on an in and out basis I didn't do any staying.

Joan Beifuss- How about then the Meredith march?

James Lawson- Well, of course the Meredith march was of course Jim Meredith's idea, his own idea we didn't control anything about it, he started it on his own. He started it to break the fear of course when he was shot outside of Hernando and brought back to Boles Hospital. Within moments of that happening Martin King called me and said you know go to the hospital and call me and tell him I am coming and I will be there in the morning. Then Floyd McKissick called and said the same thing. So, we called back and forth and I eventually got news that Meredith was alright and I did go and see Meredith.

Joan Beifuss- What was Meredith's reaction when you suddenly came.

James Lawson- Oh he was glad they were coming into visit with him. His reaction was positive.

Joan Beifuss- Was he pretty shattered by that?

James Lawson- Well he was pretty shook up but he wasn't that badly hurt so he was mostly suffering from shock, but he was still able to talk and all. He was glad they were coming in and he was glad to have (muffled) from them. And all....

Bill Thomas- So the continuation....

James Lawson- So they, eventually Martin called and told me what plane he was coming in on and so I think that was a Monday he got shot so the next Tuesday morning I went and picked up Stokely and Martin and Floyd McKissick, and Andy Young as I remember, Bob Green and perhaps Ralph Abernathy. (muffled) And then

we went directly then to the hospital and went and saw James Meredith and talked with him. And the agreement was then that he march should continue that we would go immediately down the highway and start the march. And that Meredith would join us if he was able and that we would begin organizing and inviting other people to come in and join us. So this is what was done. We went down and we stopped at my church, made some calls, stopped at my parsonage rather and made some calls, and then decided made some other plans and decided we were going to do this, we were going to have not get people to come to Memphis immediately and so I agreed that Centenary could be the headquarters and then after we did that we started on out and went on down the highway to...

Joan Beifuss- You mean you started that morning without getting organized?

James Lawson- Oh yeah we went immediately and had a token walk of a few miles. Went that very afternoon at 2 or 3 in the afternoon when we left Centenary and went on to Hernandez's spot where he was shot, and proceeded to go down the highway for a few miles and then of course we turned to Memphis and (muffled) that night and we proceeded then to further organize.

Bill Thomas- Several of the people we spoke with I understand stayed at the Lorraine that night is that right?

James Lawson- Yeah, right.

Bill Thomas- And we had understood and I can't remember where we understood this from, but that you will know I guess perhaps, but someone during the planning meetings for this march and what not. That Stokely first began talking a type of philosophy which evolved into the black power thing?

James Lawson- Well there is a longer story actually because when you talked about Stokely you have to recognize well just a number of things. Number one you know I have had many conversations with Stokely with matters like pride. Black pride, unity and all because actual fact thee are not new things, these have been very long things. I mean one of the real thrusts all along for example is the southern wing is that blacks you can't wait for the white man to take initiative you have to take initiative you have to organize and get together and you have to proceed to move in direct action towards your goals. You know that the legal can only do a certain part of the job. Getting qualified can only do a certain part of it. All these are important and keep on doing all these but more than that we have to be organized ourselves for various kinds of action, political action, economic, direct action to break the system. So this has always been a theme. Now Stokely has never been persuaded about nonviolence and we had many conversations about this.

Joan Beifuss- Where did you first meeting Stokely?

James Lawson- Oh somewhere during 60's. SNICK was Stokely was a Shaw, was Stokely at Shaw? I am not sure of that., Stokely was Howard University. A Student and of course the Howard students were the few groups of black students outside

the Mason Dixon let's say, well let's say Washington was Mason Dixon who got active in doing some things that involved the sit-in movement in restaurants and what not they were the first groups to move in this direction. Now Washington restaurant by this time had pretty well opened because that was done with CORE. I think they finished this job around 57 or 58 somewhere there. (muffled). So some of Stokely I know went into places like Maryland and he went into the surrounding areas of Washington and Virginia and worked on places there during that year of 60. Whether or not he came to the Raleigh meeting the Easter meeting in Raleigh where SNICK was organized, I am not sure.

Bill Thomas- But he rose pretty fast in SNICK?

