Civil Rights History Project
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Interviewee:	Philip Hutchings
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Interviewer:	Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D.
Videographer:	John Bishop
Length:	2:43:40

Philip Hutchings: She does this, I don't know if she's here today.

John Bishop: Okay we're ready.

Joseph Mosnier: Today is Thursday September 1, 2011. My name is Joe Mosnier of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I'm with videographer John Bishop, and we are in the field today to do an oral history interview for the Civil Rights History Project, which is a joint undertaking of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. And we're delighted to be in Oakland at the offices of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration with, uh, Mr. Phil Hutchings. Uh, Mr. Hutchings, thanks for sitting down. It's a uh, it's a pleasure to be out here to uh visit with you.

PH: You caught me.

JM: [Laughing] Let me, let me start, uh let's just spend a few minutes talking a little bit about, um, your family and Cleveland, and coming up there and obviously that would be some of the entrée to all of your later civil rights and other work. Maybe just have you talk a little bit about your folks and coming up in Cleveland.

PH: Well, my folks are, were migrants to Cleveland. Uh, my dad is from Macon, Georgia. I just visited there pretty recently, about a week ago. And uh he as a young man, I'm not sure exactly how old he was, h followed, his dad and his mother divorced. And she stayed in Georgia, and his father went up to Cleveland as part of the northward migrations and got a job as a streetcar conductor on the old trackless trolleys. And, um, my dad followed him, and I don't know exactly, a bunch of questions you'd love to ask later and never got around to asking at the time. So I don't know exactly, but he came as a young man somewhere, uh, up to Cleveland.

My mom, uh, uh, was born, uh, in a little town outside of Memphis, Tennessee, uh Union City, and, um, uh, her mother died when she was about a year old, and so, uh, she was passed to one of the sisters, one of her mother's sisters, her aunt. And the aunt lived in Cleveland and was a maid in Cleveland. And so uh my, my mom came at a very young age – uh, she was too young to be even aware of it probably – to Cleveland, and lived out in Cleveland Heights for the most part though she moved around as her aunt got different jobs. And, um, so there's a lot of interest right now because there was a domestic workers, uh, bill of rights that was passed in New York State about a year ago, and there's one pending, uh, in the California State legislature so they're trying to look at what has been the history of domestic workers over time. And I just said, "Oh my

mother wasn't a domestic worker but she, her, the woman who raised her was, she used to live in the house where her mother worked as a maid."

JM: Absolutely, yeah. How interesting. Yeah. Tell me a little bit about, uh, about –

PH: Oh, so I should just say that uh around that, um, um, they were I would call lower middle class. My dad worked at, at, at, at the post office as a clerk, pretty much all of his work life. He, in the mid-fifties he did get a job as a salesman for something called Kaiser-Frazer [Corporation]. You're probably old enough to know what that was. And that, uh, went belly up not too long afterwards. So, I think dad basically said I'd better go back to the government where there's always a current job. And again one of these questions you never ask is I, I'm sure a lot of that thinking was shaped by the [Great] Depression. And, uh, and again it was something we never, ever talked about. But at a time in the fifties, uh, where in late fifties particularly, where some of his friends were beginning to become doctors or lawyers or professionals or thinking about buying their houses, he kind of stuck in where he was and where he felt there was surety, assurance as a, as a postal clerk.

So it meant being a postal clerk he was governed by something called the Hatch Act, which means that uh, as a U.S. postal worker he couldn't be a political activist. So he had a lot of interest in a lot of the questions of the day, but, uh, that's why he did it through the church. And they, there was this social and literary forum called the Saint James Forum which was not at our particularly church actually. Uh, but he, I'm not quite sure of the politics, but he became chair of that for a couple of years. And as a little boy I would go to some of those meetings. And uh, and there would be local politicians or, uh,

talking about issues, and so, uh, on one hand at a very early age I got some sense of, uh, oh, the bigger world and they were coming right to a church right in our general neighborhood [phone ringing] in, in Cleveland. And, uh, I remember meeting the late Senator Robert Taft, who [05:00] was from Ohio, in 1952. I was all of eight years old and, uh, Taft was running for the Republican nomination against Eisenhower, which he eventually lost. But as the home senator he was going around and the church was one of the places where a lot of the white politicians came to talk to parts of the black constituency. And so Saint James was one of the leading churches for that. And so they got a really good assort – assortment and I remember shaking Robert Taft's hands. And, uh, I said to my dad, I said, "Dad, you know he's got some of the softest hands I ever shook hands with." I'm eight year old. And my dad, he was a Democrat, quipped by saying, "Yeah, because he's never done a real days of work in his life." And, uh, so okay. [Laughing] So my dad was active at that level and he was a, he was a deacon in the church. But, uh, he was restricted in terms of his politics though I always thought of him as a kind of a Humphrey, uh, Hubert Humphrey Democrat in the late fifties, early sixties.

My mom, um, uh, she grew up, she became a social worker, and uh, and then she eventually went to law school.

JM: Oh, wow.

PH: And uh she had the good fortune uh, it was one of those days there were so few blacks moving ahead, uh, at that level that small circles of people knew each other. So she ended up going to law school with Carl Stokes who became the first black mayor of Cleveland. And when he became mayor, he actually appointed her the chief referee of the Civil Service Commission. And being a typical – I mean my mind was on the South,

what was happening in the Civil Rights Movement, and I guess I wasn't aware until much later how critical a job that was because they were trying to integrate, or desegregate is a better word, the fire department and the police. And so it was a very much a hot seat job. And so but I never – again, it didn't, at the time was not totally aware of a lot of stuff that she was having to deal with and go through and, and Stokes being the first black mayor. You know, uh, it was just a lot of, it's kind of almost like Obama being the first black president.

And, um, so it was a really time for them but as a kid they kind of shield that. I was aware of it but not really aware of, you know, the details. And, um, so, they were very interested. My dad, uh, uh, we used to listen to Lowell Thomas on the radio as a kid, and we had one of those old-fashioned globes on a stand, and after the Lowell Thomas was over, we'd go over to the globe, and if there was something about uh Iran, he'd showed me where it was or Cuba. So, I say all that to say that I was getting a sense of the world and sort of it was from right in the family and um, and some of the local things. There was nothing radical about Lowell Thomas, but uh at least it was the news.

And Cleveland I think always felt itself kind of uh the more liberal part of the state of Ohio, and it tended to look east toward New York as opposed to west to Chicago. And so there was a kind of liberalism in the air; there was a very kind of liberal Jewish community in Cleveland at least at that time. I'm, I am not too familiar with what's going on more re – currently, and um, uh, and there was a lot of ethnic diversity, uh, mostly Catholic. Uh, and, uh, people from eastern Eur – different peoples from Eastern Europe, and then you had a very heavy oriented Democratic Party machine, which most of the time I was a kid was controlled by the Irish. So if you were O' anything [note: that

is, with an Irish surname], or you could say what county you were from in Ireland, you had jobs like that, you know [snapping fingers]. But my mom, uh, did get into the infrastructure a little bit in the Democratic Party. She actually ran for state representative, and she got endorsed by the local paper at the time, *The Cleveland Press*. And, uh, she did quite well for a first time run. She came in I think about twentieth, and uh there were I think the first eighteen were the ones who got nominated on the Democratic slate.

JM: And what year would that have been?

PH: I think it was ’58; it was either ’56 or ’58.

JM: Wow. Wow.

PH: I’m not quite, my memory. So I was in high school and so my mom was running. I, I, I, I helped her from the very beginning . She ran originally for precinct committeeman, and the district kind of mirrored our greater neighborhood. And I was a paperboy for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, which still exists. And so I just put her campaign stuff in all the papers, especially the Sunday paper which was really big and stuff like that. And then when I went to collect money I‘d say, “Don’t forget my mother; she’s running for this and blah, blah, blah we would uh, we’d like your vote.”

So that was some of my first little grassroots kind of political activity. And, uh, and very local and, uh, and then the other piece I mentioned that because I hadn’t thought about it for years was, uh, some of our parents wanted [10:00] us to do something civic. We didn’t use the word political. I don’t know if that was from the McCarthy period or what. But it was civics and civic interest group. So they got a, a, a group of us young people together and tried to figure out what to do. And I found this word called *arkegos*,

which in Greek I've never looked it up since then, since the fifties, but something about civic duty or something being part of the polity of the society. So we named the group the Arkegos Club and to save my life I couldn't remember exactly what we did back those years, but we did meet and we did do local projects and raise money here and there.

And then the other piece for me was in that time period, was the, there was a group, an adult group, called the Council on Human Relations, and they had a youth council, and they brought people from the different high schools, um, into that. And it was a way for me to meet young people, uh, roughly my age all over the city. Because where I lived was predominately the African American section of the East Side. And, again, years later I just realized what a small portion of Cleveland, uh, I actually spent ninety-nine percent of my time in, just the East Side and maybe when we went downtown or went to a ball game at the Cle – the old, old stadium. It was on technically the West Side, but by and large the West Side was white people, and it was a little dangerous and, uh, we didn't go there. Again, most of my life was in this small piece of geography called certain parts of the East Side.

And it wasn't until probably my early college years as I was coming back as I was beginning to realize that African Americans were moving not so much to the West Side but to different parts of the East Side which had been kind of off limits to me when I was a kid, and, uh, Mount Pleasant area, Shaker Heights, Ludlow area. And then Shaker Heights was known as having the first school integration, uh, in the country, um, during that time period.

So, uh, there were a lot of things that were going on. And, uh, the other piece was there was something called the World Council of Human Affairs, and they had different

chapters at different schools and different schools could, would, they would have yearly mock, mock general assembly and each school would be a different country. And I remember in the late fifties when I was at East High School, and we were France. And our, so this was during the French Algerian war so we had to learn all the arguments back and forth and why France was right and why Algeria was really part of France and all that stuff, but again it was like getting me into some of the broader stuff of the world. And um, and so I look back on it as kind of important beginning.

And, I guess one other thing I think that probably looking at today's world was, was important my dad – I never could understand quite the principle of a labor union, uh, in terms of having to be, having to forced to join. I mean I grew up, "Democracy, one person, do what you want so why do you have to join a union. Why do you have to be forced to join a union?" So, uh, in '58, in both actually in California out here and in Ohio there was a right to work on, on, on the ballot, and they lost – ended up losing in both places. And out here, that was when Mr. [Joseph R.] Knowland [owner of the Oakland *Tribune* in 1924 when the Oakland Tribune Building, visible from the window of Mr. Hutching's office, was opened] was running for senate – no governor, he was running for governor because he wanted to be able to command the, you had this troika. You had the Christopher was the, uh, I think – no, who, who was the governor? Uh, Goodwin Knight was the governor. And, and then Knowland was the senator, and of course you had Richard Nixon was the vice president, and, and they were all kind of big Republicans nationally. And the question was, who was going to control the California delegation at the Democratic Party – I mean, sorry, Republican Party, uh, convention in 1960. So Knowland decided he would just, uh, usurp the power and, and run for governor, and

push Knight aside and Knight ended up running for senate and losing and, and, and, um, Knowland ran for governor and he lost. But the right to work was the one of the major things as unions really, probably one of the, the last times that unions really were able to flex their power and be a decisive factor, and, and they were also that in Ohio though it got less attention than what was happening in California at the same time. So but my dad really convinced me, was able to show me the important power of labor, the importance of unions, and why, you know, crossing a union picket line you know was still just awful, which is stuff I still believe to this day.

JM: Yeah.

PH: So, that was all parts of my beginnings and kind of getting out there.

JM: Sure. Did the, [15:00] did, so you were born in '42 –

PH: That's right.

JM: May of '42. Did um –

PH: I was born in the middle of Stalingrad.

JM: Yeah.

PH: Right.

JM: Yeah. Wow.

PH: And I guess over in the Pacific there were the fights around Midway and so a lot of stuff was going on in the world.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, absolutely.

PH: We did an assignment; I can't remember if it was in high school or college. I think it was college. What was happening in the world in the, in the year that you were born. So it was really fascinating to go look at that and read what was happening in,

particularly World War II, and, uh, the struggle for Leningrad, and, uh, Georgi Zhukov and the Red Army fighting the Nazi Army and Wehrmacht and, and – and you know, and, and even I think it was after ’43 they cut off the World Series for a couple years in baseball, so you saw the impact the war was having. And, hey, I was a little kid. I was being born in all this time.

JM: Right. Did um, did some of the, some of the uh major events that history textbook would recount on U.S. race relations of the mid-fifties did those impress themselves on you really as a teenager? I’m thinking of, you know, *Brown v Board*, Montgomery, Emmett Till, Little Rock.

PH: Well, uh, to a great degree. Some of them did. I mean, I think it was probably the larger things that came out. I mean as a young man – well, young kid, I guess, teenager – when I heard about Emmett Till I mean that was just, uh, frightening. I should say, as I said, my mother is from Tennessee. And as a kid the first six years of my life every summer we would go down to Tennessee. And so of course when I was one and two I wasn’t aware too much of what was going on, but by the time I was about five or six I was getting a little handle on. There was a little small town, Dyer, right outside of not too far from Memphis and where we had family and uh, and uh, I, I never knew until layer, riding on the train, I was riding on a segregated car, and, uh, and ‘cause usually my dad would come down and take me back. So we’d ride back on the train back up to Cleveland from, um, I guess Memphis. And, um, so I don’t – aware of any segregated streets or signs. And I’m sure they were there.

And uh, but uh, we also had a black newspaper which I think still exists called the *Call and Post*. And the *Call and Post* at that time, it was written in, I mean, it was

published in purple. And people used to sometimes be a little bit embarrassed so they put the *Call and Post* inside the *Cleveland Press* so they were on the bus or public transportation they could be reading a black newspaper but everybody wouldn't know it unless you were sitting right next to them or behind them. But the *Call and Post* would have stuff about what was happening in terms of the national black community.

Uh, as I mentioned, uh, in, uh, my, um, kind of bio that I was part of the Youth Council of the NAACP. My dad was a lifetime member though I think he became that in the early sixties, not the actual fifties. He was a member, but I think he became a lifetime member in the sixties. And um, so we were aware, I was certainly aware of Roy Wilkins and, uh, and, uh, to a lesser degree Walter White who had been the leader of the NAACP before that. But that and the Urban League were the two major black organizations in Cleveland, uh, in that from being a kid to high school, certain period.

JM: You jumped in, in I guess the spring of '60 with some –

PH: Yeah, right.

JM: Can you describe that and I guess that would be the reaction to Greensboro and all that came after that.

PH: It was. And uh so part of it was kind of being in these different circles of um the Youth Council of the, uh, World Affairs but particularly the Council on Human Relations because we did a lot of interaction between at that time African Americans and Jews. And we, and some degree of Catholic schools, and to a lesser degree the more white ethnics who were from, some from Appalachia, some from the Eastern European countries, a little less and that. Again, looking back on it, realizing that class was a major

factor in, in, in who I met at that time and who I didn't meet at that time. Both on the white side and in some ways on the black side as well.

JM: Those early pickets, um – we're going to stop for just a second. [Recording pauses.]

JB: Okay, we're back.

JM: We're back after a just a quite break. Mr. Hutchings, the, the, I'd love to have you just recall being an eighteen year old, I guess you would've been, or not quite eighteen but nearly, those early pickets at dime stores in Cleveland in the spring of 1960.

