Beyond Rosie and Rosa: Women in World War II and the Civil Rights Movement

Primary Source Packet

1. Virginia Irwin, "Virginia Irwin in Berlin." *St. Louis Post Dispatch* (May 10, 1945). (https://www.newspapers.com/)

2. Mary P. Lord, "The WACs Sight New Objectives." *The New York Times*. September 2, 1945. Proquest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times with Index. (https://www.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimeswindex/historical-newspapers/wacs-sight-new-objectives/docview/107119222/sem-2?accountid=14745)

3. N.A. "SNCC Position Paper." November 1964. (https://www.crmvet.org/docs/6411w_us_women.pdf)

4. Interview with Diane Nash, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on November 12, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection. (http://repository.wustl.edu/downloads/7m01bn67n)

VIRGINIA IRWIN IN BERLIN FINDS RUSSIANS DANCE AND DRINK IN MIDST OF BATTLE

Ruthless Reds, Says Post-Dispatch Correspondent, Seem to Lack System but They Pitch In and Fight Like Hell Wherever There Is Any Fighting to Be Done.

By VIRGINIA IRWIN
A War Correspondent of the Post-Dispatch.

This is the last of three on-the-spot reports from Berlin by Miss Irwin, one of the first three Americans to enter the Nazi capital while the battle for the city was still on.

BERLIN, April 28.—The Red Army in action is terrific. On the move it looks like a mixture of a scene from a De Mille movie of the Crusades and newsreel shots of American motorized supply columns.

American Studebaker trucks rub axles with antiquated farm carts loaded down with Russian infantry. Great herds of sheep and cows are mixed in with armored cars and half-tracks with household belongings lashed to their sides. Super tanks tangle with a fantastic mess of horse-drawn buggies, phaetons, surreys, pony carts and farm wagons, all loaded down with ammunition, food, women, wounded and animals.

To an American observer used to the ordered precision of the American Army on the move, the scene is unbelievable, but behind this seeming confusion there is an order, or purpose, that has already carried the Russians into the heart of Berlin.

As I write, the Russian artillery is pounding the heart of the city with a barrage I have never heard equaled in an American battle. The earth shakes. The air stinks of cordite and the dead. All Berlin seems confusion.

The fierce Russian infantry are pushing into the heart of the city. Wild horses turned loose after pulling supply carts roam the streets. German dead lie everywhere. Here and there, a horse, caught by some sniper's bullet, lies sprawled amidst the wreckage of the buildings.

Russians Ruthless and Determined.

We three Yanks, Andy Tully of the Boston Traveler, a jeep driver, Johnny Wilson of the Twenty-sixth U. S. Division, and I are the first Americans to see the Russian fighting army in action. They have practically given us the keys to the city and we have spent the day trying to keep the Russian infantry from sweeping us before them on their way down the Unter den Linden.

The ruthlessness and the determination of the Russian fighting men is hard to describe. Nobody seems to have any set duty. They all just pitch in and fight like hell wherever there is fighting to be done.

Today we managed to make ourselves understood to a Russian infantryman who acted as a sort of guide around the city. This fierce-looking youngster in a great fur shako took off without bothering to ask a superior officer's permission. He perched on the hood of our jeep and motioned directions with his riot gun. Finally, when we had had all we could take, we made him understand that we were going back toward the rear, where things were a little quieter, but, instead of going back with us to his command post where we had picked him up about a mile back, he shook hands with us and set off on foot to join some Russian infantrymen who were going into the heavy fighting right in the heart of Berlin.

Fantastic Job of Work and Play.

The Russian Army does a fantastic job of mixing work and play. They fight like mad and play with a sort of barbaric abandon.

This morning after eating a heavy breakfast of charred veal and potatoes swimming in fat—all washed down with alternate drinks of hot milk and vodka—we three Yanks set off alone to try to see something of Berlin.

We made a wrong turn some place off the Berlinerstrasse and at a road block that had not been cleared got scared out of our field boots by a terrific burst of machine-gun fire off to our right.

Retracing our way, we went back to the command post of our friend, the Guards Maj. Nikolai Kovalesky.

When we returned, there was a mid-morning dance in full swing. Russian officers, their medals clanking on their chests, were dancing with a young Russian WAC Lieutenant; and there, practically in the middle of Berlin and in the middle of one of the bloodiest battles in history, I danced for an hour before we could pry ourselves away from the festivities.

I waltzed to the tune of "Kannst Du Mir Gut Sein," which I think was a German record of "Sonny Boy." I danced to "Magnolia" and "Love and Kisses" by Paul Whiteman and his orchestra. In fact, they swung me around until the scratchy old Victrola hopped on the table and I was a dripping mess of mud composed of three parts perspiration and one part German bomb rubble dust.

In between times, Russian noncoms would come in, click their heels smartly, salute and receive their orders for the fighting at hand.

At about 10:30 our Russian host insisted we eat another breakfast, well basted again with cognac and vodka. My Russian orderly, a fierce-looking Mongolian named Rachmann, turned up with a fresh bouquet of flowers and escorted me out into the hall for a shoeshine. He put enough black polish on my brown Army shoes to last a lifetime. He also blacked my stockings halfway to the knee.

Giant Whirlpool of Destruction.

The whole day was like being transported to another and strange world. I felt as though I had been caught in a giant whirlpool of destruction. There was such an air of unreality about the whole of the battle for Berlin that I thought at times I had lost my reason and was only imagining these strange and unearthly sights.

It was too much for my reason to accept the Russian women

Three Yanks Who Got to Berlin During Battle

VIRGINIA IRWIN and SGT. JOHNNY WILSON Post-Dispatch war correspondent and Army jeep driver who "ran off the map" 50 miles from Torgau on the Elbe to reach Berlin while the Russians were still fighting for the Nazi capital. With them was Andrew Tully, correspondent of the Boston Traveler. Sgt. Wilson's home is in Roxbury, Mass.

ANDREW TULLY

Virginia Irwin Says Reds Dance in Midst of Battle

Continued From Page One.

—in the uniforms of secretaries, laundresses and traffic cops—riding in the hay-filled ricks with the infantry.

It was too much to get out of our jeep to shake hands with a furiously milling mob of Russian soldiers—one of whom was serenading me on an accordion—and find that I was standing practically in the middle of a yard full of German dead.

All of these two days I have spent with the Russian Army is like a dream. I have only to close my eyes to see again the fantastic scene of the Russian Army on the move. The horse-drawn carts are, many of them, driven by infantrymen with their heads swathed in bandages. In the Russian Army, evidently, you have to be pretty seriously wounded to be relieved of duty and taken to a hospital.

I have only to close my eyes to see again the horses and cattle, American trucks and almost medieval carts, and antitank guns and tanks and the phaetons and buggies and gaily painted gypsy wagons are rolling down a road into Berlin.

The U. S. Army allows the German civilian to keep his cattle and chickens and sheep, so the Army won't have to feed him. The Russian Army sweeps the countryside and drives before it all the livestock in its path.

Nerve-Racking Pandemonium.

This was the most nerve-racking day of my life. We were continually caught in traffic jams. When I wasn't worried about being killed by a bursting shell or a German sniper, I was panic-stricken lest a horse chew my arm off.

Whenever a column would halt, there would be an unearthly din of truck horns mixed with the neighing of horses, the bleating of sheep and the cackling of chickens loaded in coops, with the infantry riding in farm carts. Over all could usually be heard the strains of some Russian tune being "rendered" on an accordion or a violin. Always there was the shouting in, to me, unintelligible Russian.

And over all this there has been the almost hysterical shouting of our American Sergeant, Jeep Driver Johnny Wilson of Roxbury, Mass., yelling "Amerikanski" and acting like the Grover Whalen of World War II. Johnny is the greatest ambassador of good will a nation ever had. He looks like a sad sack, but he is the personality kid with the Russians. He shows me off like Evelyn MacLean sporting the Hope diamond. If the Russians don't notice me at every hand, Johnny yells, "American woman," and brings to their attention that an American female is in Berlin, and he is right now telling a bunch of Russian officers that Andy Tully should be a battalion commander in the Red Army.

It has been a mad day, but a wonderful one.

If the pay was in something besides rubles, I'd join the Russian Army and try to help take Berlin.

ARMY FIXES WAR'S END IN EUROPE AT 5:01 P. M., MAY 7, ST. LOUIS TIME

WASHINGTON, May 10 (AP).

HISTORIANS probably will fix the time at which the European war ended at one minute after midnight, European time, May 8, or 5:01 p. m., St. Louis time, May 7. That is the time used so far in War Department records and probably will be recorded for the Department's historical files. It appears to be, except for one minute, the time used by the Russians.

The "cease fire" order, stipulated in the articles of capitulation signed by Germany and the Allies, became effective at 5:01 p. m., St. Louis time.