James Lawson- He became a field worker in 61, of course that was simple because SNICK itself was new. He became a field worker in 61 and then you know moved into the south and then worked in Alabama eventually and he came on the freedom ride because we were in jail together in Jackson, in the summer of 61.

Bill Thomas- So you knew him then?

James Lawson- Yeah I knew him through all this period, he came to Nashville a couple of times and stayed for a time and demonstrated with us. In fact, he likes to write me still because we booted him out of Nashville. He and a buddy hollered into Nashville in December of 61 while we were working on grocery stores, on supermarkets. We were working on jobs in supermarkets of course. See this is how advanced Nashville was compared to Memphis in 61 we were working on supermarkets and I have forgotten this friend of his a small guy who (muffled) but any case every time they went in a store someone got hit or someone got arrested and our movement in Nashville you know the movement got suspicious. Every time those two guys are with a group something happens you know, there is violence or there is an arrest or something goes on. And some of the adults began to explain to the students so we had an essential committee meeting about it. An essential committee meeting saying well you know we need to invite these fellows to go home because they won't accept our way. They were helping to provoke stuff this is literally what it was. So then I was assigned the task of informing them. So all the dirty work they used to get me to do. So I had informed Stokely that we felt that they would be better elsewhere. I don't remember how I did it but I did it. So I knew, you know we had met before.

Bill Thomas- 9 years. Well it was pretty clear to you as a nonviolent...

James Lawson- Yeah, Stokely always said very honestly I will go along with nonviolence because it is expedient and because it is working but he never made the effort to pretend anywhere in time that I know of, I never heard him he was always absolutely honest and of course we never had illusions about this. We have always said to people whether or not you accept the idea of nonviolence or not if you are going to participate in the movement you are accepting it in the terms of the movement (muffled). And try to do to the best of your abilities to follow it. But you

know this has been always our philosophy, it has never been that every person was a nonviolent person. Probably many of us were not nonviolent. So anyway that was the idea and he was never dishonest about it and at not time am I ever dishonest about this. I don't pretend for example the sanitation workers were nonviolent (muffled). Some did get the idea and try to use it well. But we knew full well that plenty of others, I mean after all they were born and bred in America.

Bill Thomas- I was going to say...

James Lawson- I can remember also for example a Dorchester SNICK/SCLC workshop on nonviolence by Bayard Ruston was there and I was there and I can remember the chief issue then was the whole business with pride. (muffled). And Stokely was there and Stokely was not on one side of that issue because I remember Martin and Ruston and I, and one or two others were saying that dignity means pride butt he pride has to come from the inside of he man and not form the outside. It has got to be a pride that is real to him, that if he just assumes that is the pride, it simply could be a fascist kind of pride. I remember the story (muffled). Extensive discussion that went on in that week. Now where the black power slogan did come was in Greenville Mississippi.

Bill Thomas- Yeah as the black groups slowly...IU just heard the basic soundings...

James Lawson- Let me tell you that on the highway, on the highway Stokely started to do a very stupid thing. Because that first day on the highway we were walking down with arms locked and Green and someone were on the shoulder and Mississippi state troopers were riding along beside us and they suddenly got out of the cars and pushed Green, I think maybe Floyd McKissick and Green were on the outsides. They pushed these two guys off the shoulder and staggered the 6 guys, the 5 or 6 guys that had arms locked including King, Stokely, there are pictures of this in various places. Well I remember that in the march I was right up here ahead maybe three or four feet on the shoulder and the first (muffled) (Tape Break) This, Green and Floyd I think it was, Bob Green and Floyd that immediately recovered and got back on the shoulder, thee two or three or four state troopers then of course said you know stay off the shoulder and so an exchange took place and then one of the troopers said, stop talking just push them off. And so then two or three of them came up and pushed again and the fellows resisted of course and then Stokely acted as though he was going to go after the state trooper. One of the troopers had just stepped back and had turned white and I was standing you know just like this. He had stepped back her and I was standing here, and I kept my eyes on this guy and this guy just turned pale and he was dumbfounded and he couldn't say anything. But all he did was to unbuckle his holster and he stood there like this just shaking just like that. And it was about this time Stokely acting like he was going to lunge and Martin they had their hands their arms locked together they were walking casually but they had their arms in each other's arms like this and Martin held onto Stokely and wouldn't let him go. But we were convinced that Stokely was planning to go tackled hose guys. Which we told him afterwards sheer stupidity. In fact I wrote

about this in an article in one of our publications. Sheer stupidity. Now this was a main argument throughout the march.