PH: Well, the dime stores were not officially segregated and again – didn't think about it at the time – I'm sure at the level of employment, being able to work inside the dime stores as opposed to [20:00] just coming to eat, there probably was some real discrimination and segregation. And I learned a little bit more about that when I was living years later in, in the seventies in Detroit in terms of what was happening in the dime stores in Detroit during that same time period. I'm sure it was very similar in Cleveland, maybe three hours away. But, um, I think it was just in some ways being out on the street in front of uh, in this case there was th – there was Woolworth's and there was Kresge's and a store called Neisner's. And they were all out on Euclid Avenue in, uh, right in the heart going from the public square out to Sixth Street. Ah, so they were all very concentrated so we could actually hit all three of them you know pretty easily. And we had signs. It wasn't – we weren't telling anybody not to go in. It was just more informational of what was happening and what these stores were doing down in the South. And um the fact that we were doing this raised a furor, uh, within the NAACP and our youth chapter actually got dissolved, uh, as a consequence of that.

JM: The, the, the complaint was what?

PH: Well, the NAACP was not quite prepared [cough] for more physical action. I mean they saw themselves as a bunch of lawyers, and this would be, this would be an enduring thing in the sixties as well and in some ways even today. The – they've suffered from that because a lot of the legal stuff has been officially done and, and um so what's next? And they don't have a great program for that. But then they were very – because Cleveland saw itself as a liberal city. And a lot of the aspiring black leaders at that time were having what we would call today kind of sweetheart deals with some of the white power elite leaders, is to have something that was just on the streets. And, uh, I mean if you didn't read the sings carefully it looked like it could be a picket of a, a local store. And so the, uh, fathers in the NAACP said you know this is not, not the right time to be doing this uh. There are better things we should be doing. Uh, I can't even think now what those better things were but –

JM: How did you judge, what was your reaction to the, to the disbanding of the youth chapter over that issue?

PH: I didn't really care. Ah, I mean – which was the other part. Part of the, my senior year was, ah, I mean luckily I was a halfway decent student. Um, but my mother was always afraid I'd have bad grades and wouldn't get into good colleges. But I was meeting all these young kids, ah, and there was one grouping of folks I forgot to mention, uh, called the, we called it the Circle Pines Club. Circle Pines was a camp in Michigan. Uh something I kind of sense at the time was a 'pinko' camp. And uh and more recently um that's been totally confirmed [laughs], and um a couple of years ago there was the – what's it called? – it's a labor thing that happens here in the Bay Area every year, labor

um can't think of the quite – but about three years ago, they did this year, but about three years ago they had something about youth camps, uh, around the country that were, uh, basically set up by the Communist Party, not so much per se around indoctrination but basically around how people from different races could live together and stuff like that and play together and learn to – parents could maybe meet each other and have that life long connection.

So there was this young group, they were heavily Jewish but not exclusively, and um mostly white though again there were a few kids, black kids in it. At that time it was all white and black. And, um, and so I joined the club because I met one of the kids at one of the high schools in Cleveland Heights. So we spent a lot of social time together beyond just the meetings, and there was some interaction between all these youth council, the NAACP, the Circle Pines Club, the Human Relations, and the Council on World Affairs. And so it'd be nice to do a little chart sometime of what that was, but the point being is that I was getting radical ideas from some of this that was beyond even at that time the mainstream.

There was another group, which was around which I kind of was aware of but didn't get close to. My mother even warned me about it. Now remember she's a Democratic politician. It's called the, the Fair Play for Cuba group. And, um of course this is a time that Cuba in '59 that Fidel takes over and, um, and so uh –

JM: But she was conscious of being wary of that.

PH: Oh yeah.

JM: Yeah.

PH: Yeah. And uh, uh, this is a good time to say it. There were three things she told me not to do. She said, "Phillip don't get a girl pregnant" – and that was like the future and all that [25:00]. She said, uh, "Don't become a drug addict. And don't become a Communist." So I said, "Oh, two out of three." [laughing] Not bad, not bad. But you know a lot of that advice was always with a – she was very much in the mainstream, you know, and of course and as I say she was in the hot seat, which I didn't totally realize at the time. And so I said, "Oh, mom, I'm okay." You know –

But, uh, I was getting what loosely – I was reading C. Wright Mills and, and uh, uh, reading up, you know, just about the power elites at the time and who was it. And then I tried, "Well, who would that be in Cleveland or Ohio?" and stuff like that. Uh, uh, I had one very good friend at Oberlin College, which was a nearby college, which has also had a long history going back in some ways to the Civil War and Underground Railroad. But in the, in the fifties it was, uh, you could say it was a liberal college. And, uh, I'm not quite sure, it must've been some conference, well, one of those groups I mentioned where I met a guy named Charlie Butts and he was, his family was Republican, and he actually was, this was back in the day when you still had liberal Republicans. And so he was, uh, you know, I would hear the Democratic stuff from my parents, and then Charlie would come and talk about how they were going to do something new and he eventually ran for something. I had gone to college and so I lost track at a certain time. So it was a lot of fermentation, that's what I'm trying to say, on my young mind, um –

JM: Did you ever, did you ever yourself attend Circle Pines Camp?

PH: No.

JM: The club in Cleveland. Yeah.

PH: Yeah.

JM: What um, what's the story of how you made the decision to head east to Howard?

PH: Well, that was my mother. I had, uh, just assuming an Ohioan, and we weren't very rich, is that I applied to – well, first of all my mother convinced me that I would never get in, the school I wanted to go to was Columbia and, uh, in New York. She said, "No, your grades aren't going to be good enough, too much competition." So I applied for something local, Ohio State and Ohio University, which I got accepted to both of them. And being a small town, Athens, Ohio didn't quite turn me on so I said let's go to Columbus and check that out. So I got accepted. I actually went down there. Uh, I signed up. I got a room, a house, a dorm room, even met my roommate, who, uh, and then my mother called me up and said, "You're not going there. You're going to Howard University." And –

JM: Why'd she intervene so late? Why, why –

PH: I'm not sure. I think, it was somewhat of a last minute thing. Like I said I was already, had gone down to Columbus. And school had – school hadn't actually started yet, but, uh, you know I was looking for what were some of the courses and requirements and as I said gotten a room and dorm and, and she decided that she really wanted me to be in a place where there were, uh, younger educated black people, part of the aspiring middle class. She wanted me to join a fraternity and, uh, meet nice sorority girls, and a future wife, family, people I could network the rest of my life and felt that was more realistic. And, um, and she, she probably was right in some ways.

And, um, on the other hand, which was interesting at the time, is that Howard University was actually cheaper to go to than Ohio State. Even being a state resident of Ohio, Howard was cheaper. So, uh, there was something of an economic – so they essentially, my dad and mom, we drove out to Washington. And, uh, I think as a kid I'd gone to Niagara Falls once, but that, that was all the other big trip I had taken. So going to D.C. and going to the East and nation's capital was uh – and then so, that's how I got out to Howard University.

JM: You would of course very quickly be, be thickly involved in all kinds of the unfolding civil rights activism of the early sixties. Did you –was that on your mind as you drove east? Did you think that was going to be part of your college experience?

PH: Nope, didn't cross my mind, just wanted to see the capital and Washington Monument and it would be exciting, and just open to a new experience. And I must admit there are times when I thought, "What would've happened to my life if I had stayed in Ohio, uh, and gone to Ohio State University, graduated, and stayed in the state?" I mean, the Civil Rights Movement did become a national movement so there would've been something where that would've touched me at some level and just probably given my background I would've been interested. Um, I knew some folks actually at Central State [University] in Wilberforce [OH] who uh, um –

JM: Who got involved?

PH: Yeah, who got involved and sometimes who when I came back to visit in the early sixties I'd check in with them to see how things were going. But it was a very different scene. [30:00] Can I take a quick break?

JM: Absolutely, let's take a quick break. Yep.

PH: Oh.

[Recording pauses.]

JB: Okay, we're back.

JM: We're back after a short break. Mr. Hutchings, let me ask, uh, it's interesting you were just saying driving out to Washington, D.C., the civil rights future wasn't really the question that was in front of your mind at all. Tell me about how you, you found your, you found your uh, uh, new campus life and the, the, uh activities you, the groups and organizations you, you, before long very quickly became involved in that would pull you very quickly into a lot of direct engagement with the, with the unfolding movement.

PH: Well, um, Washington was a great place to be, and on different levels. One is that Howard itself, it had a fair number of foreign students. And the foreign students were basically from three different areas. They were from the Caribbean: Trinidad, Jamaica, places like that, a couple of smaller islands. And then they were from different African countries, some of them newly independent. And the third grouping was from, uh, Iran, and I never quite understood, uh, what was the basis of them being there, not that there was anything wrong with them being there. And, uh, but those were the three groups, uh, uh, I mean that have some degree of critical mass. There was some, uh, students from other places too, but this was a primarily an African American school. Uh, a small number of white students who usually were doing like an exchange; maybe their junior year, they'd come to Howard because it was one of the historical black universities. And, um, but, uh, so when – even as a kid thinking of foreign students I think about France and Germany, and so here I was seeing foreign students from a very,

very different part of the world. And hearing it just from their mouths. So, uh, uh, I'm not sure there was any *per se* consolidated opinion on anything that they were saying, but it was just a different than what you read in the *Washington Post* or the *Star*, I can't remember there was another paper, too, in Washington at the time. And, um, so that was one piece.

Uh, two: I mean, Washington, uh, you had this new guy John Kennedy who was the President and kind of after the fifties, and here you had this young man, World War II hero, uh, in his forties. It was like a passing of the generation of the torch to a more, who was pushing a more activist role of government. People were coming in – a lot of intellectuals particularly, the Arthur Schlesingers and all these folks and you really, change was very much in the air I guess I'd – and, so part of being in Washington was getting kind of used to this or just appreciating it.

Uh, in '60, the year I got there, of course you had the presidential election. After the second debate John Kennedy came to Howard University campus. [whispers] He brought Jacqueline. [JM laughing] And which all, everybody was looking at. We went to, he went to the chapel and, uh, and talked and we had just seen him, you know, debate Nixon, and, uh, so, uh, this was not something we were reading about in the newspaper you know in Ohio or some other place. This was, like, right here. A little later, a few months later, I would see Richard Nixon and, uh, and uh, at some Republican presentation. I think it was right somewhere in Maryland but right in suburban Washington area in Maryland, and, and saw him speak. So all of a sudden the two guys who were going to be running for the future presidency of the United States, uh, are part

of my reality in a way that they never would've been in a different way. So that was very part, part, you know, important.

And uh then there were different events that would happen in the early sixties. The Berlin in '61. Most particularly the October crisis of '62 where [phone ringing] we, I remember we were all sitting around watching the Soviet boats come toward Cuba. And were they going to be fired on, were we and since Washington is the U.S. capital not like Cleveland would be A-bombed and nuked and would this be the start of World War III, different professors weighing in on their history or experience. So it was very much debates like what was going to happen, what should happen. Should the U.S. do this? Should the Soviets not do that or – and, so, these were debates that would never have happened pretty much in Cleveland. And, so, that was very much part of the milieu from the beginning.

The other piece was just being on kind of a political joiner, as I always call myself. And, uh, I joined different groups. Uh I got involved in the student government. [phone ringing] I ran for office – didn't win, but I was campaign manager for a guy who ran for the freshman class president. So uh and he then ran for sophomore; he won again. So I was kind of like a little political genius behind the scenes in getting him elected and stuff like that.

JM: And who was that? [35:00]

PH: His name was Nathaniel Knight, and he was from Baltimore, Maryland. And by and large again somebody I kind of lost contact with over the years. And, um –

JM: Yeah. Tell me about um tell me about, I want to understand the arc between '60, when you get there – fall of '60 and '64 when you go to Newark.

[PH: Um hmm.]

JM: Because you'll have, I mean, there's a lot that happens here. Um, Nonviolent Action Group protests, Easter arrests in '61 out at a CORE restaurant sit-in I think, um.

PH: Right.

JM: Ah, you'll go at some point to the South.

PH: Um hmm.

JM: You'll do a lot of work on campus to support southern student activists.

PH: Right.

JM: Um, and in '64 you'll go to, graduate and go to Newark?

PH: Right.

JM: So talk me through that arc and how you were finding your way of engagement with all of these questions.

PH: Well, uh, probably the easiest way to say this is that I come out, I come out of Cleveland interested in politics. I get involved in politics, campus politics and the school. Then there's this other group of folks, which we called the NAG kids, um, and some of them had been to the South as early as 1960 and '61 and '61. So they came, they come with a different kind of, of, of experience of being on the campus. Some of them decide to, I mean in terms of who they are. They, they decide that they aren't interested in becoming middle class black, white, there are some of them were white. And they'd wear their overalls, which they use in the South, the southern struggle they'd just walk and be around on campus, very noticeable, different buttons, "One man one vote" and all this.

And so, like, "Who are these folks?" I got attracted to them. And, so eventually I would join. And if anything that's what cuts through all the rest. Uh, uh, I think what I learned originally from the NAG folks is that politics should be about something. It's not just politics: "Well, you're my friend I'm going to make you president class, student class." Or, "Let's see how much money we can raise from the cotillion, the dance, and swap alliances between the Deltas and the Omegas and the campus frats." It's that there were some bigger things in politics, getting power, getting influence, and authority should be about. And, and I think that probably more than anything else attracted me to these so called NAG kids. Most of whom were, or a good majority of them, though not total, were from the Northeast, New York in some ways. And in that grouping you had people like Stokely Carmichael who came out of the Bronx who I met my freshman year. Uh people oh, oh, um –

JM: Courtland Cox?

PH: Yeah, Courtland Cox of course was there. We called, we still call him C. Cox and Ed Brown who was the older brother for [H.] Rap Brown, and um, and um, and but the people who were part of the early freedom movement but still were keeping one foot in, in school at Howard and then in the summers they'd go south. And uh, and so this was a whole new lifestyle. "Oh, you do this. Okay. You don't necessarily just go straight through school and get your four-year deg – BA but you may or may not." You know, it was more important what was happening in the South that kind of scratched me. I guess what was, and I would say this when I would talk to people what was, the thing is you know Washington was the kind of middle ground between the so called urban North, Northeast and the South. And, and in some ways geographically and culturally it was

part of the South. And but it was neutral in some sense you were out of the South. So a lot of people we were meeting a lot of folks in the sit in movement who would come up to Washington to catch a breath of air, maybe raise money, do a few fundraisers, uh maybe if you get a chance run up to New York but basically, uh, D.C. would be their headquarters.

And so I would be talking to these people, hearing what they were saying, their experiences. The ones that were most really got me were the high school students because here I was in college, and I'm older and I'm reading about government 101 and political science this and state government that, and these are young folks who are challenging uh, uh all this with their life. The slogan was "Put your body on the line". So it was like a, there's a word that some of the, my SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] friends came out with later called mind fuck, and that's what it was. It just totally, I mean, it just turned up my whole idea of what was the proper order. I mean coming out of Cleveland and kind of aspiring black middle class, [40:00] and my mother's training you know. I was supposed to go get a BA, meet a nice girl, get married, become a professional, get my master's, maybe even doctorate, uh, have kids. And maybe somewhere in my mid to late thirties maybe a little *noblesse oblige* out there, you know, maybe do something: join the NAACP or get active in the community.