ALLIED MAGAZINES, NEWSPAPERS TO BE BARRED IN GERMANY

Sick Nation, Unwed to Free Press, Needs Doctor's Prescription, Elmer Davis Says.

WASHINGTON, May 10 (AP).—Director Elmer Davis of the Office of War Information said today Allied newspapers and magazines would be barred from circulating in Germany for an indefinite period during military occupation, and that a similar bar would be placed on all foreign business enterprise.

A few German newspapers will be published under Allied military control, Davis told reporters.

"The reason is very simple—Germany is a sick man," he said. "He now can have only what the doctors prescribe. Later on, he will have a more ample diet."

Davis asserted the policy was necessary to insure maintenance of order in the potentially chaotic conditions attending restoration of German life.

When a reporter asked "Why are Allied officials afraid of giving entry to American newspapers?" Davis replied: "I think the Germans would get too much impression of divided policies. For 12 years their papers have expressed one policy, and they are out of the habit of understanding what a free press means.

"Those who adopted this policy all believe in a free press and in democracy, but the Germans are a peculiar case—a type of case unknown in world history—and they have got to undergo peculiar treatment."

Parcel Mailing to Philippines.

WASHINGTON, May 10 (AP).—The Foreign Economic Administration authorized yesterday the mailing of parcels from this country, its territories and possessions to the Philippines. Only gifts and samples may be sent with no compensation paid in the Philippines.

SHAEF ANNOUNCES DISACCREDITING OF IRWIN AND TULLY

Both Demanded They Be Absolved or Penalized at Once Without Waiting for Full Inquiry.

SUPREME HEADQUARTERS, ALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE, PARIS, May 10 (AP).—Two American correspondents charged with making unauthorized trips to Berlin were disaccredited and ordered returned to the United States as the number of war reporters on SHAEF's suspension list grew to nine today.

Most of the nine still are under investigation for alleged violations of army regulations.

Those whose credentials were revoked were Virginia Irwin, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and Andrew Tully, Boston Traveler. They wrote eyewitness accounts of their entrance into Berlin before the Russians captured the capital.

SHAEF said no correspondent accredited to Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower's command was authorized to go to Berlin until May 8, and then only a select group was taken to the fallen capital on a supervised tour.

'Exhibition of Bungling.'

The stories written by Tully and Miss Irwin and correspondents now under investigation were passed by censors, however.

The two correspondents were bitter in their criticisms of SHAEF public relations officials.

"I think it has been the greatest exhibition of bungling I ever saw in my life," Miss Irwin declared. "They treat you as if you were a half-witted child."

Tully, who declared his newspaper was "very happy about this," said he was "going to raise hell" when he got home.

SHAEF said both Tully and Miss Irwin were disaccredited partly at their own request since neither was willing to await completion of the investigation, but asked that they be either absolved or penalized immediately.

No A. P. Inquiry Report.

SHAEF still had not announced any results of its investigation of the Associated Press men, Edward Kennedy, Morton Gudebrod and Robert Bunnelle, in connection with Kennedy's story of the surrender at Reims, sent 24 hours before the official announcement.

Bunnelle, managing executive for the United Kingdom for the A. P., was suspended because the story in question was relayed to the United States through the London bureau, although he was not in the office at the time, it was learned.

Other correspondents suspended for what SHAEF called deliberate violation of instructions not to go to Berlin included Seymour Friedin, New York Herald Tribune; John Groth, American Legion Magazine; and Tom Downs, London Evening News.

Sam White of the Australian Consolidated Press has been placed under two-month suspension for writing a story in Seventh Army territory while accredited only to the Third Army.

"The amazing thing about my case was that I received no notification of my suspension until after they had passed my story and it had been printed in New York and Paris," Friedin said.

COLDEST MAY 10 SINCE 1907

The coldest temperature for May 10 since 1907 was recorded today by the Weather Bureau, which noted a temperature reading of 41 degrees at 9 o'clock this morning. The reading on the same date in 1907 was 40 degrees, the lowest since the keeping of records was started in 1871, Meteorologist Harry F. Wahlgren said.

Temperatures for the first nine days of the month this year have averaged 53.7 degrees, 9.6 degrees below normal for the period.

Our army of women—"Wacs, with their newly acquired skills, will certainly have an important part in reshaping our post-war world."

The Wacs Sight New Objectives

Army women want to apply their skills and talents in the pursuits of peace.

By MARY P. LORD
Chairman, Wac Advisory Committee

AN army almost 100,000 strong is marching from the past into an obscure future. It is an army new to the history of our country—an army of women. The question in many minds is what that future holds for members of the Women's Army Corps, who left homes, schools, colleges and careers in answer to their country's call.

Doubts have often been expressed as to the wisdom of admitting women into the United States Army. We know that some of our Army men viewed the formation of the corps with mixed emotions; it was hard for them to visualize a woman soldier. Would they be toy soldiers? How would they stand up to the rigors of overseas service? Could careful training, both physical and mental, show results in the all-important missions being performed on the fighting fronts? The doubters included not only military leaders but religious and educational leaders as well.

"Woman's place is in the home," "War is a man's job and a man's job alone," were typical of the remarks heard in the early days. The GI's, too, had misgivings. They were convinced that women were to be put into the Army to powder their noses and run after officers; and combat men overseas, living a rugged life in and out of foxholes, were grumbling plenty before the arrival of the first contingent of Wacs —"Wait and see, they'll get sheets and pillowcases. * * * No K rations for the women. * * * They'll be more trouble than they're worth."

THESE women were pioneers and many of us wondered if the American sense of adventure and steadfastness had died with their grandmothers. I personally need have no anxiety as I saw them on a recent tour abroad—in their billets and mess halls and in their periods of freedom and recreation. I now know that the American woman of today can "take it" as her grandmother did. With her sense of humor unimpaired, she has pioneered in a new field and has done her job well.

Each woman in the corps became very much a part of the war. When subsistence was reduced to K rations and hot coffee on the beaches of Normandy or the islands of the Pacific she took this in her stride. Her smile and her "good morning" shot up the morale of many a GI 100 per cent. She helped keep her fellow-soldier on his toes and has given him courage.

As women became an integral part of the Army it was realized that they had skills and talents that fitted them not only for the ordinary jobs but also for special kinds of work. Formerly only men worked in reconnaissance photography, but it was discovered that women, with their unusually keen sense of observation and accuracy in details, could do this job as well, if not better.

The Army also chose women for assignment in our "radio cities" where they directed pilots to safety. Women's voices, it was learned, are clearer and do not have the tendency of men's voices to become garbled by radio sound. These are two of some 300 different jobs which Wacs performed and which qualify them to contribute much to the post-war world.

What will these women find on their return to civilian life? They will want more than praise and a "Well done, soldier" from their commanding officers; their awards for meritorious service, their Bronze Stars and their Good Conduct medals will not serve them in facing the peacetime world. I know from talking to hundreds of these women that they want to play a helpful role in the slow, uphill climb back to a normal world of peace.

I BELIEVE their chances in the post-war world are good, for many reasons. The Army discovered new capabilities in women and encouraged their development. As a result many Wacs have told me they will come back to civilian life with immeasurably broadened horizons, and much better equipped to face the problems of the post-war business world. They want to share with others their new found assurance, their newly acquired skills and, even more important, their increased sympathy and understanding.

Some of the most important lessons learned by women in the Army were those especially designed to give them a broader outlook—to make each one of them a part of the world as a whole, with its shrunken frontiers and broadened horizons, rather than merely an individual in a particular community.

To help them still more, the Government has given Wacs the opportunity to attend courses at the Sorbonne, the University of Florence and the Army school at Shrivenham, England. Women are showing an interest in the educational part of the GI Bill of Rights and are planning to add to the training they acquired in the Army or to finish interrupted studies at Government expense.

Will their training in supervising large mess halls qualify them for executive positions in hotels? With further training, could they become personnel heads of industries? Will expanding airlines give them an opportunity to be radio and radar technicians, flight clerks, control tower operatives?

JUDGING from the many letters I have received, I believe the answer is yes. The chances for women in these fields are excellent, and if further training is needed they can get it. These are only some of the many new careers that will be open to women through their training and experience in the Army. The jobs performed by Wacs in the medical, surgical and psychiatric fields suggest that here, too, are great possibilities.

Wacs therefore will certainly have an important part in reshaping our post-war world, with their newly acquired skills, their experience in community living and their wider outlook on world conditions. This is as it should be, for they will want to take their place with other forward-looking women the world over in assuring that the peace is just and lasting.

SNCC POSITION PAPER (Name witheld by Request)

1. Staff was involved inCrucial constitutional revisions at the Atlanta staff meeting in October. A large committee was appointed to present revisions to the staff. The committee was all men.