Bill Thomas- (Muffled)

James Lawson- Over that incident and over that attitude because his position then was that if anyone attacks me or pushes me you are going to get pushed back. You are not going to push me, I am going to push him back. Our point was that was perfectly alright, if your only responsible for yourself. But if you are in the midst of a march and there are armed policemen on the side for you to act like you are then going to go and attack them...

Bill Thomas- It put everyone else in danger.

James Lawson- Yes it put everyone in Jeopardy. Now that happened several times in the marches, in Philadelphia essentially the same thing happened. We marched through and of course we were surrounded by national guardsmen from the...(Tape break) At Philadelphia I was saying Mississippi, we had this march into the square and we were surrounded by Mississippi troopers and national guards who had been called out. And of course it was very clear from the very beginning from the moment we left the church and they surrounded us it was very clear that they were guarding the white folks against us, they were not protecting us from the crowds. Now of course we did not hit crowds, until we got to the square and had the program, King and McKissick and Stokely and someone else spoke, briefly we had a brief meeting at the square and then returned to the church. Well, in along the way some of the troopers and some of the Mississippi people, and some of the Mississippi guardsmen acted tough you know and what not. Well we had two or three young SNICK fellows along in the back where I was marching trying to keep control of the back end who if they brushed against a trooper or some thing they would want to have an encounter. And two or three of us moved in to separate it again and again but we argued with these guys for a good part of the way on the way back because their thesis was that you can't let yourself be pushed around. Well we say but look you have children and women and here are some very old people. Now if you want to make an appointment with this guy afterwards well and good. But you are in a demonstration now and you don't have a gun and he has a bayonet and a gun and these children don't have any protection. It was this kind of a demonstration. But at that time of the state of the discussion these guys were confusing self defense with my person, of my own person in a physical way with the responsibility when you are with a public group. It was clear these fellows were our enemies, it was clear the Mississippi people there, there was no (muffled) about that. We got up to one hill, Thunderbird Ford's started the hill and came charging right down the middle of the road on the parade. Right straight through of course we all scattered. Well as I moved over to the side, away from the car keeping my eye on the car and keeping my eye on where I was going, here is a guardsmen off of the road with his bayonet at me. He is not shouting at the car going down the street and as I looked all around it was the same thing everywhere. The guardsmen scattered, the troopers and they had their bayonets and their rifles pointed at us. It was

unconsented (muffled). But still my point, my point has always been at the point of violence anyway that you know if you are going to choose that as a tactic then choose it as a tactic but don't play games and pretend that throwing a stone through a window or pushing a cop on a public demonstration is violence, it is not it is playing games and more than that it is jeopardizing people. If you play violence and you go organize your group, get yourselves in training and learn your weapons and select your targets and goals but don't expect (muffled) all through the march and of course the deacons were self defense came up and they engaged in this argument. And in a way I only see Stokely's point because the march itself was a demonstration of what he was talking about. Unity, pride, dignity blacks doing their own thing. But in Greenville in the mass meeting it was there, you see there had been a chant up to his time, what do we want freedom everyone shouted, freedom now. So that he apparently staged it with a couple of the SNICK people in Greenville so that when he shouted what do we want, while some people went to the slogan freedom now, others were set to say black power. Black power, black power, and this then is where the press of course picked it up. Now he said that he did this (muffled) because he joined the Meredith march primarily to make that slogan and get that slogan into the open. He knew the press would be there and he knew it would become known all across the country and his purpose was to get a slogan that all around the country blacks would take hold of. As far as his rationale with going...so that is where it happened that is where the term came up. Of course I had a major run in with him and encounter with him in Greenwood. Because in Greenwood, no, Greenwood or Canton? Canton that's right in Canton. Because in Canton I wasn't on the march at that time I was back in Memphis and Canton, the, when the folks the group went to put up the tent on the school ground, on the elementary school ground they were stopped and told they couldn't do anything and if I remember (muffled) that first small group that went ahead of the crowd, ahead of the march. Might have been arrested. They kicked them out (muffled) police. SO they formed a march of this and the leadership of the march of course (muffled) decided they would go to the school grounds, where they had initially commissioned to put their tent for the night and put it up. Well when they made this effort the police swarmed in with state troopers using gas, this is the bloody encounter where people were beaten, women and children were hit with a club and gassed. Ok and the march was severely bruised. Alright that got national attention and I went down immediately the next morning again and some other people did too I know because I drove down to meet them in Canton. Thinking that we would, you know we would put up a tent anyway. Alright when I got to Canton that afternoon as I recall, King and some of the others were not on the scene because they had gone out or made quick trips or something but anyway they weren't meeting to talk about strategies for that evening or that night. So when I finally got to eh meeting, when I finally found out where the meeting was going on and got to it they had decided not to try to put up a tent and they had made a compromise with the city where they could go to the school ground and have a rally but they would not make the effort to put up a tent. I recall then that Ralph and King, Ralph and Martin, Ralph Abernathy and Martin then went to the city and then we essentially led that march that night. But during that meeting I got in on the tail end of that meeting but Stokely was accusing everyone of