And, but it was basically a life of preparation, and these were folks who were doing something right now. They weren't waiting to get prepared. Uh, and they were changing history, and engaging that. You read it in the paper. You know, the segregation laws were being challenged in Virginia, right next door, or Maryland, and uh, uh, and that was totally exciting. And uh, and it just seemed like the right thing to be

doing at the same time. I mean why wait when the issue was right now. And I mean I guess I would read later Martin Luther King's great thing *Why We Can't Wait* about Birmingham. But it was the same kind of argument, you know: the struggle is now. We have to basically put ourselves out there. And we may suffer consequences, but that's, that's the risk. But that's the risk you take for freedom.

And, so that really drew me into a lot of the other things. So, specifics were we had created something. Once I joined NAG and got in this part of the group and was learning and doing at the same time. Uh, we were stay –having late night conversations in the dorm and I was learning, there was one very influential person named Tom Kahn. He was white; he was a little bit older; he was from New York. He was with the League for Industrial Democracy, which clearly had a left background. His personal politics were kind of ex-Trotskyite, and he had been very much influenced by Max Shachtman who had been in the Communist Party and then had, had, had left and formed a, what was the called the Shachtman Tendency [that is, ideological faction], and which went into Trotskyism. But Tom was one of the first people who sat down and talked to me uh, uh about history of the U.S. Left, something I would've never gotten quite the same way by reading a book about it. And, um, Stokely never had time to do that. He was too much action person. And, uh, we had – I mean we had conversations but other kind of conversations like are you coming to the demo; uh, uh how many people can you bring; can you get money from the student government to, to, to do this to send food and clothing to Mississippi, those kind of conversations.

Um, but, uh, Project Awareness which Tom formed, and we were all part of the, we were all, I mean we were all part of each other's things. Uh brought controversial

speakers to Howard's campus. The first one we did was we brought Malcolm X and of course the Howard University campus fathers shit in their pants. And, uh, so knowing that we uh, we uh tempered it a little bit to have it into a debate. And so we brought Bayard Rustin down, who was in some ways the godfather and mentor for a lot of these younger people from the New York crowd and became one of my mentors also to basically debate Malcolm X. And, so we got a huge turn out and, uh, and that established Project Awareness on the campus.

Then we also brought Herbert Aptheker you know known communist on the, the idea of having a actual real live communist at Howard University, which got a lot of federal money. That was what made them nervous. I mean in many ways. And also some of them had gone through the McCarthy period, and that's a whole another side story of how some of the brilliant minds in the political science department were writing treatises on real little league, like how does my flower grow during the fifties because they were totally scared, uh, to lose their jobs and stuff like that. And ah I mean they could talk about it in the classroom, but they couldn't really publish, put their viewpoints out and stay at Howard and feed their, feed their families and pay their rent and all that. So you got to see some of the repercussion also of taking political stands and that was important as well. So uh –

JM: How about the experience of being arrested in – oh we're going to stop for a second. [Recording pauses and resumes.] Let me ask you about the impact on you of the experience, say, of being arrested of being in demonstrations of, to shift from thinking about one set of issues and political involvements on the one hand and this action for

change now on the other. What were the impacts on you of that shift in what you were doing?

PH: Well, you know I talk about this a lot to some of the students today and there was a dramatic impact and basically it was freedom, my personal freedom because I became my own person and uh I got arrested at a place in Baltimore, Maryland. We worked a lot with a place [45:00] called the Congress of Racial Equality. It was run by a guy named Julius Hobson at the time, somewhat of a national spokesman in CORE. And, um, given that these were – CORE was mostly middle class professionals. Uh, they needed basically, uh, some soldiers who could basically afford to get arrested or, or even demonstrate during odd hours. So they'd call up NAG in D.C. or – they did some things in D.C., but one of the things we were doing was Baltimore, I mean sorry, Maryland was officially a segregated state. Uh, and so was Virginia. And we would go over to Virginia, go to some of the movie theatres because blacks either had to sit in the balcony or they could only go on certain days, and this was like Falls Church and Arlington and places really close to D.C., you know. And, so segregation wasn't just something you'd read about. It was just you know, literally right across uh, uh the state line.

Uh, [phone ringing] Uh, Maryland, we had the Saturday in spring of 1961, and we, I got assigned with a small group of people to go to this place called the White Rice Inn.

JM: The White Rice –

PH: – Rice Inn. It was a Chinese, a Chinese restaurant. And Maryland had the state accommodations law which they could serve whoever they wanted to, and if there was any troublemakers that basically the owner or proprietor would come out read the,

cite the law or read it, and if you didn't leave in five or ten minutes, they'd call the police and have you arrested. So this particular day we went to the White Rice Inn. Uh, we sat down, uh, kind of, we knew we weren't going to get served but just kind of looking at the menus and having side conversations. So it was racially mixed group. I remember there uh, was about, I think there were about five or six of us. At least there were two white people – one was a woman and one was a guy. And, uh, I can't remember if they were from Washington schools or from Baltimore schools. I just can't remember that. And, uh, so we sat there for about maybe a half hour. So the guy was getting nervous and so finally he comes over and he says –

JM: Now is he white or Asian?

PH: He's Chinese.

JM: He's Chinese.

PH: He says, "Look you know, uh, I sympathize with your cause." At one time he said, "I'm a colored man too," you know. He actually said that but, uh, this is bad for business and I'm going to get in trouble and, uh, you know, "Could you please leave?" We said, "No, we're going to sit here for a while." So finally he gets really desperate and he comes up and says, "Look! I'll make a deal with you. I have another restaurant over on the other side of town and it's called the Brown Rice, uh, Chinese Restaurant and if you go there, I'll call ahead. It's all on me. I'll pay, I'll pay for your meal, your lunch, whatever. And, uh, just go there and it'll be all over." And we said, uh, "Not today." Should've said we'll take a rain check though. We didn't think to say that. So we said no.

So we sat there for another while so finally he had to, has to do his duty and bring out the public accommodations law and read it to us. So he reads it to us and, uh, um, we sit for about ten minutes and say, he's going to call the police. Well, I think we've accomplished what we've set out to do here today. We've disrupted his business; he's totally freaked out on us and stuff like that. He's not doing any real business. Other people keep looking at us and wondering if there's going to be some confrontation with the police and they're nervous and some people decided not to come in and all that. So we decided it's time to leave.

So we walk outside and we look at each other and we just said, "We just, we just messed up here." You know, we just, we're supposed to get arrested or at least bring the police out, and we have just literally, I think the phrase we used at the time was we just punked out [i.e. failed]. And, um, probably wouldn't say that quite now, but that's what we said then. And then I, then came to mind all these young high school students who I had seen, I was telling you about, who I'd met at Howard who were younger than me who were getting arrested and, and how are they going to look up to us when we're, when we're afraid to do stuff? So we decided just there, someone said – I think it was a young woman – she said, "Let's get arrested." So we just literally sat down on the stairs in front of his restaurant so people would have to climb in and climb out of us, around us or couldn't get in. And of course he freaked out, the restaurant owner, so he called the police and we just, uh, we linked arms and, uh, the police couldn't pull us apart and they had to call another police car and then the paddy wagon, and eventually they got us apart and got us in jail. But, um –

JM: They didn't beat you up. [50:00]

PH: Nope, they didn't. No, we got a little roughed up a little bit taking and, and putting us in the paddy wagon but not anything serious. And since, as I said two of them were women, you know, we said, "Watch out for her," you know, "Don't hurt her," and all that kind of stuff. But, uh, what I realized was that all of a sudden something was more important than going back to do my assignments at Howard for the weekend. Uh, something was more important than maybe a party that might be happening, uh, Saturday night. Uh, something was more important than what my mother might think, uh, about, uh, my future or how this might fall on her career and all that. That's what I mean about liberation. It was real sense that all of a sudden I was making a stand. It could be, it could've been about something entirely different, but I was making a stand from what I wanted my life to be about, and while I was aware of other opinions, uh, I was doing what I wanted to do, and I was willing to take whatever responsibilities – in this case getting arrested, uh, for it. So in that sense the really, it was crossing a Rubicon of sorts and, and it was very much uh, uh, saying this is my life and I'm going to live it and take the consequences. It was a very much of a freeing kind of thing. That's what I meant by freedom.

JM: Let me touch on a few themes and then we'll pick up the narrative again. Um, is anything happening in the classroom at Howard that's, that's really pushing you forward in these ways, too, or you had earlier said that there's kind of a disconnect there, but was there anything, any faculty, any class that made a difference in the, in the sense of really looking at an intellectual perspective in a – ?

PH: Not really.

JM: Okay.

PH: In some ways I was very disappointed with Howard.

JM: Okay.

PH: I thought it was something like a thirteenth grade. You go through twelve grades of high school and then a thirteenth grade. And then I guess after I read Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and I said what this looks like, it's like one of these newly developing countries in Africa, and it, it felt very colonial in one sense. One because we were getting money from the federal government. The administrators were very worried about what the real powers that be were thinking and doing. Um, uh, the first couple years I was taking required courses, biological science, uh, chemical stuff, and, um, there was a political science teacher that I liked, I think Robert, his last name was Martin, I think Robert, and he was active in the local Democratic Party in D.C., and that was somewhat interesting. And, uh, as I got a little further along there were a couple teachers, one was very fascinating, a guy named Bernard Fall. Uh, Fall was a Frenchman who had fought in the French resistance, and he had also been involved in Vietnam and Algeria. And so he brought a certain kind of, uh, sense to the courses, his classes that you wouldn't get from, I mean, anywhere else. So listening to him talk we could be at Harvard University or anywhere, and we knew we were getting a first class, uh, thinking about this.

Um and uh, uh but by and large the classes were disappointing. I even took a course in what was then called Negro history. It was totally boring. It was all about dates. And, um, well, in 1615 what happened in the Songhai Empire or and no sense of context, what was happening in the bigger world that was shaping Africa or that Africa was dealing with. Or it was like history with no politics and that would change

particularly in the late sixties both at Howard and other places with black studies and a whole different focus, but that – I didn't get it there. As a matter of fact I remember in November of '63 when Kennedy got killed we were all on the campus, and as a matter of fact I was in the Negro history class. And we were all, they, they just told us to all come out on the campus, the whole school and because they wanted to say what happened one time and, um, uh, in terms of President Kennedy. So we were all on campus and, and – but it was a boring campus, I mean. Interesting people both some of the professors and stuff like that but just the arrangements about being able to teach and going through the regimen was, was, was very limited.

JM: Let me ask another thing. I'm real interested in, in having you stop and reflect on the gender dynamics inside the Movement in these years as you were experiencing both on campus and in your engagements with NAG, SNCC, CORE et cetera.

PH: Uh by and large we didn't think about gender in that sense so it wasn't a big problem. I mean, uh I say that as a man of course too. Uh but um women were very much around, very active, they weren't being secretaries. And, uh, in fact when I first joined NAG a woman named Jeannie Bell who I again have lost contact [55:00] with was one of the, one of the leaders of the local – she and Bill Mahoney were kind of the key leaders of NAG at that time period. Uh there were women in, in, in, who, like Jean Wheeler from Detroit uh who would go to, would go south, she would marry Frank Smith who also went south who later – Frank Smith would also later become a D.C. city councilperson.

Um, Ruth Howard another person who was good friend of mine, was very active, some others that maybe right this second aren't coming to mind but, uh, uh, and then because at a certain point NAG, NAG never got recognized on Howard's campus which we'd always tried to get recognized. And then at a certain point we realized this was a good thing, we were not getting recognized, because once we got recognized – the only reason we got recognized was that we could have meetings on campus and we could get, we could get campus monies as a student group. And we quickly realized there were much more important things to do than either one of those two. And we'd have meetings out, out in people's homes, out in other campuses. We met the kids from Georgetown, American University, George Washington, Catholic University in a way that if we'd just been a uh, uh one school would never have happened. That's why in my bio I have about the D.C. Students for Civil Rights, that's kind of came out of those connections, uh, and, uh, that, we didn't have to answer to anybody you know in terms of what we could do, where we could meet and all this which would happen as a student group. So it became a very good thing not to get –

JM: Exactly. Yeah. Let me ask, too, you mentioned as a child you would go down and visit Tennessee in the summers and such. Had you been into the deeper South before you went down in I think it was maybe what, '62?

PH: No, a little later '64. But what I did do is I did go back to Tennessee because in uh, uh, because it was one of the summers, I want to say sixty – yeah, in fact it had to be'62 because in '63 I was doing March on Washington stuff. So, uh, but I wanted to see as a young man stuff I had seen or missed seeing as a young kid. And there was a little bit of movement, not a big movement in, in, in Memphis at the time. And particularly

not in the smaller, smaller towns. My cousins, so I went – so that was the official reason to go and see cousins, and I had a, kind of a big, uh, older cousin I always called her Big Sis [his cousin Martha Jane West], still do. She's still alive, ten years older than me. She lives in Saint Louis now, but she has a house, she still has a house in Dyer, Tennessee. And uh so I'd just go around and all of a sudden I did see the segregation signs. I did see white people who somehow I must've seen as a young kid, but it didn't dawn on me because it was pretty much like a black world world that I was kind of in as a young kid. And, um, and then I saw some of the reaction where some of the folks were trying to do something around civil rights and, there were, uh, uh, the voter registration and the harassment they were getting. So that was, I mean, this was like revisiting my past but in a different way.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Um I'd love to have you just describe um your, your experience in, in, in Mississippi in '64 because you, you helped with the MFDP [Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party] effort, and that of course concludes or sort of has that great debacle of a climax in Atlantic City [site of the 1964 Democratic Party national convention].

PH: Well, going to Mississippi in '64 was, I went slightly limited, uh, in terms of I was working on something very particular. So there were friends I knew from NAG who had gone, as I mentioned, in the summers and so, uh, I went to a couple of projects mostly in Second Congressional District. One of them was Ruleville where Mrs. Hamer was, Fannie Lou Hamer was, and, um, and but I knew a lot of the, the staff people. Uh, Stokely [Carmichael] was doing stuff and Ivanhoe Donaldson was around and um, um, some other people I'm not thinking about at the moment. So, but my, my focus was to

try to work with the NAA – the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party with the focus on the challenge that was coming up in later that year.

And what we wanted to do because nobody trusted state officials is we wanted to get the records of people who had registered to vote and basically get their signatures, make duplicates and then take them out of state. So I was kind of in and out going to different projects but sitting in a lot of meetings and, and also particularly with the people going out to see people who were doing voter registration and uh, but really being in the community meetings. And, uh, I mean probably the thing that I think about, that I value the most was seeing people making attempts to do democracy at the very most grassroots level.

And, also [1:00:00] the other piece, which was probably in the long run even more important, uh, though why, why compare them, is, um, people being able to have complicated, uh, discussions with basic language with people who hadn't gotten through probably even high school, you know. And so, but how do you do that sort of conversation without dumbing it down? And that was the, you could only do that from the standpoint of organizing and developing relationships because part of it was learning how people used language. And so you couldn't just come down and talk or even – because then you say, "Oh these, these poor people. They only have sixth grade or less education. So I have to talk in one-syllable words." And that's the wrong approach. Though it's the one that somebody who is just coming in for just a quick visit naturally, would, you know, would think.