2. Two organizers were working together to form a farmers league. Without asking any questions, the male organizer immediately assigned the clerical work to the female organizer although both had had equal experience in organizing campaigns.

3. Although there are women in Mississippi project who have been working as long as some of the men, the leadership group in COFO is all men.

4. A woman in a field office wondered why she was held responsible for day to day decisions, only to find out later that she had been appointed project director but not told.

5. A fall 1964 personnel and resources report on Mississippi projects lists the number of people in each project. The section on Laurel however, lists not the number of persons, but "three girls."

6. One of SNCC's main administrative officers apologizes for appointment of a woman as interim project director in a key Mississippi project area.

7. A veteran of two years work for SNCC in two states spends her day typing and doing clerical work for other people in her project.

8. Any woman in SNCC, no matter what her position or experience, has been asked to take minutes in a meeting when she and other women are outnumbered by men.

9. The names of several new attorneys entering a state project this past summer were posted in a central movement office. The first initial and last name of each lawyer was listed. Next to one name was written: (girl).

10. Capable, responsible and experienced women who are in leadership positions can expect to have to defer to a man on their project for final decision making.

11. A session at the recent October staff meeting in Atlanta was the first large meeting in the past couple of years where a woman was asked to chair.

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Undoubtedly this list will seem strange to some, petty to others, laughable to most. The list could continue as far as there are women in the movement. Except that most women don't talk about these kinds of incidents, because the whole subject is discussable -- strange to some, petty to others, laughable to most.

The average white person finds it difficult to understand why the Negro resents being called "boy", or being thought of as "musical" and "athletic," because the average white person doesn't realize that he assumes he is superior. And naturally he doesn't understand the problem of paternalism. So too the average SNCC worker finds if difficult to discuss the woman problem because of the assumption of male superiority. Assumptions of male superiority are as widespread and deep rooted and every much as crippling to the woman as the assumptions of white supremacy are to the Negro. Consider why it is in SNCC that women who are competent, qualified and experienced, are automatically assigned to the "female" kinds of jobs such as: typing, desk work, telephone work, filing, library work, cooking and

the assistant kind of administrative work but rarely the "executive" kind.

The woman in SNCC is often in the same position as that token Negro hired in a corporation. The management thinks that it has done its bit. Yet, every day the Negro bears an atmosphere, attitudes and actions which are tinged with condescension and paternalism, the most telling of which are when he is not promoted as/equally or less skilled whites are.

This paper is anonymous. Think about the kinds of things the author, if made known, would have to suffer becuase of rasing this kind of discussion. Nothing so final as being fired or outright exclusion, but the kinds of things which are killing to the insides --insinuations, ridicule, over-exaggerated compensations.

This paper is presented anyway because it needs to be made know that many women in the movement are not "happy and contented" with their status. It needs to be made known that much talent and experience a re being wasted by this movement when women are not given jobs commensurate with their abilities. It needs to be known that just as Negroes were the crucial factor in the ecnomy of the cotton Sputh, so too in SNCC, women are the crucial factor that keeps the movement running ona day to day basis. Yet they are not given equal say-so when it comes to day to day decision making.

What can be done? Probably nothing right away. Most men in this movement are probably too threatened by the possibility of serious discussion on this subject. Perhaps this is because they have recently broken away from a matriarchal framework under which they may have grown up. Then too, many women are as unaware and insensitive to this subject as men, just as there are many Negroes who don't understand they are not free or who want to be part of white America. They don't understand that they have to give up their sould and stay in their place to be accepted. So too, many women, in order to be accepted by men, or men's terms, give themselves up to that caricature of what a woman is-- unthinking, pliable, an ornament to please the man.

Maybe the only thing that can come out of this paper is discussion--amidst the laughter -- but still discussion. (Those who laugh the hardest are often those who need the crutch of male supremacy the most.) And maybe some women will begin to recognize tday to day discriminations. And maybe sometime in the future the whole of the women in this movement will become so alert as to force the rest of the movement to stop the discrimination and start the slow process of changing values and ideas so that all of us gradually come to understand that this is no more a man's world than it is a white world.

Interview with **Diane Nash**
November 12, 1985
Chicago, Illinois
Production Team: B
Camera Rolls: 353-359
Sound Rolls: 1323-1325

Interview gathered as part of ***Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965).*** Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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Interview with Diane Nash, conducted by Blackside, Inc. on November 12, 1985, for *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in ***bold italics*** was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize.*

00:00:02:00

[camera roll 353]

[sound roll 1323]

[slate]

INTERVIEWER: NOW WE'RE DOING THE FIRST THING WHICH IS—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: HAVE FLAGS.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: BRING YOURSELF BACK TO CHICAGO. TEENAGER, ABOUT READY TO GO OFF TO COLLEGE AND I WANT YOU TO GET US IN TOUCH WITH WHO DIANE NASH IS, AT THIS TIME. WHAT SHE'S LOOKING FORWARD TO. WHAT SHE'S, WHERE SHE'S COMING FROM.

Diane Nash: She has—Oh.

INTERVIEWER: WELL, OK. WHEN YOU SPEAK, SPEAK "I."

Nash: I. OK. As a teenager, I think I really started emerging into being a real person, and I was very much aware of it, and ***I was looking forward in college to really expanding myself and growing. I was taking those kinds of issues very seriously. And that played quite a, a***

part, when I got to Nashville, and why I so keenly resented segregation and not being allowed to do basic kinds of things like eating at restaurants, in the ten cent stores even. So, you know, I really felt stifled and, and, and shut in very unfairly.

00:01:18:00

INTERVIEWER: WELL, YOU'RE FROM CHICAGO. EMMETT TILL'S FROM CHICAGO.

Nash: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: ROSA PARKS SITS ON—DOESN'T—REFUSES TO GIVE UP HER SEAT. ECKFORD TRIES TO, TO, TO GO TO LITTLE ROCK. TALK ABOUT THESE THINGS AND HOW THEY MIGHT HAVE BEEN PART OF YOUR LIFE AS A YOUNG GIRL. SHAPING YOU, AT THAT TIME.

Nash: You know, I heard about the Little Rock story on, on the radio and Autherine Lucy. I, I remember the Emmett Till situation really keenly. In fact, even now I, I can—I have a good image of that picture that appeared in *Jet* magazine, of him. And they made an impression. However, I had never traveled to the South at that time. And I didn't have an emotional relationship to segregation. It's, you know, I had—I understood the facts, and the stories, but there, there was not the emotional relationship. When I actually went south and actually saw signs that said "white" and "colored" and I actually could not drink out of that water fountain or go to that ladies' room, I had a real emotional reaction to that. I can remember the first time it happened, was at the Tennessee State Fair. And I had a date with this, this young man and I started to go the ladies' room. And it said, "white" and "colored" and I really resented that. I was outraged and so, it, it had a, a really emotional effect.

00:03:09:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. [pause] YOU, YOU, YOU'RE BEGINNING TO TAKE PART IN, IN NON-VIOLENT, DIRECT ACTION WORKSHOPS. AND YOU, YOU'RE JOINING OTHER STUDENTS TO DO THIS AND YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT SITTING IN AND ATTACKING THESE LUNCH COUNTERS THAT ARE BOTHEIRNG YOU. TALK TO ME ABOUT THOSE STUDENTS AND, AND YOU AS ONE OF THEM AND WHY DID YOU FEEL THAT THIS WAS SOMETHING THAT YOU HAD TO DO?

Nash: Well, I had by then experienced the emotional reaction and, and was really feeling stifled and, my goodness, I came to college to grow and expand and, you know, here I am shut in. And in Chicago, I had had access, at least, to public accommodations and lunch counters and what have you. So, my response was, who's trying to change it, change these things? And I recall talking to a number of people in the dormitories at school and on campus and asking them if they knew any people who were trying to, to bring about some type of change. And I remember being—getting, almost, depressed, because I encountered, what I thought, was so much apathy. At first, I couldn't find anyone and many of the students were saying, why are you concerned about that? And, you know, they were not interested in trying

to effect some kind of change, I thought. They certainly didn't, didn't seem to be. And then, I did talk to Paul Lepred [sic], who told me about the nonviolent workshops that Jim Lawson was conducting. They were taking place a couple of blocks off campus. And the reason that I said earlier that I thought the other students were apathetic was that after the movement got started, and there was something that they could do, i.e. sit at a lunch counter, march, take part. Many of those same students were right there going to jail, taking part in marches and in the sit-ins, and what have you. It was that they didn't have a concept of, of what they really could do. So when they got one, they were on fire. They wanted to—a change too.

00:05:47:00

INTERVIEWER: TALK TO ME ABOUT JIM LAWSON AND HOW HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN A CATALYST FOR, FOR GETTING THESE KINDS OF THINGS DONE. HOLD ON A SECOND.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: HOLD ON A SECOND. SORRY ABOUT THAT. OK, THAT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: JIM LAWSON BEING A CATALYST FOR THAT KIND OF ACTION.