selling people out because they hadn't done anything, because they weren't going to put the tent up by reaching a phony compromise. Well so after the march then that evening on the school grounds we went back to the Roman Catholic center where we were sort of headquartered, we went back to the Roman Catholic center preparing then for the night because then the next day then the march would go down to Jackson or wherever it was going next. And Stokely took the mic at the platform with a number of the SNICK fellows around him, about 4 or 5 hundred of us are sitting the gym and proceeded to Harangue the leadership for failing to have put that tent up tonight, So I challenged him on it and I said after all you are one of the leaders you were in the meeting. And I said that so when you are talking about the leadership you are talking about yourself because you were in on the strategy meeting. I came back here and you didn't (muffled) no matter the price personally. I said I know there were others of us prepared to go out in small numbers and do it. But I said that as I heard the tail end of the strategy meeting this afternoon you and nobody else had any alternative plan. I knew full well he couldn't send the women and children out there to put up the tent. I said it is your responsibility as a leader in the strategy if you want to pass them it is your responsibility to have a plan of how it can be done but I heard no proposal from you as to how it was to be done. I said it could have been done, and I said you know full well it could have been done. But I said you weren't prepared to suggest an alternative plan and that must be your role as a leader and so you are as much to blame as anyone else. If other leaders were not prepared to do it because they were scared, you should have been prepared to suggest how it could have been done. You should have at least if nothing else come to some of us who were on the ground waiting for a decision and asked us what we wanted. So we had an encounter and then he insisted from his haranguing of the leadership, of course he was attacking truthfully Martina and Floyd and I don't know who else. (muffled).

Bill Thomas- What was Dr. King's reaction?

James Lawson- Well he was gone then, after that strategy meeting towards the evening the march was at night, after that strategy meeting towards the evening as I recall he had to go somewhere else and was coming back that next afternoon and joining the group. Because that was towards the tail end of it that was the end and Canton was not that far away from Jackson and I think it was going to end then that Sunday, this might have been a Friday or a Saturday and the next march was going to (muffled). Yeah that is right.

Bill Thomas- The incident on the highway the pushing and Stokely's attitude, to your knowledge is that the first time that King had trouble and there seemed to be a division developing or....

James Lawson- No, because Stokely and some others led (muffled) SNICK that around 62 and 63 maybe later 63, 64 was constantly accusing of King of hogging the limelight and refusing to share it with SNICK and this kind of stuff. Petty, mostly in

my own judgment it was petty childish kind of stuff because Martin, the one thing you cannot say about Martin is that he was a selfish man. There is no way in the world to say that about him. He was generous to a fault, if anything. But they were accusing him of hogging the limelight or taking the glory from SNICK or taking (muffled). Giving himself credit for it and dominating the financial contributions that came to the movements in the south. You know that for which Martin didn't really, well I thought in a sense it was pretty unfair...

Bill Thomas- Well how about the, that resistance type thing the if you push me I will push you back. The idea against the (muffled) of militantism, is that the first of that?