So, our approach was for organizers who had been there at least all summer, maybe several summers, some people just who decided to be there, and, and, and dropped

out of school, and, to work on this is that we were able to know how people thought, their thinking patterns, how they approached ideas, what was the language they used around those ideas. And then how, so in that language, uh, it wasn't so much like a foreign language, but it was kind of a dialect at some level is to basically talk about registering to vote, state government and particularly a restrictive state government, and what were some options around strategy and ways that appeal to them and where they could participate.

And I think, you know, that's probably the greatest lesson that I learned, uh, in and you know watching Mrs. Hamer, you know, just, you know talk to people sometimes break out into a song. And the song would be not just a song, it would be a reflection of the mood in the room and, and, and therefore the words would pick up on what people were thinking about, feeling about, maybe wanting to do, maybe scared, uh, whatever. But, but, but maybe you couldn't just say that in a conversation so you had to take a song to do that and seeing the power of, of, of, of how that cultural manifestation is able to be used in a very political way. That was a profound learning.

JM: I haven't asked and just not incidentally I think, uh, you had come up in the church in Cleveland I guess.

PH: Um hmm.

JM: Were you, would you have said of yourself at the time that you were a person of faith? Is that a part of how this was written for you?

PH: No, no I wouldn't say that at all. I thought church was pretty boring. I liked Sunday School because it was about history, the Philistines and the Israelites and the Romans and all that. But, uh –

JM: Did you get – excuse me.

PH: Yeah, so if I could follow that, I never really felt that God was in our church. It is a nice church, a middle class church. It's still there, and it's in University Heights – Circle rather – in Cleveland, but I mean, God's supposed to be everywhere. So why do I have to go to that church at eleven o'clock on Sunday morning to be in God's presence when I can do that at home or be with some friends or, uh, or we could have a meeting out in the park, you know, and, and do the same kind of thing, but why this church business.

JM: Did you go out down in Mississippi did you get, um, did you find yourself in a place where you were, had, had to be because of circumstances fearful, actively fearful for your basic wellbeing?

PH: Oh yeah. One of the things actually that we're doing right now relatively speaking as they bury veterans of the Civil Rights Movement is we're actually doing, we tape record some discussions of then and now and all that. And one of the ones we're doing is around fear in the Movement. And, I mean, it's impossible, I mean Mississippi I mean, Nina Simone said it, "Alabama's bad, Georgia's awful but Mississippi God damn." And it was like the worst, and, uh, you were literally were going into a battleground. And the only comparison that I've been able to get in terms of conversation, or listening – because I never went to Vietnam which is a whole other story – but um, uh, is talking to people who were in Vietnam and just the fact they were, they were in a pressure cooker, and there was no way to get out of it. And it's, anything could happen at any moment, and that's the closest I've felt in terms of the Mississippi experience. And then since I didn't stay there that long but, but talked to people like my friend who is here now a guy

named Wazir Peacock, Willie Peacock, you know, who is from Mississippi and talked about being a civil rights activist in that kind of pressure cooker, or people like Hollis Watkins who is still down there with a group called Mississippi Echo [note: this was actually Southern Echo Inc., founded 1989 and based in Jackson, MS], even now, today. And it's like this is a war zone, and, uh, you can get killed at any time. A sniper could get you just like in Vietnam or, or uh it could be a straight out assault. Uh, we had to know how to talk to the state officials who would come out after you and, and tell you to get out of town and, and yet you [1:05:00] had to stay there but also not directly confront them one-on-one because they had the guns; they had the law. They had, you know they had everything. I mean, they had FBI watching and doing nothing. And so yeah, it was literally a pressure cooker and, and uh, I mean, I mean, that's why to some degree where we lived together in project houses and part of it was that if I was living by myself I would be totally freaked out.

And I guess about my whole time in the Movement I, you know publicly say as a way to get people thinking is ninety percent of the stuff I did there in the Movement I probably would never have done on my own. And I could only even think about it and summon up the courage to do this if there were other people who were involved with me and we were doing it together. And so I, I say that to younger people today and even some adults as a way to think about, you don't have to do this all by yourself. And part of the power of being able to work for social change is that you have people, and some institutions, not a whole lot – in the South the church was very important, it was kind of a sanctuary. But, uh, um, you know, that really gave us some degree of backbone. So when times when people were in jail they'd sing and drive the jailers crazy so they would

be glad to get us out of there, you know, because, "Stop making so much noise." But it's like I could hear, I couldn't see you, but I could hear you singing. So "Paul and Silas Bound in Jail" and you'd do the next verse. And so we were creating community right in the jail. And, um, so I mean that fought that fear though. That's what it was about, not just singing. But it was about fighting fear.

JM: Yeah.

PH: Or I remember getting tear-gassed in Cambridge Maryland, and when was that, '64, George Wallace came to town, uh Cambridge, Maryland, eastern shore of Maryland as he was running for president.

JM: That was a tough neighborhood.

PH: Huh?

JM: That was tough fighting in Cambridge.

PH: Yeah, so we were out there marching on the front lines, and you saw the, the National Guard and they were pointing these, it turns out to be tear gas uh, uh. canisters at us. And, uh, we couldn't stop marching. So we started saying, [sings] "We are not afraid," you know, and keep on and keep marching. Of course we got tear-gassed and then but again we clutched and helped each other. A guy named Reggie Robinson who was at SNCC and he is now in D.C., and I mean we were right together and we fell together and we staggered out of the crowd and back to safety that night. And, uh, Rap Brown was there and uh he got arrested or re-arrested probably more accurately. And, uh, I remember I went back to Howard University in my, my fatigues and tear-gassed, I went straight to my ROTC class and deliberately wanted to smell up the whole place. You know like, "Okay, Hutchings where have you been?"

JM: You were in ROTC?

PH: Yeah, you had to be. It was mandatory, for two years, yeah.

JM: Oh. Did, did Atlantic City – was it, was it a point of transition for you or a point of continuity?

PH: Well, it was continuity in the sense that it was another part of the struggle. But just given what happened there and that the MFDP did not get seated and people left, there was a real depression that settled on the Movement.

JM: Did you feel that yourself?

PH: Um, yeah, I think not right away. I mean I was sorry, sad that we didn't – I mean that practical politician part of me was like if we'd only done this and this and of course, uh, but we were dealing with Lyndon Johnson and then, and so probably in the long run it wasn't possible. And so I think it sank in at a later time. Uh, it reminded me in some ways of I remember when my mother died. Much later in '90, 1991 as I went out to Cleveland, went to the funeral, I'm the only child, and did all this stuff and then took care of the burial, met with the minister all that. Good soldier came back to California, and I wa – I was doing consulting at the time so I had to get my back on stuff, and all of a sudden my body just closed down on me like it said, "Okay, you want to do all that stuff? I'm not moving." And so for two weeks I just sat in the house and basically mourned, uh, my mom. I think something not quite as dramatic but something similar happened in the same way. It was a little delayed reaction is what I'm going to say. And it was like literally what to do next.

And as you saw from my bio I went back to up North and where some friends I had from, again from the NAG days, uh, and ended up working for Robert Kennedy in a,

in a very interesting position in a research uh research and speaker's bureau because he was running against a liberal Democrat [1:10:00] – I'm sorry a liberal Republican, Kenneth Keating – and somehow beyond the hype of being a Kennedy, you had to kind of say what's the difference between being a liberal Republican and a liberal Democrat. So that's the research part that came in very useful being able to do that and then of course the speaking part was going out and to basically speak. And of the people around at that time, I mean I was feeling that Kennedy was probably – Robert – even though we used to call him all kinds of names when we couldn't get any federal assistance down in Mississippi or the South is he at least understood what that experience was. And he was growing as you know later things and that, uh, he could become more than he was at the time. And nobody else quite seemed to have that and so being a Kennedy he would be a major mark on the Democratic Party and maybe the country. And so that was kind of my rationale for working in that campaign but it was also it got me out of Mississippi, it got me out of the funk. And, and, and basically put me in a different situation.

JM: How did you find your way to Newark?

PH: Well, that's uh, [pauses] it's fairly immediate because I went to Newark in December of, uh, 1964, and the election for Kennedy was November of '64. We're of course right across the river. Uh, but, uh, this has to do with another little piece, uh. I guess I think I'm one of the few people in the Movement who was both in SDS and SNCC at the same time. I had this really crazy idea, uh, which didn't really work out, it was interesting, is that SNCC was mostly activist organization. So somehow I would do my action in SNCC and then I, SNCC would – SDS did a lot of these working papers on state in society, America the new era, what was the meaning of corporate liberalism, all

the interesting stuff. Uh, a guy named Richard Flacks who was down in southern California now was one of the key people, Tom Hayden.

And back in ’64, early part of ’64 I had gone up to Ann Arbor, Michigan for a conference, uh, that they were putting on. And, um, I got to meet a lot of these people. And one of my good friends who was part of the old Circle Pines group in Cleveland, a guy named David Strauss, was a student up at – at uh, uh, uh, the University of Michigan and he was also very active in the Voice Chapter, the student group SDS political party at U of M. So it was through him I got to meet people like Tom Hayden and Al Haber [founding president, SDS] who were the formers of SDS and, and um, so I say that, that’s where that piece started and that I got to know some of the SDS people in uh, in uh, in D.C. There weren’t that many, mostly around George Washington University. And they mostly were in the peace movement um, um, and, uh, at the time and some of them individually did certain things in the Civil Rights Movement particularly, uh, some of them had gone north to Chester, Pennsylvania right outside of Penn – uh Philadelphia had been active in community work there.

But, uh, anyway, uh, SDS had started these Economic Research and Action Project to actually do work in the field and the model was SNCC. They were going to try to do what they called the interracial movement of the poor. And, um, they had places in Chicago, uh, Cleveland, um –

JM: Ten cities initially.

PH: Boston, and, and I’m probably missing some places.

JM: Baltimore, Newark and –

PH: Yeah, Baltimore joined and Baltimore. And so, uh, I went to a party and ran into Tom Haden and just go to talking. I always say he got me drunk. He said, "Why don't you come on, come over to Newark and see what we're doing. You know it's a lot like SNCC and hey, you know, you're from the North and you probably could help us out on some stuff." And so probably with the liquor and still in this post-Atlantic City thing, um, and I knew I wasn't going to do anything with Kennedy. I mean he was going to be, he became senator and that was good at the time. But I had no dreams of wanting to go to Washington and do that. So I said, well, let's go to check out Newark and it was appealing because they at the time were talking about a statewide movement and the idea that in terms of the '60 census New Jersey was at that time the most I don't, still maybe, but that was the most urbanized state in the country.

So the idea was to start in Newark and, um, Hoboken. And they had a project in Hoboken, one in Newark and we talked about doing something in Elizabeth, uh, and then maybe working down to Trenton and there was some university people in New Brunswick and also at, uh, Princeton that in terms of the academic level and research would be helpful. And so it was like a statewide movement. It wasn't like just like going to one city even though you were technically in one city, but the idea was going to there and so that was appealing and then the New Jersey turnpike, you could just connect really easily from city to city, [1:15:00] place to place which you couldn't do in Mississippi so easily. So that was attractive. And so, uh, I'd always wanted to be in the North and do stuff. I had this little quote that the success of the anti-Jim Crow would be to turn Birmingham into Chicago and uh, uh, places like, uh, you know, Atlanta would become like New York. And so we would be facing the real problems of this country in a way

that segregation, racial segregation had not allowed it to happen. And so this great victories that we were getting and, and which were hard fought and well earned and well deserved were basically just putting us into the situation where we were like everybody else. And was America that great a country economically, politically, and for freedom, and so that had always been my focus about wanting to work in the North. And so Newark opened that possibility.

And, and SDS had a project and, uh, they actually, most of their organizers were white. Uh, they had a couple of black organizers but the, that was a part of the, is, I, I, I could claim false labeling. I mean, we got there and there was no interracial movement of the poor. There were white people who wanted to work with us. We were, Stanley Aronowitz and all these people did all these surveys on unemployment and particularly focused on New Jersey, and that was, and we thought we were going to work around unemployment. Well, that was not the issue people wanted to work on. They wanted to work around housing and rent and police brutality and things like that, which is what, you know, you do what the folks want to do. You're organizing them or you don't have a real project. So we ended up doing that and a mostly black you know community and, um, we broke with the kind of more liberal group, the Clinton Hill, uh, Neighborhood Association. A guy named Stanley Winters, um, was head of that. And, uh, they had a very limited, kind of very, just generally at the time liberal, and we wanted to do more than that and raise basic questions. So we broke off in what was called the Lower, uh, Clinton Hill section and, uh, became a real power base.

JM: Yeah.

PH: And, uh, and then eventually a year later there we'd start doing stuff in the, in the Central Ward of Newark, which was a more, an even more black and more poor and, and, and kind of the cesspool of Newark.

And I remember being with Tom Hayden in '65 during the Watts Rebellion and we were sitting there talking, looking at it on TV and saying wonder if this is going to happen in New Jersey, in Newark and more importantly what would, what would, what would that impact be on us? What would, what should we be doing? And so on. And so, we, out of that conversation and bringing other people into it, we developed a strategy for the next what became, we didn't know when, the next two years, so that when the Newark Rebellion actually happened, you know we had a game plan, an organizing thing of how to, to work on this. It was basically as the Movement – this was going into the mid-sixties becoming more racial conscious and more black focused is we began, we began to put issues into more racial terms.

And so this is, Newark was predominantly black at that time, still is today. Uh, and the people were poor and destitute, were also poor blacks, and but the power structure, in this case unlike Cleveland which was Irish, were Italians and is that we began to pose that. It was like Newark was kind of a mini – this was one of the third world concepts we're heavy. And people were, so we were like uh, colonial African nation struggling against these white European Italian-American colonialists to, to get our liberation. We didn't quite say it that way, but that was the general thought. And so as I mentioned in the bio we were talking about black institutions and Black Power, community control of schools, neighborhoods, et cetera, and get more black policemen.

And I remember going through, you know – and you know this was when some of the class stuff gets involved, too, "Well, why are you arguing for black policemen?" And, uh, "Because police arrest people. They're agents of the state." And our answer was which was true in Mississippi, too, was well, people have never seen black policemen. And until they actually see a black policeman get up, get beat up by a black policemen, uh, they won't get to see what police are really about. They're going to think it's really a white-controlled thing. And so they have to get at the level though direct experience of seeing the system at work using black people but have no – if there are no black people at higher ranks in the city, of the system, which includes mayors and congresspeople as well. [1:20:00] Then, this is where we into some of our Left friends who just way out in left field literally is that you can't talk about socialism and capitalism at, at a level when people are feeling the racial thing you know most heavy in their daily life. So, I mean, that became some of the thing.

So we spent a lot of time polarizing and what's interesting in terms of the Newark experienced looking back on it is we were, you know, we had some real power. And I mean the authorities really had – look, because we had a real grassroots base. And nothing I've worked with in the same way since, uh, has had that type of grassroots base where the mayor and the city council, you know, were very, you know, concerned, leery of what we were going to do tried to bring in some of the old what we called the Uncle Toms who were the Negro politicians. I mean they literally broke our windows. And, and, and slashed some of the tires of the people in the car. And one time we were out in the middle of Springfield Avenue almost going to have a physical altercation with them. I forget how that was stopped but we didn't, it didn't actually happen. And the guy who

was, uh, head of the local Democratic Party in Central Ward, a guy named Eulis "Honey" Ward, uh very good guy but he was totally into the old framework. And he wanted to knock our blocks off because we were these new folks and, and all these white radicals from SDS had really set us up to do this. And blah, blah, blah I mean, you've probably heard variations of the story.