Nash: Jim Lawson was a very interesting person. He had been to India and he had studied the movement of Mohandas Gandhi in India. He also had been a conscientious objector and had refused to fight in the Korean War. And he really is the person that brought Gandhi's philosophy and strategies of non-violence to this country. And he conducted weekly workshops, where students in Nashville, as well as some of the people who lived in the Nashville community, were really trained and educated in these philosophies and strategies. I remember we used to role-play and we would do things like actually sit-in—pretending we were sitting in at lunch counters, in order to prepare ourselves to do that. And we would practice things such as how to protect your head from a beating. How to protect each other if, if one person was taking a severe beating. We would practice other people putting their bodies in between that person and the violence. So that the violence could be more distributed and hopefully no one would get seriously injured. We would practice not striking back if someone struck us. There were many things that I learned in those workshops that I not only was able to put into practice, at the time that we were demonstrating and so forth, but that I have used for the rest of my life. That have been invaluable in, in shaping the kind of person I've become.

00:07:08:00

INTERVIEWER: SPEAK—TALK TO ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THAT. HOW WE DOING ON FOOTAGE?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE'RE DOING FINE.

INTERVIEWER: ABOUT THAT GANDHIAN IDEA AND, AND HOW IT BEGAN TO BE SOMETHING THAT YOU COULD LATCH ONTO, SOMETHING ABOUT IT THAT

CONNECTED WITH YOU. WHAT CONNECTED?

Nash: Well, several things.

INTERVIEWER: REPEAT WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT. FROM—OK SO.

Nash: I didn't hear you.

INTERVIEWER: REPEAT WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT SO PEOPLE KNOW WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT. GANDHI.

Nash: There several principles that I learned in those workshops that I've been able to really use in the, the rest of my life. For example, I discovered the practical and real power of truth and love. Truth, I, I've gained a respect for truth not because it has anything to do with being good or right or anything, but it's being in touch with reality. When you're really honest with yourself and honest with other people, you give yourself and them the opportunity to solve problems, using reality, instead of lack of reality. That makes problem-solving much more efficient. [pause] I, I could give you an example.

INTERVIEWER: YEAH. TIE THAT, TIE THAT TO THE MOVEMENT THOUGH IN TERMS OF USING IT TO CONFRONT THOSE WHO WERE, WERE FIGHTING AGAINST YOU.

Nash: We felt we were right.

INTERVIEWER: YOU OK?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YEAH, I'M OK.

Nash: We felt we were right and rational. When we took a position that segregation was, was wrong. And we really tried to be open and honest and loving with our opposition. A person who is being truthful and honest, actually, is, is standing in a much more powerful position than a person who's lying or trying to maintain his preference even though, on some level, he knows he's wrong. I think, on some level, most people, really deep-down, know that segregation was wrong, just based on race—

00:10:29:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Nash —and disregarding everything else about the person.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: JUST ABOUT TO RUN OUT.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: COULDN'T GET THAT LAST SENTENCE.

INTERVIEWER: THAT'S GOOD.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK. [coughs] THAT WAS A CAMERA ROLL OUT ON THREE-FIVE-THREE. WE'RE GOING TO THREE-FIVE-FOUR.

00:10:44:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 354]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: HAVE FLAGS.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERIVEWER: ALL RIGHT. YOU'VE GOT—YOU'VE BEEN ORGANZING IN NASHVILLE. YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE GETTING READY. IT'S, IT'S, IT'S FEBRUARY AND YOU'RE INVOLVED IN FINALS AND YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE GOING TO GET IT, GET IT STARTED, ONCE YOU GET OUT OF THAT, BUT GREENSBORO HAPPENS. WHAT DOES GREENSBORO DO TO YOU? WHAT DOES IT DO FOR THE, FOR THE STUDENTS THERE WHEN THIS HAPPENS? CONNECT IT. REMEMBER BACK THEN.

Nash: Yeah. You know, we had—after—during the workshops, we had begun what we called testing the lunch counters. We had actually sent teams of people into department store restaurants to attempt to be served and we had anticipated that we'd be refused and we were. And we established the fact that we were not able to be served and we asked to speak to the manager and engaged him in a conversation about, why not. And the fact that it really was immoral to discriminate against people because of their skin color. And then Christmas break had happened. And we had intended to start the demonstrations afterwards and we hadn't really started up again. So when the students in Greensboro sat-in on February 1st, we simply made plans to join their effort by sitting-in at the same chains that, that they sat-in at. After we had started sitting-in, we were surprised and delighted to hear reports of other cities joining and having sit-ins. And, I think, we started feeling the power of that idea whose time had come. Before we did the things that we did, we had no inkling that the, the movement would become as widespread as it, as it was.

00:13:09:00

INTERVIEWER: WHEN, WHEN GREENSBORO HAPPENED AND YOU FOUND OUT ABOUT IT THAT, THAT DAY, THAT TIME WAS IT, WAS IT EXCITEMENT? WHAT IS A SENSE THAT OTHER PEOPLE WERE MOVING WITH US THAT—WAS ANY OF THAT KIND OF THING HAPPENING THEN?

Nash: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: DESCRIBE THAT TO ME.

Nash: It was a—

INTERVIEWER: DESCRIBE GETTING THE NEWS AND REALIZING.

Nash: It, it was very important, because as, as people our age—

INTERVIEWER: GOOD. TELL ME WHAT "IT" IS. START AGAIN AND TELL ME WHAT "IT," WHEN YOU SAY "IT."

Nash: It's very important to hear news of other cities having demonstrations of their own; sit-ins of their own at these same chains. As, as people twenty years old—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THAT, THAT NOISE.

INTERVIEWER: OK. CUT.

[cut]

00:14:01:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: HAVE FLAGS.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND THANK YOU SIR.

INTERVIEWER: OK. SO WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO IS GET BACK TO BEING IN THE DORM AND HEARING THAT ORANGE—AND OTHER PLACES ARE STARTING TO, TO MOVE AND THAT FEELING AND WHAT THAT MEANT TO YOU IN TERMS OF HAPPENING.

Nash: It was a total surprise, when other cities joined in the same chains that we were sitting-in. And I can remember being in the dorm any number of times and hearing the newscasts that Orangeburg had had demonstrations or Knoxville or, you know, other, other towns. And

we were really excited. I can remember, we'd applaud, and say, yeah! [laughs] When you are that age, you don't feel powerful. I remember realizing that in—with what we were doing, trying to abolish segregation, we were coming up against governors of southern states, judges, politicians, businessmen, and I remember thinking, I'm only twenty-two years old, what do I know? What am I doing? And I felt very vulnerable. So when we felt—when we, when we heard these newscasts, that other cities were having demonstrations it really helped. Because there were more of us. And it, it was very important.

00:15:40:00

INTERVIEWER: GOOD. NOW, IT'S TIME. YOU'RE GONNA MOVE. YOU'RE GONNA GO DOWN AND YOU'RE GONNA SIT IN. YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN, YOU KNOW, WHAT'S GOING TO FACE YOU. TALK ABOUT THAT. TELL ME WHAT THAT FEELING IS ALL ABOUT.

Nash: People used to tickle me, talking about how brave I was, sitting in and marching and, what have you, because I was so scared all the time. It was like wall-to-wall terrified. I can remember sitting in class, many times, before demonstrations and I knew, like, we were gonna have a demonstration that afternoon. And the palms of hands would be so sweaty and I would be so tense and tight inside. I was really afraid. The movement had a way of reaching inside me and bringing out things that I never knew were there. Courage and, and love for people. It was a real experience to be among a group of people who would put their bodies between you and danger. And to love people that you worked with enough that you would put yours between them and danger. I can't say that I've had a similar kind of experience since Nashville. And the friendships that were forged then, as a result of going through experiences like that, have remained really strong and vital and deep to this day. There are people that, sometimes I don't see them over several years, but when I do see them, we are still very close.

INTERVIEWER: OK. LET'S CUT FOR A SECOND.

[cut]

00:17:49:00

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: HOW THE STUDENTS RESPONDED TO IT AND WHAT DID IT, WHAT DID IT MEAN WHEN THIS—THAT KIND OF THING CAME DOWN? AFTER ALL, YOU KNOW, THINGS THAT YOU WERE DOING. WHAT WAS THE FEELINGS YOU HAD ABOUT ALL THAT? OK. TELL ME WHEN YOU'RE READY.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: AND WE ARE READY.

INTERVIEWER: OK. TALK TO ME ABOUT THAT RECOMMENDATION.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: HOLD IT, HOLD IT. LET THAT GO OUTSIDE NOW. NOW, DON'T CUT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: NO I'M NOT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: I, I NEVER CUT.