James Lawson- Yeah that's, yes I think that is...Here is the article I wrote in March (muffled). In which I write about that (muffled). So well that is one of the in a sense I guess one of the, first encounters with it at least after Stokely (muffled) county experience. I would say that. Of course during this period, a number of SNICK people in Mississippi as well, southwest Georgia also as well as in (*muffled) county area back in Alabama, started putting guns in their cars and did exchange shots on a number of occasions with whites that circled their house and shot and this kind of stuff. And also negroes other negroes farmers and what not had shotguns and what not in their cars and in their homes.

Bill Thomas- Yeah but this wasn't during a demonstration?

James Lawson- No this wasn't during a demonstration, this is the whole point you see, they like this whole business, it is the same kind of confusion that goes on in America. Almost invariably, a person declares himself a conscientious objector or a passivist is asked the question what would you do if someone charged in your house and attacked your wife? And we equate that with war. They are one in the same thing, which they obviously are not. Well it seems to me they are the same thing, well they have this confusion between what I will do if I am in a personal encounter with someone who is threatening me or pushing me around and what then I am going to do if I am out in the street with a lot of people unarmed and start getting pushed around. I think you know that if they think about it from the point of view of tactics and all they obviously know that if they are being attacked on the street, a crowd of them and they want to defend themselves, well they can't defend themselves on the spot. At least they have got to try to get the women and children and the old folks safely out of the way and then come back. Or they have got to go and get some weapons and then come back, but to pretend that I can you know stop the policemen with my bare fists in the midst of a demonstration because he pushes me is not...

Bill Thomas- So the answer tactically is that yes, you do fight if somebody comes in and attacks your wife because it is good tactics or it is reasonable tactics.

James Lawson- Well that is not my answer but that is the usual American answer. Which is a romantic answer because most attacks come by surprise and you don't have your gun in your hand or your nightstick in your pocket, you have it put away

some place and so you have to make a move to go get it which is not a move that is based upon your speed but upon your ability to detain the attack to some non-physical form, while you are going....you know I mean that is, so my answer is that is not my answer because I think there is too many ways of self defense to assume that the only way is with a big stick obviously it is not. Because obviously most of us defend ourselves day after day with our lips, with our tongues as an illustration. A mentally ill person defends himself by developing a whole fantasy. I mean we defend ourselves in a great variety of ways, women as an illustration get their ways through a lot of subtle forms that are not obviously based, that are definitely not based upon power. I mean economic, or political or physical power or strength. So I mean you know but this is again in America a kind of American myth that self defense means I have my stick in my hand and I cut anyone through it. No one does this. And the police and the insurance companies keep telling us that most attacks on persons personhood comes as a surprise and no victim of an attack is ever prepared for it. I mean if he were, if he is walking down a dark street or if he is in his home ready for an attack no robber would come in the house. That is just the very nature of the violent act.

Joan Beifuss- Did a period at the end of the Meredith march that there was danger of a real schism there?

James Lawson- well the black power slogan of course was quickly picked up by the press and became national news and then became the straw man that was vigorously attacked. Essentially all across the country then you had hysteria reign. No one for a time there when you could read the papers there was very few papers dealing with issues, they dealt with the slogan black power.

Joan Beifuss- I am going to eliminate what the outside people were saying within, the movement.

James Lawson- No they didn't say what, they didn't say what, they tended to immediately equate black power with violence.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah I understand that...

James Lawson- When Stokely hadn't said incidentally.

Joan Beifuss- I understand that but (muffled)

Bill Thomas- But I think Joan's question deals with a dividing path between King and Stokely over the emergence of the militant.

James Lawson- Yeah right well you got then, you know this is very difficult to explain in a way because the press moved very quickly to point up the cleavage and when in reality a functional unity continued to exist and of course in a sense the Meredith march where we ourselves had a chance to assess the meaning of black power and to evaluate and all, there has been a concerted effort to define black power in essentially historical ways or in ways that are consonant with the main

stream of black history. In terms of unity and consciousness pride, constructive work and effort.

Joan Beifuss- Yeah right..

James Lawson- I mean this has been done increasingly and in the black community it self there is essentially a growing tendency even on those parts of groups that call themselves militants to reject the idea that black power has identified with any kind of racism or violence, persay.