So it was very thrilling to say the least and uh and uh we lived in the community. Uh I stayed, we did have a project house at one time when we had a little bit more money. We got most of our money from labor unions. Uh and probably the, I know the UAW [United Auto Workers] gave us some money and, I can't, there was another union, which I can't remember now who gave us some money and some church money, mostly from the Episcopalian church, which is how I got in contact with Nathan Wright. Which would, he would write a book on Black Power in Newark but more importantly, he was the organizer for the first Black Power conference right after the Newark Rebellion. And he didn't have that grassroots thing; that's how, that was my role to come in and do that. But, uh, he had other kinds of ties, which I didn't have. And, uh, and, um, so that was useful.

JM: Yeah. Let me ask how you're bridging – no, we'll pause it for a sec.

PH: [Panting]

JM: Take a little break? [Recording pauses.]

JB: We're back.

JM: We're back on. Let me ask, how, how are you bridging between SDS and say Central Ward, which is basically entirely black? And how are you managing

between, how are you managing the race and class questions simultaneously in an organizational sense?

PH: Well, in terms of, um, what we called NCUP, Newark Community Union Project, which is an SDS oriented – organized project is that that pretty much had been entirely organized by SDS. Uh, most of their work was – well, pretty much all their work except, had been in the South Ward except with the, some of the little forays that mostly Tom had done, Tom Hayden, had done in the Central Ward. And we had done that together. Um, but, um, at a certain point by ’65, the, I think they, some of the white folks were realizing the limitations on white organizing in a predominately black community in a way that had really not been raised quite as heavily in the early sixties or even when the project first started. And since this idea of interracial movement of the poor was not happening, uh, that uh, uh, it wasn’t like they could go to white folks and offer the hand of unity and bridging the gap and all that. So some of them began to play more technical roles: fundraising, uh, doing research, uh, on city structures – which was totally useful because frontline organizers never have time in any struggle to do that kind of stuff – making ties, ties with some of the university people, uh, but playing a less visible role.

They also got race-baited. I mean LeRoi Jones [later Amiri Baraka], who was a, who was, Newark was his home base for, where he’d grown up, and he had formed, uh, his group called the Spirit House um, um, uh actually kind of race-baited. Not kind of, he did. Uh, and, uh, and I know sometimes at meetings he would ask me, “Well, who are you representing? These white, white folks or are you representing, uh, are you with us?” And I said, would say, “Wait a second. I’m representing the people that I’m organizing the Central Ward” who were like ninety-nine percent black. Um, and also we got allies.

One guy was a guy named, uh, Willy Wright who became, uh – oh, uh, I should say. One of the things that happened somewhere I guess ’64, between ’64 and ’66, this thing called the Poverty Program, anti-poverty program. And of course there is a national program and everywhere [1:25:00] had money and resources, we had to figure out how to do with it.

JM: That was coming from the federal government, the War on Poverty, yeah.

PH: Yeah, so we had to figure out whether we should ignore it and, and uh, and some of the things like the VISTA [Volunteers in Service to America] program, which would bring in young, predominantly white kids into some of the same areas that we were working in or did we, should we try to take it over. So after some major discussions – uh, we had a similar debate on this around the Democratic Party by the way. There was something called the United Freedom Party, which was like a third party and was led by a guy named George Richardson who had been a former state assemblyman in, with the Democrats and had broken with the Democratic boss and, and as a way to threaten him, the boss that is, he formed the third line. So if the Republicans could conceivably win if they withheld a significant size of vote.

So that was a prior discussion that had gotten us thinking about that kind of a strategy. But we decided not to do that in terms of the federal government. And then we decided, let’s, “Well, we have a community base. Let’s become the poverty program, uh, because the feds can’t do that.” So, we, uh, basically in the, what was called District Three, which was the South Ward, we literally had the, the forces to take over the poverty program. We hired one of our own people as the, uh, staff organizer, a guy named Jesse Allen and, um, Bessie Smith who was our version of Fannie Lou Hamer was the, was the,

was the chairperson – not paid, Jesse was paid – of the board. We, our, our headquarters were the, the government office of the anti-poverty program in the Third Ward.

In the Central Ward we didn't quite have, we hadn't spent as much time developing a base so we had some base. And we were able to work with a guy who was kind of like the local Black Nationalist and, um, named Willy Wright. And he, almost, when he gave speeches he kind of reminded you of Malcolm X a little bit. And so but you know we were, what tied us together was we were both insurgent forces. So we got him elected to be the, the chairman of the area board, too. So we essentially controlled two boards in the two most poverty-stricken areas of Newark. And so we were a serious force, uh, you know, to be dealt with.

So there were some downsides I mean and to that. One is that in the focus on the government and the government largesse, we lost a little bit of the community not so much in terms of the actual people but being able to have that – I mean before the government brought, we spent like ninety percent of our time in the community on the day, ah, during the day. In fact folks in these non-profits now who go out – and I, I even belong to a couple – it's a big thing to go out to their community, you know, once a week and for a couple of hours and we were there six days a week and more. Frequently on the weekends I'd take advantage of the closeness of New York and take the subway, the PATH [train] over to spend time in New York City, kind of get out of it for a minute and come back.

But we were there and, but we lost that because what happened is that we had this fancy phone with push buttons and Jesse, who was the organizer, and Melvin Huggins, who was another sub-organizer, they could just spend all their time in their office and

didn't have, didn't have to go out into the community and knock on doors anymore. It's like, "You come to us." We had these nice couches, leather couches that where people sat. Where before people had donated their own couches to our neighborhood storefront office, and, you know, and so there was a sense of ownership at the community level that they had. You know, they had put up money or they had put up their, their furniture. Uh, we had meals together, which we had paid for, we shared. And, uh, we were poor, but we shared and we made do. All of a sudden now we have nice big meeting halls and phones and, "Come down and, come down to my office, you know. I don't have time to come to your – I've got to talk to five different people. I don't have time to do that." I, I'm saying that in the most provocative way. It wasn't quite felt like that all the time. But that was the some of – that's why I say we lost a little bit of the community, uh, or the community feel of in the poverty program. But for '64, you know that little famous clause the maximum feasible, uh –

JM: Participation.

PH: Participation of the poor? We worked, we worked them to the bone. And, uh, and uh, in fact one time a new, uh, director of the, it was called the United Community Corporation, UCC, that was the official name of the poverty program in Newark. They, uh, had a new director come in. He was from the Urban League. And, he would later come to Cleveland; it's kind of interesting. But, uh, the community wanted to have some votes. So they wanted to have their community action director and so they nominated me to be the community action director. [1:30:00] And of course the, the, the top folks didn't want that. So, I didn't get the position. I remember looking at it in hindsight. It was a salary of $12,000, which was big time money. I had never gotten

$12,000 in my life. And, uh, so there was a small part, I said, "Hey I'm going to become rich in this job," because we were kind of living hand to foot at the level of, uh, that's my joke by the way now. Is that, is that I can tell you politically how I got through the sixties. But if you had to ask me how economically how I managed to get through the cities I could be down in Guantanamo and being tortured, and I could not give you a yearly account [JM laughing] or a monthly account for all those years of how I survived. You'd have to torture me, and I couldn't do it.

JM: Yeah.

PH: Because I mean that's, it was a whole different climate. Sharing, sleeping on people's sofas and community folks letting us stay in the house. Dinner – I used to have this very elaborate system of where I was getting meals. I'd say okay, Joe, I actually wrote it down. So, uh, the first Monday and the third Tuesday of each month I'm going to come over to your house. I'm just going to happen to drop by at dinnertime and because you saw me in the community you'd say, "Hey, oh, Phil, stay for dinner." Okay, you, I'm going to come out the third Wednesday and the fifth, the fifth [day] of the last [week] of the month and I'd do my whole couple blocks that I was kind of liaison for. So it would look spontaneous, but it would be very planned and I would have, know I'd have meals.

Uh, because I'd bring news and so I was always, it's like that famous commercial I always used to love about the guy who goes camping and all he takes is a six-pack of Budweiser. And everybody comes and greets him and takes him, takes good care of him. I mean, I brought the news. I could tell you what your neighbor was doing, what, what the landlord was doing, what the electric company, who was fussing with that, or the

church meeting here, and so I was in some ways a welcome guest. I mean it was part of the organizing and, uh, could be part of the social thing. I was telling somebody here that I would, as part of exploring one of the Central Ward neighborhoods I went into this bar and they said – I was looking to see what was happening and going on, and I was new. So I saw something on, on the bar, said, "Christian Brothers meet from two to three every Sunday." I said, "Oh that's a group I better check out with." And so I asked them, the bartender, I said uh, "What does this Christian brothers group do in their meetings?" And the guy looked at me, kind of the way your looking and said, "Oh we just drink Christian Brothers liquor." [Laughing] Here I thought it was going to be a social group with, make connections and – so I have a lot of great stories like that and that's what made it interesting and learning at the same time.

JM: Did you, and you felt you were making progress.

PH: Yeah. We, I mean I said we had a face in the city. And so after the rebellion folks wanted to blame the riot on us to a certain degree.

JM: Yeah, before we get to that, would the mayor of Newark have known who you were in these years?

PH: I don't know. Um, uh, uh, some of his, his people would have.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

PH: He had this guy named Del, Donald Malafronte who was – I can't remember his exact title, but he was like chief of staff – and I decided, because he was like at every community meeting running down the, the garbage from the mayor's office. So I personally decided to make him the arch bad guy. And so uh, any time I had a chance, publically or privately – I actually wrote a column, there is a guy named, a white guy, uh,

interesting guy, who is dead now, unfortunately, named Derek Wynans. He came from a fairly wealthy family in New Jersey. I can't remember exactly what their money was from. But Derek got interested in the Movement. And this was his hometown. He, he saw us and some of the people we were close to as being real progressive force of the future, and so, uh, he, he did all kind of things to help us. So one of the things he did, he started a newspaper, a community newspaper called the *Newark Advance* and I wrote a column in it. I think it came out every two weeks or something like that. And so usually I'd find some time in the column to talk about Donald Malafronte, as, as the arch bad guy on everything. And, uh, so he would know who I was.

And then some of the, there was a really good guy named Doug Edwards who wrote for the Newark *Star Ledger* and he covered a lot of our stuff. And uh, and uh I don't know if he's still alive or whether he's passed on, but uh so, so I mean we were picking our friends and enemies mainly because we were a force beyond the neighborhood. If we were just in the neighborhood, folks downtown wouldn't have cared that much. But because we had a much bigger view, uh, we were making ties, con – connections in the West Ward, which by '67 we never had really gotten a real base in – but we were, [1:35:00] I mean but people were aware of us as a force in the town. And, that's why I say I've never really been in anything quite like that since whether Detroit or here or where had that access to, uh, some degree of clout.

JM: Right. Right. Um, how were you managing, say, '65, '66 with uh, would you have formally described yourself still then after you're sort of deeply in the Newark experience as a member of SNCC?

PH: Well, no. I, I, I mean, some of this, some of this is personality; some of it's politics; some of it's cross and –

JM: And it's the themes of you know the, the –

PH: It's really the energy of what's happening with the times.

JM: Yes.

PH: So, like, I move to December, Newark, in December of 1962, and Tom Hayden and the party and all that. Um, and was beginning to work with NCUP again doing community work, and all of a sudden SDS decided that they wanted to do this march on Washington. It would become the first major march against the war in Vietnam. It was, it was April I think, I want to say 19th of 1965, I think. Uh, but anyways, April of '65. Paul Booth, was, who was the chair of the national chair of SDS at that time was the main speaker. And his great speech was, "We have to name the system!" You know, not just protest but anyway, but the problem is SDS didn't have any real base in D.C. And so I remember they came up to Newark and asked, uh, if I could be released to go down, go back to Washington, uh, where I knew people and be one of the organizers for the uh, for the march. And, uh, which I, I said to the SDS people, I mean to the ERAP people – NCUP – I mean it was up to them. And they said, "Yeah, this is important, because there's a bigger, what we're doing in Newark we think is important. But there's also the world which we have to have, have an awareness of and, and if you have some skills in D.C. and can do some of this," so. So, uh, the lead organizer from SDS was a guy named Paul Booth who I think at the time was the national vice president and he was there and I was the main organizer.

JM: Yeah.

PH: And in some ways I had done something a little different but similar in ’63 with the March on Washington committee. In that you had Bayard Rustin, who again was one of our mentors, who was basically organizing the national March on Washington. Somewhere along the line they realized they had forgotten about D.C. And were bringing all these people from all over the country, and nobody’s tried to do anything about mobilizing Washington, D.C., the people there. They’re, they’re going to feel totally invaded, and what is this and all that. So, uh, he leaned on some of the NAG kids as they, we were called and uh to actually do something. So we formed a little group and we said we will basically be the organizers for, uh – a guy named Cleveland Robinson, who was one of the more national folks in the March on Washington, gave us money, I should say got us money. He didn’t give it to us personally out of his pocket, but he got some money to, to set up an office, uh, and then later a couple desks in the main office so we could have coordination.

And Norman Hill from CORE, Congress of Racial Equality, was part of that. I say him because he was our generation. He was one of the younger, upcoming people in CORE at the time. And, uh, we basically, uh, organized in D.C. Cleve Robinson went to lead unions in D.C. We went to a lot of the churches, community groups so that we could get a turnout, but also, uh, people could we got places for people to stay you know who were coming not just for the day from other places. Uh, uh, churches opened up so people could go and get food and clothing, not, not so much clothing but food and water and respite, respite for a while. So, again, it was just having gone to college and done some work in D.C. that made that possible in ’63 and then also ’65 now with the anti-war thing. Then after that I went right back to Newark.

JM: Yeah, John, let's pause for just a sec here. [Recording pauses]

JB: We're rolling.

JM: Okay we're back after break.

PH: So in terms of the SDS-SNCC thing, I think some of the SDS people were moving more consciously to the anti-Vietnam war thing in relat – to some degree in relationship to what the more black nationalist tone around organizing in urban communities. It wasn't necessarily a boom-boom thing. It was gradual and some people stayed, like Tom for a long time, but then Tom went to Vietnam with Herbert Ap – Aptheker and Staughton Lynd. And then when he came back to Newark and talked about what it was like to be in Vietnam, and he was able to humanize both Vietnam and the Vietnamese in a way that never would have been possible if somebody hadn't, that we knew you know hadn't gone to Vietnam.

But there was that shift. So what happened with me personally this goes back to NAG, is that when Stokely becomes chair of SNCC and wants to take it [1:40:00] in a different direction uh I remember he comes up to Newark. We talk and he says do you want to be part of this new action and uh, I said, "This sounds cool." And at the time also it allowed me to think about a different kind of focus for the Central Ward, which was more around the Black Power as opposed to just the black and white thing. Um, and which in terms of people's real life experiences they didn't see that happening with a more theoretical construct.

JM: Let me catch you right at that moment, say, when Stokely Carmichael comes to have that conversation with you. He's, he's spring of '66 I guess when, when, um, he ousts John Lewis –

PH: Right.

JM: – at SNCC.

PH: And John is still mad about that too.