INTERVIEWER: TALK, TALK ABOUT THAT FEELING AND HOW YOU RESPONDED TO THAT RECOMMENDATION OF PARTIAL INTEGRATION AND—

Nash: One of the things I remember about the bi-racial committee was that the students managed to move so fast that other forces in the community couldn't keep up with us. At that time, we would have meetings at six in the morning, before those—before class for those of us who had eight o'clock classes. And then we'd meet again in the afternoon. And we received word that the bi-racial committee had issued their report. One night—we received word one night and formulated our response to it, almost, immediately. And it was very clear. We didn't have a hard time debating what would—the response of the committee had been that blacks and whites start at opposite ends of the lunch counters and, and fill inward. And we were clear on that. That was still treating blacks and whites as though blacks were somehow inferior. And we were just not free to go and sit down and be served like anyone. And so, we immediately decided to begin sitting-in. So, elements in the community that would have supported that position, didn't even have a chance to say, well, we think this is a responsible kind of workable situation. It wasn't and we moved on it. And, and I loved the energy that that kind of feeling, like we were right, feeling prepared to put our whole selves into what was right, gave us.

00:20:15:00

INTERVIEWER: TALK TO ME ABOUT THE IDEA OF GOING TO JAIL. ABOUT BEING A STUDENT, YOU KNOW, AT THAT TIME AND—

Nash: That was the thing that I could never envision, beforehand. I remember being at, at a workshop and asking Jim Lawson, well, what happens when the police come and say they'll arrest us? And he, he would respond. And I must have asked him four or five times, that same thing, but what, you know, and what I was really trying to get him to do, was somehow say, well, everything will be all right, and of course he couldn't say that. And it was really strange because I had no way of envisioning myself in jail and how that would be. You know, it was like somehow, a wall here, the end of life, that I couldn't see beyond. And, after that workshop, I told the other people there, I said, you know, I'm really not going to demonstrate with you. [laughs] I was afraid of going to jail. I said, I'll do telephone work and I'll type and, what have you, but I'm really afraid to go to jail. And, and I meant it. And, like I said earlier, the movement had a way of reaching inside you. When the time came to go to jail, I was far too busy to be afraid.

00:21:41:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Nash: And we had to go and that's what happened.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YOU'D BETTER PICK IT UP WITH "I WAS FAR TOO BUSY."

INTERVIEWER: RIGHT. YES. OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THAT'S A ROLL OUT—

00:21:48:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 355]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: —YOU'RE HAVING TOO MUCH FUN.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: HAVE FLAGS.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Nash: The movement had a way of reaching inside you and bringing out things that even you didn't know were there. Such as courage and what have you. When it, when it was time to go jail, I was much too busy to be afraid. The sit-ins were really highly charged, emotional, emotionally. I'm, I'm thinking of one in particular where, in our non-violent workshops, we had decided to be respectful of the opposition and try to keep issues geared towards desegregation not get sidetracked. And ***the first sit-in we had was really funny, because the waitresses were nervous. And they must have dropped two thousand dollars worth of dishes that day. [laughs] 'Cause they, I mean, literally, it was almost a cartoon. Because I can remember one in particular, she, she was so nervous. She picked up dishes and, and she dropped one and, and she'd pick up another one and she'd drop it, and another and she—it was really funny and we were sitting there trying not to laugh, because we thought***

that, that laughing would be insulting and, you know, we didn't want to create that kind of atmosphere. At the same time, we were scared to death [laughs]. And so there were all these emotions going on. Well, ***the day that the police first arrested*** us was interesting too, because their attitude, but they had made a decision they were gonna arrest us if we sat-in that day. And so, ***they announced to us, OK, all you nigras [sic], get up from the lunch counter and, you know, or we're gonna arrest you. And their attitude was like, well, we warned you. So they repeated it a couple of times and nobody moved. And, course, we were prepared for this. So they said, well, we warned you, you won't move, OK, everybody's under arrest.*** So we all get up and marched to the, the wagon. Well, actually, I wasn't in the first group. But everybody who was at the lunch counter was arrested. So then the police had the attitude like, OK, we warned, warned them, they didn't listen. ***And then they turned and they looked around at the lunch counter again and the second wave of students had all taken seats. And they were confounded. They kind of looked at each other like, now what do we do? You know? They said well, OK, we'll arrest those too, and they did it. Then the third wave and no matter what they did and how many they arrested, there was still a lunch counter full of students there.*** And it, it was interesting to watch their response, which was really unset—really surprised them, you know? They didn't quite know how to act, and pretty soon it just got to be a problem for them [laughs].

00:25:16:00

INTERVIEWER: LET'S JUMP A LITTLE BIT FURTHER AND ALEXANDER LOOBY'S HOUSE IS BOMBED. WHAT—HOW DID, HOW DID PEOPLE RESPOND TO THAT BLACK AND WHITE? DID IT—HOW DID IT AFFECT THE MOVEMENT AT THAT TIME?

Nash: Attorney Looby was a very, very respected man in the community. He had a reputation of defending people who didn't have enough money to adequately pay him and, and of being a really decent human being. And quite by accident, the student central committee had a meeting scheduled for six a.m. that morning. And I remember I was up and getting dressed to go to the meeting, when I heard the explosion, although I didn't know what it was. I just heard this big boom and by the time I got out of the dorm and went to the cafeteria and what have you, people had started talking about the fact that—of, of what had happened. So when we got to the meeting that morning, we were able to, again, move very rapidly on what had just happened. And we decided to have the mass march consisting of students from all of the schools who were participating. And so, we got back, it was interesting, too, the make-up of the central committee. There was a real continuum of students, those who tended to be more radical and—by radical, I mean, going to the heart of the problem. Doing really progressive things. The ones who were always ready to march first and then there was, you know, there was a continuum of people. Those who were in the middle and then those who were conservative, in terms of, you know, wanting to go slow. I wasn't, personally, I wasn't sure that, you know, this mass march, that fast, that day, was the thing to do, at that time. After that it was really clear that it was a, a wonderful strategy and I'm, I'm glad that the student committee decided to do it, even though I wasn't ready to at the moment. But—

00:27:42:00

INTERVIEWER: EX—OK THE MARCH HOW—DESCRIBE THAT MARCH TO ME IN YOUR OWN RECOLLECTION. IT WAS, IT WAS A QUIET MARCH. YOU KNOW, GIVE ME—DESCRIBE IT TO ME SO WE HAVE A SENSE OF WHAT IS WAS. HOW, HOW IT UNFOLDED. THE FEELING THERE.

Nash: The, the students met on Tennessee A&I's campus and we marched, I think, three abreast. We were very organized. One of the things that we made it a point of—was that whenever there was a demonstration, we were to be overly dressed. The, the men generally wore suits and ties and the women, well, we looked like we were dressing up for Sunday. And anyway, we, we marched quietly. We were met later by students at Fisk. We passed Fisk campus. And other students—other schools had points where they joined in to the march. There were many thousands of people that marched that day. We marched silently, really. And the, the long line of students must have continued for many, many, many blocks or miles, maybe. And we marched to the mayor's office. We had sent telegrams ahead of time telling him that, as a result of the bombing of Attorney Looby's home and the state of violence and potential violence, in the city of Nashville we felt like we needed to talk to the mayor. So we met him on the steps of City Hall and confronted him with what his feelings, as a man, were. As a person. I was particularly interested in that as opposed to just his being the Mayor and—

00:29:56:00

[cut]

[lost frames]

00:29:59:00

Nash: —and ***I have a lot of respect for the way he responded. He didn't have to respond the way he did. He said that he felt like it was wrong for citizens of Nashville to be discriminated against at the lunch counters solely on the basis of the color of their skin. And I think that was the turning point.***

00:30:24:00

[cut]

[lost frames]

00:30:25:00

Nash: The Nashville newspaper reported that in the headlines the next day. And it was one more step towards desegregating the lunch counters. And, I think, that day was very important. One of the things that we were able to do in the movement which was one of the things that we were also—that we learned also from Gandhi's movement was to turn the

energy of violence that was perpetrated against us into advantage. And so, if Attorney Looby's house was bombed that was used as a catalyst to draw many thousands of the people to express their opposition to segregation.

00:31:13:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. HE MAKES A STATEMENT. THE DOWNTOWN MERCHANTS, EVENTUALLY, DECIDE TO DESEGREGATE. IS IT A VICTORY THEN? HAVE YOU WON OR IS THERE ANOTHER SIDE—

Nash: Who makes the statement? Who—

INTERVIEWER: THE, THE MERCHANTS DECIDED THAT THEY ARE GOING TO, I MEAN, THE MAYOR SAYS THAT HE DOES NOT THINK THAT PEOPLE SHOULD BE DESEGREGATED [sic] AGAINST IN THE CITY OF NASHVILLE. THE MERCHANTS, EVENTUALLY, DECIDE TO LET PEOPLE—DESEGREGATE THEIR COUNTERS. IS IT A VICTORY THEN OR IS THERE, IS THERE MORE TO THAT STORY?