Joan Beifuss- None the less the string of violence did come in black power or ascribed to black power things that would have been violent.

James Lawson- Well I think that what you can say is that the string of violence primarily came in not from the black power slogan or from Stokely primarily but instead one from the riots that were being justified by essentially northern groups, northern ghetto people. And then as they took on the slogan black power this is the main stream, that and the press. Because as an illustration if you read Stokely Carmichael and Hamilton's book black power the politics of liberation. It is a very mild book, it is astonishingly mild. There is not even any call there for guerrilla warfare, at least that book. Now he is saying, if the New York Times is correct that the black man (Muffled) a gun and he must organize and if necessary tear the streets apart.

Bill Thomas- (muffled)

James Lawson- Yeah and he said in the recent New York Times interview which I got a copy of here not too long ago. But in terms of black power the politics of (muffled) he does not make a (muffled) he calls for self defense on the part of black people and black groups. But it is definitely not a radical book in my judgment it is a very mild book.

Bill Thomas- However to clarify Stokely's philosophy and this whole context, would it, would strict nonviolence could he go for that in other words the black pride thing would that be so strong that no he could not be pushed without pushing back?

James Lawson- Well I personally don't think so, now wait a minute let me qualify that. Stokely on the highway was apparently going to charge this guy from all I could see and all Martin and the rest of us interpreted it the same way, it would have been disaster. Stokely there was backed by nothing but rage and anger. I think that, I just don't think that Stokely is an irrational man, which that was an irrational act, that would have been an irrational act. I don't think he was basically a rational man. I think that basically if Stokely were on a march and a demonstration and all that was essentially nonviolent and that march was attacked by people with weapons of one kind or another.

Bill Thomas- (Muffled)

James Lawson- Yeah I think he would, and furthermore this would be for his protection, I wasn't for example even that example on the Mississippi highway if he had his arms locked with a woman, two or three women I don't know what he would have done. It just so happened that particular first day there were no women along with us because we picked up those who you know we were able to find just a handful of them no more than 15 of them at the most. Of course I got my first awareness of Jackson.

Bill Thomas- Was Ralph Jackson on that march?

James Lawson- As I recall he drove his car down with a couple of preachers and marched, I don't know if Ralph himself marched.

Bill Thomas- Mrs. Smith and Vasco I knew were involved.

James Lawson- Yeah but not on that first day though.

Joan Beifuss- They took Meredith to the (muffled) I think when he started.

Bill Thomas- Yeah that is it.

James Lawson- He did, now what they all, everyone came around eventually but you see we hadn't really organized to continue the march that day, from anywhere and these figures were here and they were a handful if the rest of us around and so we just went on and started it in order to see to it that there was some one marching that particular Tuesday that they have,

Joan Beifuss- A friend of mine from Chicago came down for the Meredith march and he came off the plane in Memphis and he came into Centenary what would he have done that he would have been transported to Mississippi where the march was at?

James Lawson- Yeah the first two days, the first few days before we got tents, (muffled) the people came back up here and slept in homes or the Lorraine motel.

Joan Beifuss- Oh and then you took them all back?

James Lawson- Yeah then we transported, we had a transportation group you see, so for the first few days while we were still within a few miles of Memphis which we were most people came back here except for those few who got who found homes or some place because after that time you see there was no staff in those first few days we, all that had to be set up and then of course almost immediately we tried to get, we got to go the route and we got the route laid up and we sent some people along the route to try to make arrangements and then we tried to order tents right away to rent them so we could take them down and trucks to carry them and all this kind of thing but it took a few days to get all of this really functioning well, so in those first few days, everyone came back here to Memphis just about and slept and then we had cars provided. And then of course from then on Memphis remained essentially then the transportation center. People came in and then we had a transportation committee and then as people came in then they were as soon as

possible then transferred down to wherever the march was. If they came in at night we, kept them over night and cared for them and then went down the next morning so I have forgotten who all...

Joan Beifuss- It was definitely not happy by the presence of white people on that Meredith march? Was there a feeling there that it should be an all black thing?

James Lawson- I don't remember as much t his issue. Now I understand that this did happen on several occasions there was discussion about his but I do not remember, I simply myself cannot remember (muffled) I think we better quit for the night.
(Tape End)