JM: [Laughs] Tell me about, tell me about how you would have – can you in some basic summary fashion, can you describe the vision, the perspective you had the, the way you added up what you were trying to do and what your critique was and how you wanted to get where you wanted to go?

PH: In Newark or just in general?

JM: In general. Your philosophy about how to do what you wanted to do.

PH: Well, I think coming both starting with SNCC and then the experience in Newark with SDS is that we felt that the true bearers of future change were going to be the grassroots communities, poor people, even poor white people, uh, that we were running into and organizing in certain places. So we were for in some ways doing the prototype of what would be the future society. There were going to be room for a lot of allies and the church, the labor unions, research and teachers. So, but in terms of where the force of that change was going to come from was people who had gotten the least, uh, and had the least stake in maintaining the current setup of, uh, the way government and the society was set up. So, uh, and we felt what SNCC was doing and what the SDS was doing emphasized that.

And that as the racial dynamic as, was getting to spread around the country, uh, thanks to the urban rebellions all around the country, and we were experiencing something which we had no real answer for in terms of our southern experience. And that was true with Martin Luther King went to Chicago. He, the same thing happened,

both at the level of the violence but also at the level of the Democratic Party because our whole objective in the South had been to get into something that was keeping us out. So when Martin King went to Chicago, Mayor Daley says, "Come on in! Become a Democrat and join the Party. Of course you're going to be on the bottom and, I mean, you're a person, key authority, well-known person so we'll make a symbolic position for you but everybody else is going to come in at the bottom level and, and we'll just replay the society but with new forms now." And the Civil Rights Movement, the traditional southern-based Civil Rights Movement had no answer for that either, both at the level of, of the increasing violence, people not feeling a adherence to nonviolence as well as the fact that there, there was racism without segregation laws in the North. We didn't have an answer to that. So it was like we had to make up as we went along, and, because there was no theoretical structure for how that was going to happen.

JM: What did you see as, what did you see as the elements that were essentially reformist and the elements that were radical?

PH: Which –

JM: Yeah, how did you, how would you have said –

PH: Oh –

JM: – in my program these are essentially reformist and these are essentially radical.

PH: Well, for the most part we were against the Democratic Party because we felt the Democratic Party was sometimes people said, the plantation which caught up and trapped all the particularly at that time the black initiative that was trying to rise up. And that, uh, in some ways it might be better than the sharecropper system in the South, but it

was still a bondage system and that the, the white people called, called whether it was Tammany Hall in New York or, or, or the, uh, Daley Machine in Chicago and variations of that around the country, they still made the rules. I mean it was the Democratic Party machine in Newark, the Italians and Irish as second-class citizens, and then we were at the very bottom. And then there were a few blacks who got into those bottom-level positions, but they were bottom-level positions and most of us you didn't get into them at all. So that was not benefiting anybody that we were trying to organize and, and that we had to give people some sense of civic action in the old sense of that word, civic action, to make a difference, and it was not going to be through mainstream structures.

JM: Tell me more about how you saw, what your program was to sort of overleap that obstacle that was posed by the Democratic Party by that structural reality.

PH: Well, as I said we went through again learning as we, we [1:45:00], we again sort of like in Newark there was this, we made this temporary alliance with George Richardson, the former state assemblyman, uh, to work in something called the United Freedom Party, uh, UFP, uh, United Freedom Party. And, um, that was experience, it was a little bit beyond our scope because we weren't that involved, we were door knockers and, uh, and people's issues around housing and welfare and not electoral politics. Because electoral politics was basically a field that was way beyond our control to, uh, pretty much for any community group to actually control that. Not just at a level of money but money being an important one as well.

And, uh, and we were coming abreast at the time when television, uh, which it had really gotten in the early sixties but by the mid-sixties people were seeing things which never were possible to do and having access to those things. I mean, we were

fortunate but in terms of the day that particularly in the Black Power period that any time – we used to joke, you just put on a pair of dark glasses and a leather jacket and say "Boo!" and you're on page one, especially if you have a big Afro. And, uh, that's no longer true of course; the press learns, too. But, sometimes you would use the other side or some of the apparatus on the other side to promote your cause. And so, that became one of the things that happened to SNCC a little later, which was unfortunate, is that we frequently talk, assisted what we called the white press to make announcements to black people, uh, I guess because we didn't have our own institutions to be able to do that. You know, that was a real problem then; I mean it worked and it didn't work. Because then the press could do the interpretation. They would carry us but then – so frequently, and this was true particularly with Stokely, he would always say, "I'm being misquoted," and, or, "I'm being quoted out of context," because that was, they would carry him. You know he would be on the front page or whatever but usually in way that showed him as this wild man making all these volatile statements and no sense of, you know, context for that.

JM: When Stokely Carmichael came to you in '66 with this proposal that you were mentioning, [microphone noise] were you, because of your history and time together back in NAG and Howard, would you have said you were, did you have a personal friendship that you were moving forward from or an alliance born of common struggle, you know different roles in the common struggle?

PH: Well, some of both. I mean, I mean I knew his family. I knew his mother; I actually had a brief flirtation with his sister. Uh, and, uh, visited his house in the Bronx. And, uh, so I mean we weren't necessarily – I wouldn't say that he was my best friend,

and I don't think he would ever say I was his best friend. And we challenged each other on a lot of things. I looked up to him totally. Uh, but there were things, I mean I was not comfortable with him on certain things, politically that is, on certain things. But on the level of public stance, you know, I loved him and, and uh I guess he represented like some people say that Malcolm does or did rather, um, a sense of black, particularly black manhood asserting itself in a way that was not convenient or comfortable for the white mainstream society.

JM: Um, take, take me forward from your conversation with Carmichael in '66 through, well, of course we're going to, we're going to encounter the Newark Rebellion in summer of '77 –

PH: '67.

JM: Excuse me, '67 of course, and, um, Carmichael will depart SNCC in '67 and H. Rap Brown will come in as SNCC leader, yeah, yeah. Kind of talk me through that; that that's a lot to talk about but, um –

PH: Well, one thing they did in '66 as part of that interchange and as Stokely wanted people who he knew to travel with him. So, I went on several trips with him. I mean he was speaking at that time for big money, a thousand dollars a speaking engagement, which SNCC badly needed. We went on to Seattle, Washington, uh, to the university there. And I remember going to a Charles Lloyd concert, first time I encountered Charles Lloyd. Uh we went up to Bard College in New York State. And [microphone noise] then I went to the University of Wisconsin with him, in uh, in uh – where was it, Milwaukee or Madison? I think it was Milwaukee. Huh?

JM: They have two campuses.

PH: Yeah. I know. That's why, I'm tempted to say, uh, Milwaukee because I remember there was this Locust Street that seemed to be everywhere. It was a Main Street and everywhere, you somehow, you always came back on Locust. I think that, it's a, I think it was Milwaukee. But in the process of flying out and talking, we'd have a lot of conversation on the plane and then, then after whatever the activity, day's event, we'd, uh, kind of debrief, uh, and, [1:50:00] um, with the Bard trip Cleve Sellers went up with us and, um, and then Stokely was being mobbed. And so, he'd always be saying, you know, was I too strong on this or was, was I not strong enough, or should I have emphasized this or that. And so it was like getting into like what's the messaging and what is it we're trying to say, but it's from the person who's at the very point of doing it you know. I mean that was a kind of unique spot. And just because again the NAG experience and, and, and I mean he knew we were going to be both, uh, totally friendly and supportive but also critical. You know, it's like, you know, um, you know –

JM: Right. Right. Um, the, the, we'll come back to Carmichael and the, his vision at, at SNCC, but let me ask about – you were in Newark in July of '67.

PH: Um hmm. In fact I'd gone to visit to Cleveland a week before, visited my folks. And my da – my dad who never quite made that radical step, I remember he said, "Oh you got back just in time to start the riot, didn't you?" Um, my dad unfortunately became – who had been, as I said earlier in this conversation a great inspiration for me. Um, uh, as we the sixties progressed we had less and less real conversations. He was just really, he just couldn't go beyond a certain point. And we had gone beyond that and the fact that his son was doing it, the first person in the family who had a chance to complete a college education, I dropped out of school for eleven years, uh, wouldn't go back until

’75, which was after this time period we’re talking about. It was after he died, too. He died in ’74. Um, he just – he thought I was wasting my life. He said, “Are you, are you, are you, happy working for Mr. Castro?” and this, you know, Mr. This, and this –

JM: Well, that I guess that, to say that is to is to make that very important point that there are very substantial personal costs that come with a life of commitment of this sort that you have lived, yeah.

PH: Yeah.

JM: Um –

PH: The thing with my mother was funny: she was also opposed to it, a lot of the stuff. But, uh, and I used to come home and she’d, she’d, she’d always have this conversation. But the way she’d look at me she’d always kind of look, it was like from here up, my hair, Afro and it wasn’t until *Ebony* magazine did a whole thing on the new cultural look of the sixties and the Afro that she finally relented and said, “Well, as long as you cut it and keep it shaped, it’s all right,” you know, but, uh, but she was very much concerned with how the appearance, and how people think, and stuff like that.

JM: What was your reaction to Newark?

PH: To Newark?

JM: Yeah, to the, to the rebellion.

PH: Well, I mean I think we, we participated in it. I was out on the streets during the Newark Rebellion. We actually – as I said it was part of this more racial, against the white power structure is – well, let’s just say what happened. I got back from Cleveland. I had just developed this friendship with a lady who was a VISTA volunteer and she was over in the North Ward and she was from, actually from Wildwood, New Jersey, a beach

town further south. And, um, I had gone over to visit her, and I stayed until a little after midnight and, uh, and something told me I should go home, back to the north, I was living in the Central Ward on 18th Avenue, and so as I was just walking back at night, there were very few cars out. Then all of a sudden I heard police sirens and I, and then I heard, uh, cracks and stuff – "Was that a gunshot?" Uh, somebody shooting at somebody. I kept walking back. So I got over to the 18th ward, I mean the 18th Avenue in the Central Ward, and people are telling me the whole, all hell had broken loose. And it had broken loose at the police station, which was just one block away from where I lived on 17th Avenue. And where they had captured this guy, I forget his name now, John something. He was a –

JM: A taxi driver.

PH: Yeah, a taxi driver. And they had put him inside. And the people were outside the police station, and then they started throwing rocks and bricks and stuff like that and what happened is because, um, uh, I lived a block away but more importantly, uh, and so I was right there at the scene, is that there was this guy named BJ. And BJ was a community character who had grown up, grown up in the Central Ward. And the minute I saw the movie Zorba the Greek, that's BJ. So if you ever saw that movie, with the kind of character Zorba was, that was what BJ was. And, uh, and he and I lived together because what happened is we got an office in Central Ward whose windows would get broken out by the local Demo – Democrats. But right next door [1:55:00] uh, he had a place, and I moved in, I remember we had a tub, a, a, a tub right in the kitchen and, uh, it was old-fashioned legs and, uh, but he knew everybody. And so I mean my ability to be there and organize and meet people and get accepted was through BJ.

And so when we went out that night, 17th Avenue, it was like, what's happening is he knew people, I knew people but I knew people basically through him and we said: look, it looks like something big is happening here. We heard it was spreading over on Springfield Avenue which is one of the main streets and we said, let's not try to stop this. But let's what we do, is we're only going to attack things that are white owned because we want to get the white domination, the white ownership out of the black community. And which forced a lot of storeowners to start saying – even some white folks said put on their windows black owned, black owned, you know. After they caught up on the second night or so. But I guess what I say that is we didn't want to have people basically going out wildly doing stuff and is that we were, had very much of a clear intent. And so this was even different than when in SNCC. I remember my friends in Detroit SNCC had basically told people to get off the streets. And they had no street role. And so we were right there.

I actually got beat up by the police that night, well the second night, because what happened is, it was really stupid. Uh, uh, there were some housing projects right near the 17th Avenue called the, uh, Hayes Homes, uh, and, um, I, I have no idea if they're still standing. But, uh, I saw a bunch of policeman and being cocky and young and totally stupid. I yelled, "Black Power!" Like this is what was happening. And they said, "Stop right there!" So, I had about less than two seconds to figure out whether I could run fast enough to get into the projects because I knew once I got in the projects they, they'd never find me. But the question is how, would they chase me, how fast their guns could shoot, how good – so I decided well, I think I'm going to stay here. I'm not going to run. I'm not going to take that risk. So all of a sudden I was with a guy from the

neighborhood, a guy named Joe Whitley who was a bartender at a bar in, in the Central Ward, and they stopped us and they said now "What did you say?" And this is about eight really big guys. They're all bigger than both me and Joe and so in some little squeaky voice I said, "Black Power" because I couldn't recant what I had said. But, uh, you know, this is totally intimidating. They had guns and everything. So they grabbed us and what was really interesting is both then and in hindsight, they beat us. But what they did was they used rubber truncheons. They didn't use anything that would leave marks. And so they just, they just came and turned us around, hit us, hit us like this, all this. And what happened is, this is where the earlier civil rights training really paid off. Back in the nonviolent days because I knew how to turn and lean so they couldn't get in here and all this stuff. Protect my head and so absorb some of the blows. But my friend Joe didn't. Uh so what happened is that they left us there and Joe was lying on the sidewalk. I was on the sidewalk, but I bounced up and so I had to take him home, essentially. And then once, I was really mad then, and so we ended up going into one of the neighborhood bars and just, and just, of course this is where the looting part came in because all these beer, beer cans – people just say, "Hey," the term was, "We're going to liberate that." You know. "Take it over to my house" and we're going to consume it.

But, uh, so, uh, it was a very, you know I could've gotten killed easily that night. And then about two nights later I was, they, they had a curfew and so I was out past the curfew, out on South Orange Avenue and so I had to again call around on some community resources to, didn't have cell phones, if they'd have had cell phones that would've been great then. I could've called a few people and gotten, so I just knocked on a couple of doors and I said, "I'm with the Newark group and we've been working

around black support and civil rights and Black Power and could I stay here for a while?" And they let me in. If not, I would've been out in the street. There were snipers out in the street. We actually knew a couple of the snipers who were, who were firing on the cops, but, uh, uh, we weren't doing that but, uh, I didn't want to get caught in the middle of that either. So, I mean, they let me in. So that was the night I got saved from being out on the street. So there were several you know occasions like that when it happened during the Newark [2:00:00] Rebellion. So by the next morning of the first night, we came back over to the South Ward, had breakfast with some SDS friends. And then, uh, sitting up in this place and there was some older black woman – I could hear her in the background, they were talking about all the stuff that had happened last night and she said, "It's about time they did this. They've been doing it around the country, and it's about time they do it here." And so that kept me, our message and our campaigns of the six to eight months previous to that in terms of the racial polarizing around white control, not necessarily just white people, but the white control had had some positive effect.

Because I remember in a couple of other places, Cleveland being one of them, in my hometown where we had had the Huff Rebellion it was a very apologetic, "We just, we, we, we acted like animals. We just overreacted." It, that's why we made sure to say this was a rebellion not just a riot, uh, making those distinctions in terms of the organizing so that people who had stood up in a slightly unusual way, you know, felt they had made, had manifested in something important and, and feeling good about it. Which is one of the reasons why the state police really felt that we were, had a real hand in promoting and being a part of the Newark Rebellion.

JM: The, uh, massive police response, [chair creaking] um, did you, did you emerge from that, it sounds like you emerged from that, that five days, um, feeling more inspired by the example of this self-assertion of the black community than you did discouraged by the state's capacity to respond.