Nash: Well, I that when blacks were actually served at the lunch counters that was clearly the reaching of the goal we had set. There was another very important element in terms of the economic withdrawal. The first time we talked to the merchants their attitude was, well, you wanted a meeting, you know, here we're having it. They listened to what we had to say. They very quickly said, no we can't do it. And then their attitude was like, we're busy men we're ready for the meeting to be over, that's it. No we can't have desegregation.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: RELOAD BEFORE THE NEXT POINT.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SORRY. WE'RE JUST ABOUT TO—

[cut]

00:32:26:00

[slate]

[change to camera roll 356]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: YOU READY?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: YEAH.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SECOND STICK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —KEEP THE, KEEP THE ENERGY UP. THE MORE ENERGETICALLY YOUR, YOUR ANSWERS ARE AND EVERYTHING THE MORE ENGAGING THEY BECOME TO YOU. AND SO—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: OK, IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: —TALK TO ME ABOUT THAT. THE, THE RELUNCTANCE OF THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND HOW THE BOYCOTT, THEN, CHANGED THEIR MIND AND HIT 'EM AT HOME.

Nash: You know, Gandhi actually developed a way to declare warfare without using violence. And it is efficient and effective. And I, I sometimes marveled that, in spite of the success that we had with the southern movement, that we are not studying it and developing it and pursuing it more. It's, it's a process that a community goes through that consists of five steps. One of the important phases of the movement in Nashville was the economic withdrawal where the oppressed people really withdraw their participation from their own oppression. And so, there was a, a withdrawal of shopping by the blacks from—and by whites who agreed with us and who'd participated, from the downtown area. That, while blacks couldn't be served at the lunch counters or in the restaurants of the department stores, we didn't shop downtown at all. And that was the height of the Easter shopping season which used to be even more important to, to retail merchants then, then they are now. Everybody used to get a brand new Easter outfit that, that could possibly afford to. And that boycott was, I think, about 98% effective or more among blacks in Nashville. So that the next time, when, when we began negotiating with the merchants again, they were much more interested in talking to us than they had been the first time. And they had a real interest in working out how we could really resolve this situation. And, I think, the, the experience was important for me, personally, because we really began to see them as people and tried to hear what their reservations were. For instance, you know, they were concerned that there would not be a boycott of the whites of the lunch counters if they began to serve blacks. And we started to, really, strategizing how we could avoid that. So some of the whites, in Nashville, who were—who recognized that it was important to desegregate the city figured in to the, the strategy, because they made it a point to sit next to the blacks who were being served so that there could not be a white boycott. So—those kinds of experiences made me really look at the fact that bringing about social change through violence is, probably, not nearly as, as realistic because, who do you kill? Do you kill all whites? That doesn't make sense because we had whites who were our opposition the first year who the second year—who were merchants even the first year. The second year they took an attitude with the merchant's whose lunch counters we were desegregating as kind of, I know how you feel. I felt that way last year. It's not that bad. In fact, it really makes sense. And they were very helpful to us the second year in bringing about desegregation.

INTERVIEWER: OK. LET'S CUT FOR A SECOND, PLEASE.

[cut]

00:37:07:00

INTERVIEWER: THINK BACK TO WHAT WAS GOING ON AT [sic] THE SIT-INS ARE, ARE HAPPENING. THEY'R BREAKING OUT ALL OVER THE COUNTRY.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FLAGS.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: THIS IS EXCITING. YOU, YOU RECOGNIZING THAT IT'S HAPPENING IN OTHER PLACES. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN TO YOU AND THEN HOW DOES IT, HOW DOES IT THEN BEGIN TO FORM ITSELF INTO A, INTO A, A NEW ORGANIZATION? SO, TALK TO ME ABOUT HOW THE FEELING OR THE IDEA TO, TO, TO ORGANIZE AS A STUDENT—INDEPENDENT STUDENT ORGANIZATION CAME ABOUT.

Nash: I remember receiving the invitation to attend the conference that would bring together student leadership from many campuses where there were sit-in, sit-ins going on. And, of course, we had been really excited by the fact that there was a national movement in many cities involved. We felt a real kinship with the students who were working in other cities, to bring about the same things that we were. And it, it felt like a good idea. We were interested in meeting the people that, you know, meeting as individuals the people that we had heard about. And we decided to send a, a large delegation to the—that was Raleigh, I believe, yeah, North Carolina. The impetus, we understood later, had come, for that meeting had come from Ella Baker. And I, I'd, I'd, I'd like to just say a couple of words about Ella Baker. She was a person who I think was very central to setting the direction that the student movement—

INTERVIEWER: STOP FOR ONE SECOND. START IT AGAIN. TELL ME WHO ELLA BAKER WAS, IN CASE I CAN'T—I CUT IT. I CAN'T—

Nash: ***Ella Baker was very important to giving direction to the student movement,*** at that particular point. ***And not giving direction in a way of her making decisions as to what the students ought to do, but in terms of really seeing how important it was to recognize the fact that the students should set the, the goals and directions, and maintain control of the student movement.*** So, she was there in terms of offering rich experience of her own and advice and helping patch things up when they needed to be patched up. She was very important to me, personally, for several reasons. Number one, I was just beginning to learn, during that period of time, how everyone, particularly people who were older than we were, had other motives for their participation. Motives other than simply achieving freedom. There were people involved who worked with civil rights organizations, who were very concerned about their organization's image and perpetuating their organization. Who were concerned about fundraising and who would, would make decisions and take positions, based on those concerns, even at the expense, sometime of actually gaining desegregation such as

the students were trying to do. And that was a very energy-draining thing for me, sometimes. And I didn't—I, I remember a couple of times when things had happened that really bothered me, that I didn't totally understand. I never had to worry about where Ella Baker was coming from. She was a very honest person and she was—she would speak her mind honestly. She was a person that I turned to frequently, who could emotionally pick me back up and dust me off. And she would say things, like, well, you know, so-and-so is concerned about his fundraising and maybe that's why he took—and it would make things click and fall into place and she was just tremendously helpful.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Nash: To me personally and also to SNCC. I think she was constantly aware of the fact that the differences that the students had were probably not as important as the similarities that we had, in terms of, what we were trying to do. So, very often, she was the person who was able to make us see and work together and what have you. I think her participation as a person some years older than we, could really serve as a model of how older people can give energy and help to younger people and, at the same time, not take over and tell them what to do. Really, really strengthen them as individuals and also strengthen—she strengthened our organization.

00:42:58:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT MADE YOU FEEL THAT WHAT YOU HAD THERE, THE STUDENT MOVEMENT AT THAT TIME, WAS SOMETHING NEW, SOMETHING SPECIAL, SOMETHING THE MOVEMENT MIGHT HAVE NEEDED? WAS ABOUT IT? WHAT ABOUT IT MADE—

Nash: You know, when you're that vulnerable and you're afraid of getting killed and you're being sent to jail and you never know what the next hour—

00:43:21:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I, I'M SORRY. I THOUGHT WE WERE GONNA MAKE IT BUT—

00:43:23:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 357]

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: MARKED.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: WHAT A GREAT MARK. THAT WAS ONE OF THE BETTER MARKS.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: THANK YOU.

INTERVIEWER: OK. SO WE'RE, WE'RE MORE THAN HALF WAY. HOW DOES THAT FEEL AND WE'RE—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 3: YOU'RE ON.

INTERVIEWER: —PICKING IT ALL UP OK. WHAT I WANT TO DO IS, I WANT TO JUMP TO THE FREEDOM RIDES, AND I WANT YOU TO TELL ME ABOUT HEARING ABOUT MONTGOMERY AND THE FIRST RIDES AND THEIR STOPPING AND WHAT THAT—WHAT THAT DID TO YOU, THAT MADE YOU FEEL.

Nash: Well, we heard about the Freedom Rides in Nashville, when they were starting. And we all agreed with their purposes and agreed that it was really an important thing for CORE to do. We also were very aware of the fact that taking the route that they were taking, which was down the eastern seacoast, into the Deep South, through Georgia, Florida, Alabama and Mississippi, we knew that that was awfully dangerous and that they would probably meet with violence a number of times. So in Nashville we decided that we would watch them, as they pro—as the Freedom Ride progressed. And if there were ways that we could help, we'd stand by, and be available. And true enough, that's—well, they were beaten and attacked, many, many times. When the buses were burned in Anniston, on Mother's Day, the Nashville group met and—[laughs]

[cut]

00:45:15:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: HAVE FLAGS AND—

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: FEELING. WHAT IT'S MAKING YOU FEEL.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: ONE SECOND, O. IT'S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: OK, TALK TO ME ABOUT THAT, AT THAT TIME, THAT MOMENT.