PH: I, I yes definitely. In fact we were hoping the state wouldn't have a good capacity to respond. That they would've put us in jail, that would've probably been some of the proper response. And of course there were of course all these commissions that came afterwards that were set up. I can't remember the big one in New Jersey to investigate what had happened and why this had happened and what, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And but uh we felt that the pulse, the goal so where do we want to go from there I mean because from the organizer stand point. Okay, we had the great massive revolt on the street, we did something totally unprecedented and where do we go from there?

JM: This might be an opportunity.

PH: Yeah, so let's make this an opportunity to go for black political power. And it's out of that came the idea of getting the black mayor. And so we had begun this earlier on in some ways, uh, in 1966. There had been a mayoral election, yeah, '66, yeah. And, uh, we couldn't get quite unity for, for who should run for mayor, of course, the black candidate. And so George Richardson, who had been a state assemblyman and lived in Newark, wanted to run. And, and so what he did was – but he wanted a power base kind of like Bill Knowland [former U.S. Senator who assumed control of the Oakland *Tribune* in 1960, taking over from his father, Joseph P. Knowland] around the right to work thing. So instead of running for, for mayor he wanted a power base so he

ran for Central Ward councilman. And we, we put up just like the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, put up the mock election for governor back in, what was that ’63 is we did something for mayor. We said let’s, we have to have a black mayoral candidate to get people thinking about voting for a black man for mayor. So we found this guy, uh, named Ken Gibson who is a civil engineer. Uh, he seemed to be, he was very, he was middle class, not excessively but clearly that’s where he came out of. Uh, didn’t have any great formed pol – formed policies around a lot of stuff, but didn’t have any real, uh, garb – track record in a negative way either, and he hadn’t antagonized many folks in the black community. So we put him up to run for black mayor. Uh, he lost, but he got a credible amount of votes.

And uh so um what happened though in 1970 after that is Richardson decided he really wants to run for mayor and so does Gibson now. And so that’s why we had a political convention so that there would be a candidate that comes out of the black community. It was actually the black and Puerto Rican because we were, at that time we began to notice there were more and more Puerto Ricans living. There was a woman named Hilda Hidalgo who had been very uh, uh, supportive around a lot of the black causes and realizing that the Puerto Ricans had more at stake with the black community there, and so that there was that link early on. So we had this black and Puerto Rican convention, and we nominated Ken Gibson for mayor and then that was early ’70 I think. I can’t remember, either late ’69 or early ’70, and then of course the election was in ’70 and then he ran for mayor and won. [2:05:00]

JM: Let me pull you back for one –

PH: And I say, the other side, out of total arrogance – there were four Italians who ran against him. I mean, they just assumed that they could beat any black candidate. So they ran four of them, and of course they split the vote and then Gibson won easily.

JB: A lot of strategy involved.

PH: Yeah.

JM: Let me pull you back to, uh, one other very significant outcome of post, post-July of ’67. Um, uh, you would work with Nathan Wright to organize the first Black Power convention, national Black Power convention in Newark. Um, can you describe the, that, that process, that effort to bring that together and what and, and, and the vision that animated that, that convention and what you saw looking ahead from that moment.

PH: Well, I think part of the vision was how do you go from community power to broader urban power, uh, even taste of national power and stuff like that. And how do we sit down with different parts of the black community, some of the more progressive black politicians, uh, some of the black businesspeople, some of the folks who were going from that thing of being Negro to being black. It didn’t make them rev – revolutionaries, but at least they were having progressive thinking. Of course you have progressive music, Motown, Marvin Gaye, uh, was you were hearing on the radio now, was more, Aretha Franklin was coming out from this period. So, it just seemed, I mean we were going over to the Apollo Theater every week, weekend over in New York so it seemed like there were a lot of things that were just coming, falling together.

And so, uh, the vision we were putting out is a different kind of black America that, that, that united different parts of the black community, was in struggle against all

forms of white domination and white control. But as LeRoi Jones in some ways I think, uh, symbolized it, in terms of more modern Black Nationalism, which makes him a little different than others, is that Newark as our battleground. We're not talking about Africa like Marcus Garvey. We're not talking about the black world. I mean, we may have some ideas on that, but that's not where, what we're spending any time working on. And, we're talking about how do we get black power, right below our feet. And our feet are here in Newark, New Jersey. And, so, so from a national, a more traditional nationalist perspective, he brought that, he brought that in, the power he also brought in the Nation of Islam, uh, as, as part of that. So we were able to talk, this idea of what was called the Black United Front, which is what Stokely wanted to do in D.C. after he left as chairman of SNCC in '67. And um, and, and trying to build a unity around politics in the black community which hadn't, hadn't happened in modern times.

So that was in some ways the broader vision and that, but we needed candidates and working relationships at different levels which we – I mean, we had traditional Baptist churches and did this, and – I always say, the sixties was a period when you could go from politically wanting to have a white, I mean a hotdog next to a white person in the early sixties to talking about mass revolution, revolutionary politics all in the space of – I mean when you think about what happened in the sixties that, all that continuum was just amazing. That's why particularly in the seventies and eighties, you know, it's like when that didn't exist in the same way, people were lost. A lot of people who were activists were lost. Because it's like we, you know, so much happened in that, in that short time period.

JM: Let me ask for, let me ask you if you would to, to describe, um, your emergence through SNCC as, as SNCC's national director in '68.

PH: Well, um, well, what happened increasingly as the years went on, and both in terms of financial resources lessening, some of which we helped, we shot ourselves in the foot, I think, probably always, I'm not saying it's wrong. We, when we came out against the war in Vietnam, just like Martin Luther King organization suffered some financial as well as political repercussions, um, him probably even more than we did. Because after the March on Washington, he was seen as a national black leader to a great degree and people like Lyndon Johnson were seen working with him and all of a sudden he's now opposing the Vietnam War, which is Johnson's war, and the ramifications of that on the SCLC, his group, were much more tremendous than on us. We never were quite at that lofty stand. But still I mean there were people who didn't think, I mean we're talking about civil rights. Now that's not the position that, African Americans are not supposed to begin talking about foreign [2:10:00] policy. That's a whole other section of the world does that, the U.S. government or the U.S. civil society. But civil rights is about local, domestic or black problems and we are going beyond that. So that was, we lost some money in that as well as some, some political support. Uh, it got, brought us closer to the anti-war movements and the peace movement to be sure, but it lost us some of the mainstream people who had really, in terms of sixties, the Mississippi Challenge and the Freedom Party and the Freedom Schools and such had really gotten on to us.

JM: Then pulled back.

PH: And then, and then in ’66, uh, thanks to a research paper by this, uh, one of our research people, a national SNCC guy named Jack Minnis – oh, I always called him “Jack Daniels” – drinking, a brilliant guy. He, um, he did a research paper on Israel, and out of that, uh, determined that SNCC, I mean that, that, that, not SNCC but that Israel was a Zion – was a Zionist country. It was basically oppressing the people, the Palestinians and blah, blah, blah, blah, and SNCC people read it and supported it. So we basically came out against Zionism and, and Israel. So that created another whole stir of, of consternation and particularly in the more liberal movements of the United States.

I remember in New York we had at that time [microphone noise] newspaper, and, uh, I was going to take the newspaper over to a meeting, a community meeting and somewhere in Manhattan. And I got there at the very end of the meeting, and people were walking out the door and I went up to the person who was chairing the meeting and said, “Can I make an announcement?” And I said, “I have the new newspaper of SNCC with the article on Israel and Zionism.” People literally turned around who had walked outside. I got mobbed. I mean not physically mobbed, [laughing] but I mean, these people, everybody wanted that paper because that was the issue, and I was sold out in probably about five minutes and, uh, it was just at that, that, that point. And um, so, but that issue in many ways reverb – reverberated on us negatively in terms of the more broader, I mean the liberal movements of the time. It was a thing between liberalism and radicalism, not just around Israel but Vietnam probably being more of a point thing. Um, and, and then are you just for peace? Are you for liberation of Vietnam? That was another little side point in that debate as well. And we supported the National Liberation

Front of the Viet – of the Vietnamese people, and I did that even more so after going to Cuba and meeting some of them.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Let, let me uh – [Recording pauses.]

JB: I don't like the files to get too big. It makes it hard –

PH: I'm joking. I'm joking. I know you're a pro, so –

JB: We have like another two hours after this one –

JM: We won't keep you two hours. Are we – ?

JB: We're running again.

JM: Okay, we're back on.

JB: We still have two hours on the –

JM: We're good. Um, you've mentioned the financial pressures that increasingly were really battering groups like SNCC after say '64.

PH: Yeah, CORE was going through some of that, too.

JM: Sure. Uh, you've mentioned, um, the, the, the Israel tensions. You've mentioned, um, the anti-war stuff. Um, you haven't talked about and I'd love to get your perspective on the simultaneously negative consequences of, say, COINTELPRO and state security and the whole campaign to come after, um, pretty much all the heart of this Movement.

PH: Yeah, I think we weren't totally all aware of all of it at the time. I mean by the time the Panthers, for example, became more prominent, it became much, much clearer. Uh, but, uh we knew that there were things that were happening. Um, people became aware of agents in the Movement. Who were they? How do we recognize them? What would they be doing? What do we have that is so sensitive that anybody would

particularly want? And, and then: how do you deal with this? How do we develop a strategy for, for, for dealing with internal agents and what do you talk about? So that was one piece of it.

Another piece is that it just seemed that particularly the FBI and maybe COINTELPRO – wasn't always clear who was which – was more interested in dividing the black movement and then trying to get people one by one from that. So particularly when the Panthers started becoming a more of a prominent organization, there were real attempts to pit the Panthers against SNCC. And um, so, uh, [2:15:00] uh, one of our, uh, key leaders in New Jersey came to us and said, you know, "I got a visit from the FBI and they uh, uh, came in my house," he said, and – this guy named Irving Davis. Uh, and, uh, "They dropped $100," which was more than it is today, "on my bed and said, uh, 'We need to talk to you and you need to talk to us and we'll make it easier for you, and here's some money for you.'" And he turned it down and told them to leave the house.

Another time is they would tell people the Panthers were out to get us. And that uh the Panthers hadn't quite liked some of the things we were saying. This was another process of which isn't about COINTELPRO so much. Uh, there was this attempt to bring the two organizations together into either an alliance, as we called it, or a merger, as the Panthers called it. And, uh, this was right around the time I was became head of SNCC and, um, Huey Newton and the Panthers central committee had literally drafted on their own, free of our best-known people, Stokely [Carmichael], Rap [H. Rap Brown] and James Forman, into their organization. Stokely was drafted as a – they created a whole new position called prime minister. Uh, this was 1967 and, uh, Forman was made the minister of foreign affairs and, um, Rap was the minister of justice.

And um, and there was a big thing at Huey's birthday party in February 17th here in Oakland, and I think they did something similar in LA, where it was basically publicizing that Forman was there um, uh, Stokely was there. He was by this time the ex-chair and Rap was technically the chair in February. Rap couldn't travel, uh, because he was, on this gun charge. And he could only travel, if at all, with his lawyer, who was the late William Kunstler, and, and, and there were a couple trips that they went on. One, one was I guess to LA because Rap did, was at that event. So I guess Kunstler went with him. But, uh, so he wasn't quite as able to travel with Stokely and Forman, but it was part of bringing us in.

But there were tensions. It was like do we agree with everything the Panthers are saying? Do we agree with their style of organization? Which is beyond whether we think they're a great organization. Um, but are they our organization and do we want to become Panthers. Most of us kind of were lukewarm on that at best. And some people were saying no and other folks were saying, "This is a historical opportunity. Hey, we represent the more educated, intellectual folks. The Panthers represent the street force and the brothers and the sisters on the street. And this would be a historic alliance within a new organization." But, um, I think the feeling was that we were getting eaten up or that was an attempt. And Eldridge Cleaver, particularly, because Huey was in jail was, uh, the point person for a lot of this discussion and dialogue.

And, um, I guess at the meeting that I was made chairman of SNCC, we voted on the Panther program, and we said we thought it was a good program but it was not either our program or necessarily the revolutionary program. And somehow that got back to the Panthers and that, uh, of course. And then at a certain point when there was some more

friction, uh, which got almost physical in some ways, um, that, uh, we said we can't be in a group with this kind of people. So as chair of SNCC I said there's no, you know, there's surely no merger and there's not even a clear alliance. And, um, and then we spent some time in '68, uh, and I did personally, trying to work with local groups, again the local focus, uh, of groups who had been inspired by what the Panthers were doing but might have a slightly different politics.

So one group particularly that I spent some time with was a group called the Black Liberators out in Saint Louis and in fact managed to get arrested with them. And, um, Bill Kunstler had to come out and drag me out of jail, though what was also really great was my uncle, who was a lawyer, he wanted to join the, join the legal team and he did. He came in and to my horror they said that, uh, they should recor – they should play the speech to the jury to see if the police were warranted, and the police had actually pulled out an old anti-labor law called unlawful assembly, which had only been used back in the thirties, hadn't been used since then. And that was what we were arrested for, unlawful assembly. And I thought I said some pretty provocative things in the speech that night, but the jury thought that it wasn't necessarily beyond the pale, and, uh, [2:20:00] we got off.

JM: As you remember, [microphone noise] what were you saying that would've been regarded as most provocative?

PH: You know, I don't know. Uh, maybe if I thought about this for a couple days I might think of it. I mean I can't remember. I mean, I was generally supportive of, of, of the uprisings, and, uh, that were happening around the country. This was still '68, so there were still rebellions after Detroit and Newark, and I was supporting the people of

the world, kind of the third world concept of that we were all generally supportive of at that time. And, I don't even know if I said anything that specific about Saint Louis itself. I, I probably tried to, because I like to try to make stuff more, less abstract, and so I probably might've said something about the local officials. But, uh, and then I remember, I really got pissed off because, I, afterwards you get mobbed of course. And there was this really nice-looking sister who came up and said she'd like to meet me and there was a party later on that I was invited to. So I was prepared to go to this party and meet the sister again, [laughing] and we ended up getting arrested right in the middle of the street and then sent to the workhouse.

And that was interesting, too, because in many ways because we were known, we were, uh, celebrities, the prisoners treated us extremely well. It was like being a mafia don, uh, in the prison. Uh, even the warden -- this was a black penitentiary at a place called Kinloch [MO], a small predominantly black town outside of Saint Louis – and I mean he let us go in and use his telephone, uh, to talk to the national press and whatever. The prisoners would come up and say, "Hey, man, I can get you a good sandwich tonight or you smoke," I didn't smoke, but, "We'll get you some cigarettes" and all that. This is like, we were big shit. And of course the warden was afraid we were going to organize the prisoners against him of course. And so he was nice for that, that was why he was nice, and. So it was a little, just a side experience, but –

JM: Sure, did you have confidence when you took the helm at SNCC, that you could – so much was swirling, there was so much volatility with the membership, staff, uh finances, relationships, this whole struggle with Panthers, all these things. Did you have, what was your sense of the likelihood that you could –

PH: Be successful?

JM: Yeah.

PH: Well, look at Obama today after George Bush! [Laughing] Context. No, I actually did feel that way.

JM: You did feel that way.