Nash: When those buses were burned in Alabama, since there was such a close kinship,

between us and the Freedom Riders, we understood exactly what they were doing and it was our fight every bit as much as theirs. It was as though we had been attacked. And a contingency of students left Nashville to go and pick up the Freedom Ride where it had stopped or been stopped. Now, that was really one of the times where I saw people face death. Because nobody went and joined the Freedom Ride without—it would have been really unwise to have gone without realizing that they might not have come back. Some of the students that left gave me sealed letters to be mailed in case they were killed. That's how prepared they were for death.

00:46:51:00

INTERVIEWER: WHY DID YOU, WHY DID YOU THINK YOU HAD TO CONTINUE RIDES, THEN?

Nash: ***You know, if the Freedom Ride had been stopped as a result of violence, I strongly felt that the future of the movement was going to be just cut short. Because the impression would have been given that whenever a movement starts, all that has to be done is that you attack it with massive violence and the, the blacks would stop.*** And I thought that was a very dangerous thing to happen. So, under those circumstances, it was really important that the ride continue. And again, part of the non-violent strategy understands that when that type of negative energy is directed at you, one of the important things to do is find ways to convert it to, to positive energy, which we were able to do as a result of continuing.

00:48:06:00

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DID YOU THINK THE, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WAS GOING TO DO FOR IT? WAS IT A PLAN TO THEN FORCE THEM INTO SOME SORT OF ACTION, WAS THAT A PART OF THE PLAN THEN, TO GET THEM TO RESPOND TO—

Nash: As I recall, there was some, different individuals had different feelings about that. Of course, our whole—

INTERVIEWER: START AGAIN. ABOUT WHAT. TELL ME WHAT "THAT" IS.

Nash: Right. Our whole way of operating was that we took ultimate responsibility for what we were going to do. So we made our decisions and then we told the Federal Government what that would be. It was felt that they should be advised, in Washington, of what our plans were and what we were going to do. And we certainly made sure that they did know what we were going to do. Some people hoped for protection from the Federal Government. I, I think Jim Lawson was, well, he, he cautioned against relying on hoping for federal protection.

00:49:20:00

INTERVIEWER: YOU, BUT YOU STAYED—YOU WERE CONSTANTLY IN TOUCH WITH THEM. YOU WOULD CALL THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT CONSTANTLY.

WHY?

Nash: Well, as my job—the students from Nashville who were going to pick up the Freedom Ride elected me coordinator. And as coordinator, part of my responsibility was to stay in touch with the Justice Department. I was to keep the press informed, the Justice Department. To keep, keep the communities that were participating informed, such as Birmingham, Montgomery, Jackson, Nashville, etc. To coordinate the training and recruitment of more people to take up the Freedom Ride, etc. etc. So I advised the Justice Department regularly as to what our plans were and what kinds of things were happening.

00:50:13:00

INTERVIEWER: NOW, WHEN THE RIDERS ARE AMBUSHED IN MONTGOMERY, THE SECOND WAVE, JOHN LEWIS AND JIM ZWERG AND THESE PEOPLE. WHAT DID YOU FEEL ABOUT—DID YOU, DID YOU EXPECT THEM TO BE PROTECTED UP TO THAT POINT?

Nash: Well, I hoped they would be, of course, everything was so uncertain. We never knew what the situation would be like ten minutes from the time that it was. During the Freedom Ride, in my job as coordinator, I found myself really, that was an intensely emotional time for me, because the people, some of the people I loved most, who were my closest friends, I was very well aware of the—of the fact that when I went to sleep at night some of them might not be alive the next night. And during that particular time, I think, I, I cried just every night, profusely. And, and I needed to as an energy release. There was so much tension. It was like being at war. And we were very upset when they were attacked and injured. And I remember visiting them in the hospital and there was so much concern over which of these injuries would be permanent. And, and people really stood to be permanently injured for the rest of their lives.

00:51:43:00

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME ABOUT GOING TO JACKSON, TELL ME A STORY ABOUT GOING AHEAD, BEING THE FRONT PERSON. GOING TO THE WAITING—CHECKING OUT THE WAITING ROOMS.

Nash: Nope. [laughs]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK, HOLD ON. LET ME CHANGE.

[cut]

00:51:58:00

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: YOU TAKING UP MY TIME NOW [laughs].

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: WE'RE ALL ENJOYING THIS ONE. IT WORRIES ME.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: SOUNDS ON.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: CANCEL MY CHRISTMAS PLANS. OK, HERE WE GO. SHAKE THE CAMERA A BIT. OK.

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME ABOUT BEING A PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT AND YOU'RE FEELINGS ABOUT THAT, YOU KNOW.

Nash: I think it's really important that young people today understand that the movement of the '60s was really a people's movement. The media and history seems to record it as Martin Luther King's movement, but if young people realized that it was people just like them, their age, that formulated goals and strategies and actually developed the movement, that when they look around now, and see things that need to be changed, that they—instead of saying, I wish we had a leader like Martin Luther King today. They would say, what can I do? What can my roommate and I do to effect that change? And that's not to take anything away from Martin. I personally think he made a tremendous contribution. And I, I, I liked him a great deal, as an individual. I thought he was a really nice guy. And I, I still feel the pain of his not being with us, but I think that, that, that it's really important to realize that each individual shouldered a great deal of responsibility. And, and, and that's the, the way the movement of the '60s was accomplished.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: CAN WE CUT FOR A SECOND?

INTERVIEWER: YEAH.

[cut]

00:54:01:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FLAGS.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: TAKE YOURSELF BACK TO THAT TIME.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OK.

INTERVIEWER: EXPLAIN—DESCRIBE FOR ME YOUR REACTION TO THE BOMBING SIXTREENTH [sic]—SIXTEENTH STREET, STREET CHURCH AND WHAT THAT—HOW THAT EVOLVED INTO A MOVE—A PLAN FOR A SUMMER MOVEMENT.

Nash: Well—

00:54:20:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Nash: —my former husband and I were sitting—

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I'M SORRY.

00:54:28:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 358]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: FLAGS.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARKER.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: OK.

INTERVIEWER: OK. I WANT YOU TO TAKE YOURSELF BACK TO THAT TIME. GET IN TOUCH WITH HOW YOU REACTED TO THAT BOMBING AND WHAT THAT—HOW YOUR PLAN EVOLVED OUT OF THAT REACTION, THAT FEELING THAT YOU HAD THEN.

Nash: Well, on the Sunday when the girls had been killed in the bombing in the church, in Birmingham, my former husband and I, Jim Bevel, were sitting in Golden Frinks' living room. There was a voter registration campaign going on, currently, that we were involved in, and we were crying, because in many ways we, we felt like our own children had been killed. And we knew that the activity of the civil rights movement had been involved in generating the kind of energy that brought out this kind of hostility. And we decided that we would do something about it. And we said, that we had two options. The first one was, we felt confident that if we tried, we could find out who had done it and we could make sure they got killed. And we considered that as a real option. And the second option was that we felt that if blacks in Alabama had the right to vote, that they could protect black children. And we deliberately made a choice and chose the second option. And, at that time, promised ourselves and each other, that if it took twenty years, or as long as it took, we weren't gonna

stop working on it and trying until Alabama blacks had the right to vote. So, we drew up that day, an initial strategy draft for a movement in Alabama designed to get the right to vote. Bevel continued working in the local—he had responsibilities in the local voter registration drive and my job was to get on an airplane and have a meeting with Dr. King and Fred Shuttlesworth and encourage them to have a meeting of the staff to make a decision on what to do. Our strategy could be a draft, but—

INTERVIEWER: SO WHAT HAPPENED?

Nash: Wait a minute. Can?

INTERVIEWER: CUT?

Nash: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: CUT.

[cut]

00:57:25:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: FLAGS AND MARK.

[sync tone]

Nash: Well, we tried for some—I'm not comfortable.

INTERVIEWER: CUT. CUT.

[cut]

00:57:42:00

INTERVIEWER: I'M GONNA GIVE YOU AN ACTION NOW, OK.

[sync tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: NOW LET ME GET SETTLED HERE. WE'RE SETTLED.

INTERVIEWER: OK. TELL ME ABOUT THAT—

Nash: OK. Well, the first time I remember being in direct touch with the Justice Department, of course, was with the Freedom Ride. And their response was to try to discourage us from going and, of course, we had decided to go and we weren't asking them if we could go, we were informing them of what we were gonna do. So that they could, you know, offer protection or whatever they wanted to do. And their response had been, well, don't do it. All

right, so then in Birmingham, I remember calling the Justice Department one day to tell them that the Birmingham Police had police dogs and were—had brought police dogs into the, the demonstrators. And their response was, well, have they bitten anybody? And I said, no, as far as I know. Unless they've bitten someone since I left in order to come and make this phone call. So, you know, the Justice Department's response was well, if they haven't bitten anyone yet, there's nothing we can do until they actually bite people. [laughs] Which wasn't the case, because there had been the incident of the, I think they were called RAM, who were making plans to blow up the Statue of Liberty, allegedly, making plans to blow up the Statue of Liberty. Well, they certainly adju—arrested them, before they actually did it. And so I, I really felt impatience with the Justice Department, because if United States citizens were getting discriminated against, they had a responsibility to, to act like a government, and assert themselves. Civil rights laws were the only ones—later, after Kennedy offered the Civil Rights Bill. Violating civil rights laws and discriminating against blacks, you couldn't get in jail for doing. Nobody was jailed for, for violating those laws or, or seriously fined. It was like they were playing. So, we realized that we had to really shoulder the responsibility for our movement ourselves and not count on Washington to do that.

01:00:26:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. SPEAKING ABOUT GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNMENT'S INVOLVEMENT, GOING BACK TO SIT-INS, HERE YOU DON'T HAVE SPECIFIC LAWS THAT SAY A PERSON HAS TO OPEN THEIR STORE TO YOU OR, OR ALLOW YOU TO SIT NEXT TO ANOTHER PERSON AT THEIR COUNTER. HOW—WAS THERE ANY WAY THAT YOU FELT THAT YOU COULD ENGAGE LAW ENFORCEMENT OR LAW TO AID YOU AT THAT POINT? WERE—WAS THAT A PART OF YOUR STRATEGY?

Nash: Now, the laws I was referring to had to do, particularly, with Kennedy's Civil Rights Act. And, in fact, Gloria Richardson and I sat down at a meeting that Kennedy had called women from across the country to support his act. And we circled the loophole in every section of that bill which really weakened it. Now, interestingly enough, the, the law and the reality of, of action is, is,—has an interesting relationship. For example, in Nashville, in 1960 and later, there were laws on the books that said it was illegal for blacks and whites to eat together in public accommodations. Well, we desegregated the lunch counters and those laws stayed on the books for some years. I presume that they’re no longer there, but it was in practice while there were, in fact, laws that forbade it. There were injunctions issued throughout the movement. And if, if thousands of people disobeyed the injunction, the injunctions were forgotten about. [laughs] So, you know, laws that are immoral, I think people have to realize, that there do in fact exist higher laws and that they shouldn't tolerate or, or obey those laws.

INTERVIEWER: OK. CAN WE CUT FOR A SECOND?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: TWENTY.

[cut]

01:02:40:00

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: HAVE FLAGS.

INTERVIEWER: AT WHAT POINT IN THE MOVEMENT DID YOU FEEL THAT YOU WERE—

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —NO LONGER AN INDIVIDUAL? THAT YOU WERE REALLY A PART OF, OF SOMETHING MUCH LARGER? A PART OF SOMETHING THAT, WHAT WE CALL NOW, THE MOVEMENT?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: CAN I, CAN I OFFER THIS ONE QUESTION. YOU LOOK GREAT WHEN YOU LEAN ON YOUR HAND.

Nash: [laughs]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: NO SERIOUSLY. YEAH. SERIOUSLY LOOKS REALLY NEAT ESPECIALLY FOR THIS QUESTION, I THINK. HANG ON ONE SECOND. OK.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU TALK TO ME ABOUT THAT. WHEN, WHEN YOU WROTE IT BEGAN TO DAWN ON YOU, YOU WERE A PART OF SOMETHING MUCH LARGER THAN AN INDIVIDUAL ACT.

Nash: First of all, I always have felt like I was an individual, even though, at the same time, I've been very aware of being part of a larger movement. I think during the period of time where we kept hearing newscasts that city after city was—had begun, begun demonstrating at lunch counters was when I began to see there is really something sweeping the country and started, you know, feeling a real identification with people, many times, whom I had never met. But I knew that there were hundreds of people in various cities that were a part of the same thing I was a part of. And it was important, it was quite an experience.

INTERVIEWER: WHAT, WHAT—HOW DID IT MAKE YOU FEEL? CAN YOU—

Nash: Like a part of something strong and powerful and right and good and, and growing and, and transcending some really negative, unhealthy stuff that was going on.

01:04:28:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. JUST ONE MOMENT, DURING ALL THAT TIME, THAT MAKES YOU LAUGH, MAKES YOU SMILE, MAKES YOU FEEL GLAD. CAN YOU TELL ME THAT MOMENT?

Nash: The moments when I got out of jail? [laughs]

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME THAT. THESE ARE THE MOMENTS THAT I THINK—

Nash: I think, when we had the mass meeting and announced to the Nashville community that we had won the struggle was, was really a, a high point. And, and we look back and realize that every kind of emotion had been invoked. The, the anger, the fear, the, the tension, the awareness—

01:05:30:00

[cut]

[wild audio]

Nash: —of being part of a large, powerful issue, and group and, and the happiness of feeling like justice has triumphed. The, the Voting Rights Act, that Alabama blacks actually had the right to vote, and that there were federal referees going to come in to ensure that. After having made a commitment to, to help issue that in, that was a great moment.

INTERVIEWER: OK. OK.

01:06:10:00

[cut]

[slate]

[change to camera roll 359]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 1: HAVE FLAGS.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER 2: AND MARK.

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: BACK IN NASHVILLE AND YOU'RE SITTING IN A ROOM WITH JOHN LEWIS, BERNARD LAFAYETTE, AND, AND MARION BARRY, AND OTHER PEOPLE. IF YOU LOOKED AROUND THAT ROOM, VIVIAN. DO YOU THINK ALL THESE PEOPLE WOULD BE SO IMPORTANT TO THE MOVEMENT THAT TIME? DID YOU, DID ANY OF YOU HAVE A FEELING FOR WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THAT PLACE AT THAT TIME?

Nash: I don't understand the question. Did—that they would be important to the movement itself? During that period of time?

INTERVIEWER: YEAH. YOU KNOW, ALL THESE LEADERS CAME OUT OF THAT

MOVEMENT.

Nash: Or that they'd emerge later, as important?

INTERVIEWER: THAT THEY WOULD EMERGE LATER AS SO IMPORTANT.

Nash: Oh.

INTERVIEWER: DID YOU REALIZE—DID YOU HAVE ANY FEELING FOR WHAT WAS IN THAT ROOM TOGETHER?

Nash: I had a—I really never felt very able to envision the future. [laughs] I was intensely aware of them as people, at the time. My respect for them was profound. They were very brave, very wise people. And, and I loved them very much. And we were all parts of—they were very reliable. I could count on them to do things. We were all really aware that each other's lives depended on other people in the group. And that's the way I related to them and, I think that—and I know that's the way they related to me also. And that experience was very important. But as to envisioning where we would all be in twenty years or anything like that it, it was not possible for me to see in the future. I don't know, if I tried very hard.

01:08:15:00

INTERVIEWER: OK. DESCRIBE FOR ME—TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT REVEREND VIVIAN AND WHAT HE MEANT TO YOU, YOU, AT THAT TIME, AND, AND THE GROUP, THE MOVEMENT?

Nash: Well, C.T. Vivian and Jim Lawson were older than the students, and I mentioned to you that, for me, being twenty or twenty-two represented a certain kind of vulnerability and when I felt like we were coming up against people who were older and more powerful and more experienced. C.T. and Jim were part of the student central committee. They were representatives from the group that we, we used to call the adults; the Nashville Christian Leadership Council. And they were right there with the students. They sat-in at the lunch counters right with us. Anything that happened to us happened to them. They were vulnerable to being beaten up or, or jailed and what have you. So, they were very important links to the older community. And C.T. offered a kind of fire in his personality, you know. His, his commitment was something that I've always found beautiful and it's lasted through the years. It's, it's had a very long duration.

01:09:57:00

INTERVIEWER: DESCRIBE HIM ON THE STEPS TO ME THAT TIME. CONFRONTING BEN WEST THAT—SAYING TO ME THAT YOU QUESTION.

Nash: I guess his fire was very much in evidence that day.

INTERVIEWER: GOT TO TELL ME WHO “HE” IS.

Nash: Oh. C.T. Vivian made a, an initial presentation. He was the person who presented our, our position to the Mayor, to Mayor Ben West on the steps that day, in Nashville. And he was an eloquent spokesperson. His, his fire was very much in evidence that day. He, he has a certain commitment in his personality that really pervades the things he does and says, and, and that was his, his role that day, to make our—state our position.

INTERVIEWER: OK. LET'S CUT.

[cut]

[end of interview]

01:11:11:00