PH: And I must admit it had as far as a major depression for me in the, some of the following years. I wasn't able to do more than I could. I mean, looking back on it, in terms of my head, in terms of rationality, looking, like you say, as you posed the question, given what was going on, SNCC was on a downright, downward cycle pretty much ever since '64 after the, after the Atlantic City thing. Ah, we did kind of revamp in '65 and did some stuff. Stokely took some folks to Alabama where we had a project that out of that came the Lowndes County [AL] organization. So there was some motion but still people were leaving. They were doing other things, and, it was like almost, kind of even for people who weren't leaving for political reasons so much, it was like, I've been in this battle too long. As I say it was like being in a war. And I need to go do something else, maybe related but not here. And so we were losing membership, losing money, uh, uh, and the meetings were getting dispirited. This was a time when the white folks were asked to leave, and so that became a whole other major issue in itself. So there was a lot of, this is even before I got there.

And, uh, but you know there was still an organization in '67 and '68, uh, and, uh, and I felt that we could turn the tide. Maybe as a different version and, uh,, and, and my focus was to try to again, given my history what I'd done with SNCC and SDS, do it at more at the grassroots level. SNCC was not going to be the organization. That was

always the difference between the SNCC approach and the Panther approach. I mean the Panthers went around like a lot of groups, like NAACP, organizing chapters around the country. Uh, and while we had a couple chapters, that was, when we organized something it was always a people's thing. So, like the Lowndes County, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, Newark Community Union Project, stuff like that. Because we knew at some leave we were always going to leave. And, I mean, and so who had to have the real ownership of this from the very beginning were the people. And, and so that was really part of our organizing thing.

And so, it tried to do some type of national community unions, focus on grassroots unity. [2:25:00] It was not so much – SNCC was doing this but it was basically joining with groups that were kind of radical, grassrootsy around the country, Black Liberators in Saint Louis, a group called JOMO [Junta of Militant Organization] in, um, uh, Jackson – Jacksonville and Orlando, Florida, some folks out of LA who had come out of the Watts Rebellion. And, uh, but looking at groups like that, you know, who had local base, and traction in their own communities, and who would be empowered by having national connections, national networks –

JM: To work some kind of national consortium.

PH: Yeah, national consortium, I mean, whether that would be come a political party or what we never got to finesse. I mean, but, uh, at least in one year that was, that was generally my focus. Stokely had a little different focus. And, I mean, he wanted to this Black United Front, an idea which he tried to do in Washington and I guess had a little bit of a traction while he was physically on the scene, but at a certain level you're bringing together interests that have really, are not going to stay together. Maybe in a

perfect world they might stay together a little bit but you have this bigger world like the so-called white power elite. And which will find ways to, through, through the carrot or through the stick to pry people apart. And so you have other interests beside just joining up with a bunch of black radicals, and that's generally been what's happening around the country around that.

JM: Let me have you, let me have you take this moment to, to tell this story of, um, the, the work you did in Cuba.

PH: Well, part of the third world focus is that there were different places around the world that we were generally supportive of. And, uh, the idea of the Venceremos Brigade – which interestingly enough still exists today, one of the things I'm not that close to any longer but, uh, not for political reasons just doing different things. And it's more younger people now who kind of go – is the idea of both meeting people, uh, in third world countries, and we had been somewhat inspired by the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, and some of us wanted to go fight in Vietnam against United States invading troops. That was very rhetorical, but that was at least the idea that was put out there. Um, just given what's happened more recently, this guy here locally, I can't think of his name now. He's in jail who was supporting Al Qaeda and they have him jail now and I can't – John Howard something [John Walker Lindh]. I can't remember his name. Um, but he's from Mill Valley [CA] over in Marin.

So luckily that never happened and wiser heads came down, uh, starting with the Vietnamese themselves. And they said, you know, there's some place closer that is, needs your help, and that, uh, you can do something where you don't have to actually physically fight because they've actually been successful but they can use other kinds of

help from you. And that's Cuba. And, so that's what, that was the logic of what brought Cuba into our eyes away from Vietnam even in the middle of the anti-Vietnam War. And so, um, some people who in the movements, people from SDS, uh, representing the white movement, some people from the Chicano movement, which was developing, and the black movement, and the Panthers were too busy, thankfully, and so they said, well, somebody from SNCC should do it. And uh when I'd been chair of SNCC I'd sent some people, delegations to Cuba, actually sent one to North Korea. We had sent one to Africa, to Tanzania. We had a Pan-African skills program in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, where we brought in people who had technical skills, African Americans to help in those countries. So there was precedent of thinking about that.

So, uh, we joined the National Committee and, uh, and organized the uh, uh, first actually of four brigades and what happened in the first one was, I mean the program which was part of the time, the propaganda at the time, was we're going to bring 300 black people, 300 brown people, and 300 white people to, uh, to Cuba. So 900 people. Uh, turned out there were 200 people who actually showed up for that first Venceremos Brigade and most of them were white. And we thought we had failed. Cubans didn't think that but we thought that. Because that was what we had projected. And, and also in hindsight even then we realized that we had been a little bit off kilter in our target. But what we felt was, it's important to build the movements, [2:30:00] uh, and see the brigade as an organizing arm. So we organized for the second brigade, which was in March of 1970 and we had over 800 people there, which was the biggest brigade ever. Uh, I mean the Cubans even told us we had too many people. Not because we had too many people but because their resources to house us, to take us around, to feed us at the same time

they were doing other things in Cuba, you know like, they were doing a ten million-ton sugar harvest that year we were there, it was just, and they weren't a rich country. You know, so, so they couldn't do that.

So but the point was we had made is that there was a real enthusiasm in the Movement and for this, and it did a lot of different things. I mean what it did for me, it took us out of the United States in a way that we could look at the US movement in a more objective way. So we had people sitting around in the camps in Cuba, uh, where we're working and meeting people from all over the country in a way that I could never do that in the United States. They could meet each other, meeting people from different movements. Uh, I mean sometimes our rhetoric was a little wild. I mean, I was thinking one time being the Cuban [2:31:16] You had a bunch of African Americans who said they wanted the Republic of New Africa, we want five states of the South. Then the Chicanos would come and talk about Aztlán [Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán, founded 1969, aka MEChA] and the Southwest, which was going to be the new Chicano nation. And then the Indians would come and talk about taking over some of the Southwest. It's like, well is there enough space for all that? What happens to the white people? You know, but that's our youthful, youthful craziness.

But, um,, uh, but we built some bonds both with the Cubans, uh, uh. I mean, I loved it that the Cubans would basically cut sugar cane and work all day and then go have parties and dance and drink rum. I mean, it was a way, something you could identify. I mean, the Russians, I mean, you could read about the Soviet revolution and the discipline and the democratic centralism and all that, but it wasn't like, well, that's not my revolution, you know. So it's like who was it that said, Emma Goldman says, "If

I can't dance in my revolution, it's not going to be a revolution. And you felt the Cubans understood all that, you know. There was this problem, which wasn't big at the time, I remember it came up around Granada, about the God, the spiritualism piece. And I remember some Granadians who really liked the Cuban model said that it wouldn't work in Cuba, I mean in Granada because you've got to have more God, space for God, in our movement. In, in, in our liberation force. Uh, so, that's a, an aside.

But, uh, so we got a sense of who, some real people who had made a revolution and as real human beings who had real problems, people who had divorced their wives or wives who had became independent, left their husbands and, uh, and, uh, so some of the downsides but or, you know, the continuing struggle. People going to meetings eight nights a week, not seeing their kids on a regular basis. Their kids being schooled by community and, well, [high pitched voice] "What happened to my mommy and my daddy?" you know, kind of thing. And so the real, so it wasn't glossed over. Um, so that was great. Uh, got to learn certain basic things like when we say ten o'clock, we mean ten o'clock. And this is a Latin country, too, you know. You know we're going to have a meeting the next day, or later that day, you know, the Cubans would say, "Campaneros, it is now four o'clock. We are going to meet at six o'clock. Let's synchronize our watches so we come here at six o'clock because we're doing important business." And that was something, we had this thing called CP time, colored people's time, black, Latinos, and we'll show up and the meeting starts when we show up. And very lackadaisical form. So the Cubans really helped us think that in terms of if you're going to be doing stuff for the people, representing people on the people's time, then you need to have some degree of discipline.

Uh, so little things like that but also uh, uh meeting people. Cuba was a center for revolutionaries from all over the world. So, I mean, I remember this guy, a guy named Ernesto from Angola and he came, we just met him at the Isle of Youth [Isla de la Juventud, Cuba] and he just talked about his country, the struggle.

And one of the things I got from people like him and other people was, uh, we had some Brazilians who at that time had been, couldn't be in Brazil, uh, as, how well they could talk about their whole country. And I said, you know, I know people who can talk about Harlem or some community folks who can talk about the south side or the west side of their town, but can they really talk about their state or their country, other cities in the country. I mean, do we have a view of our country that's concrete and, uh, and, um, and not just rhetorical, that we can actually talk about? [2:35:00] And so listening to those folks do that. I mean, granted Angola is smaller than the, than the United States, uh, but I mean, how do we develop the kind of learning and discipline to do that kind of thing?

Uh, I remember meeting with some of the Vietnamese, with this guy from Vietnam and he said to me, he says, well, "What's the labor movement like in your country?" So my first reaction, was, "Oh, it's just a bunch of sellouts." Next question: "What's the labor movement about in your country? Could you tell us about that in detail?" So in two hours he made me backtrack and get through some of my stereotypes. Which are the progressive unions. Which are the non-progressive unions. What makes them progressive; what makes the others not progressive. What's their constituency? What's their base? Uh, is there possibly, I, I, I mean their focus of course is in terms what groups in the labor movement might be more open to being more anti-war activity.

But still the thinking of how to dissect a whole movement beyond the little simple stuff that we were doing you know was a learning process. If you're going to meet with revolutionaries and be with revolutionaries, you've got to basically have serious conversations based on real things. And so that was real useful.

I mean, uh I had been kind of organizer of the brigade and the second brigade came, the third brigade came down later in the summer, and so I remember asking the Cubans if I could stay on for another couple months so I could actually enjoy the country. So I was at the Havana Libre as they called the old Hilton Hotel, and one of the things I learned to like, I say this now, because I was on their dime, essentially, is, uh, was fish. I grew up in Cleveland, no fresh fish around. I ate sardines, that was my, and maybe tuna fish sandwiches. That was my idea of fish and didn't know fish had these little bones that you might – so one of the things I tried to do in the Havana Libre I said there's fish here every day. But what's interesting, though, is Cuba being an island didn't have a fishing industry. It was only thanks to the Japanese, uh, who came in and showed them how to do, uh, refrigeration to make it something that they could do all over the island. Uh, because if you could get fish obviously if you were rich or if you lived right near the coast and fixed it that day, but you couldn't take it inland, and Cuba's a big fat island, it's not, you know. So there was never a real taste for fish on the island. So, uh, that's a little story on the side. But, so, but I used to go and get, I said, I wonder what halibut tastes like. I wonder what this tastes like. What's perch like? And I could just do it.

And so it gave, I mean, that's a small piece, but, but, uh, and then we had these wonderful meetings with the Vietnamese. Uh, uh, a conference that never came out, is that the Vietnamese wanted to organize an anti-war conference of folks from the United

States and a few other countries, and, um, it was going to be in Cuba because that was the place we had all access. And I was asked along with a couple of other folks, actually Abbie Hoffman from the Yippies was there, and as part of the planning group and got to meet with the Yippies for the first time. I mean I had heard of them and I'd seen them at a thing but actually being in a hotel rooms and staying in a hotel with the Yippies was a thing in itself. That's another chapter, somewhere, some book. Uh, Jerry Hoffman. But, um, talking to the Vietnamese about what they were going through and how they viewed the world, how they viewed their struggle. Uh, I remember after one day after some really, serious intensive US bombing of North Vietnam a young Vietnamese brother says, "I can't meet with you today. I'm just really feeling too anti-American; it's really not about you. Please understand that, but I just can't do this today." And he just went off and we saw him a couple of days later.

And then, you know, just a lot of great stuff. I mean the humanism comes out. I remember when we were telling a joke and there was a woman sitting there, a Vietnamese woman, and, uh, I started to stop because I was going to use a kind of cuss word and stuff. He said, "Oh no, no, no Madame so and so she's liberated. You can say this," you know?

And, uh, and then just the physical thing, like some of the men walking down holding hands with each other in a way that you would not see outside the gay movement which was still very new in the United States, uh, there. And I remember one time we were going for lunch thing, and, uh, and it was cafeteria style. It was really crowded and, and the Vietnamese guy was sitting down, and I said, "Oh, you sit down," and then he says, well, "Here, you sit on my lap." [excited] Uh, and I: "Oh, I'm bigger than you! I

can't do this! Two men sitting on each other's lap, we can't do this!" [Laughing] He was just cool with it, you know, so. But, so, it was just constant learning on so many levels. I'm just, just some that come to mind and –

JM: Let me pause here for just a second and then we'll come back. [break in interview] We're back after a break.

PH: [2:40:00] The struggle continues. "A Luta Continua," as they say in Portuguese, and that, uh, it takes different phases. You learn some things. You move forward, and then the other side learns stuff. Even the work around immigration, uh, the different levels. I mean the thing that we like about immigration is it's both a domestic issue and an international issue. One very difference is that, uh, and I say lot of this when I go, when I talk about, talking about then and now. I just came back from Georgia, uh, uh, in Atlanta where we're trying to do some work around this House Bill 87 and we were going to get to Alabama but we ran out of time. So that's a future trip. But, uh, is that logic of the sixties was that we were fighting against the racists, segregationalists, state governors, state, city local officials. And we were basically fighting for our civil rights, which were national. And we basically wanted the federal government to come in and take care of these bad guys either through the National Guard if necessary, through deputizing, that's why we pushed with Robert Kennedy and John Kennedy and later with Johnson to come in. Because the government was going to take care of this and live up – we were going to force the government to live up to its standards.

What we find with immigration is the government is not the savior; it's the problem. And because there is a world system uh, uh, of giant corporations because of the laws like NAFTA and these other things that the United States is, as the major

western power, is on top of. And that, uh, the problems that are spurring the mass migration and immigration, uh, not just to the United States but all over the world, are based on that type of unequal world level. And so in terms of trying to fight around, against racism at a higher level uh, uh, fighting against economic corporations at a higher level is we're running into this that the system, the system of um some people in the old days called it imperialism but economic globalization or whatever you want to call it that, that, that the United States government is very much a part of. And that part of the immigration problem as it gets stated, is we're only talking about one part of it. We're talking about, it's a push pull and what's happening is we're just talking about the people who come here and we are not talking about the situation that, that forces them to leave their countries and the role of the United States government and other western governments and banks and corporations in that. Uh, and that's not stopping. So, you can't really stop the immigration as it gets put out in the US press unless you do both ends. You just can't punish the people who come, uh, or whether they come to England, or whether they come to different parts within countries or within continents. So, anyway.

So, I mean, there's a continuing learning and refining old concepts, developing new concepts. And but still looking at question which, which is to me how, how does the race and class thing come together and somewhat, increasingly, gender as part of that, and in a way that we started in the sixties and the seventies and now in the twenty-first century is playing a major role.

JM: I can't think you enough. It's just been a real honor and privilege. Thank you so much.

PH: Okay, thank you.

[Recording ends at 2:43:40]

END OF INTERVIEW