

Civil Rights History Project
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Interviewee: Dr. William Lamar Strickland
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Location: Conference room, New Africa House (academic building),
University of Massachusetts-Amherst
Interviewer: Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D.
Videographer: John Bishop
Length: 2:09:32

Joe Mosnier: I have to start a little blurb when we go on here.

William Strickland: [Laughs]

John Bishop: Okay, I think we're good. We're rolling.

Joe Mosnier: Today is Friday, [WS clears throat] the 23rd of September, 2011. My name is Joe Mosnier of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am in Amherst, Massachusetts, on the campus of the University of Massachusetts in New Africa House with John Bishop, our project videographer, to do an oral history for the Civil Rights History Project, which is a joint undertaking of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress.

And we are privileged today to be with Dr. William Lamar Strickland, um, who has taught here, uh, in, in many, for many years, and long before that a deep engagement in the

Movement in a whole host of capacities that we'll discuss today. Um, Dr. Strickland, it's a pleasure –

WS: Bill, Bill, Bill.

JM: Bill, Bill, it's a privilege and a pleasure to sit down with you. Thanks very much.

WS: Thank you, um-hmm.

JM: Um, just a quick note before we dive into the interview. Our videographer, John Bishop, has long personal acquaintance with, um, with Worth Long, and, uh, before we turned on we were chatting a little bit about, uh, mention of Worth. And I thought maybe we'd just ask you to lay that down here so we don't miss it.

WS: Okay. Well, it's – I assume people know Worth was regarded as the poet of SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee]. And for some strange reason there's a quote that's been attributed to Stokely [Carmichael], which actually was Worth's quote, and it was, quote, "False-faced America, we have found you out," unquote.

JM: Um-hmm. Thank you.

JB: That sounds like Worth. [Laughter]

JM: Bill, let me, um, let me have you begin today with just recalling your family and your parents and how you – just coming up in Roxbury [Massachusetts] and how you found your way, um, kind of out of that context, say, to Boston Latin [School].

WS: Wow. Well, it was, uh, elementary school. The, uh – I had a teacher who thought I should apply to Latin School, and Latin School had a procedure where they would let you in based on your grades. And then, as you sat in the auditorium, they would tell you, "Look to your left and look to your right, because he –" because at the time Latin School was all boys, of course, since 1635 – "they're not going to be here at the end." So, you enter in Class Six, which

is the seventh grade, because we had six years of Latin. And that was correct. Almost seven hundred (700) guys started out, and we graduated about two-twenty (220) or two-thirty (230), of whom six of us were black.

JM: Hmm, yeah. Tell me, if you would, some recollections of your parents.

WS: Oh, my father was killed, um, in the war. And then, my mother was a – worked for Raytheon [Company], she worked the union for Raytheon's. But I had this – I had aunts in Roxbury and fabulous aunts in, uh, in Newark, New Jersey. And [clears throat] my mother's family was from Georgia. So, I was – as a child, I would go to visit them in Georgia. In fact, it, um, was a little town, a little town outside of Macon [Georgia] called Haddock, called Haddock – Haddock, Georgia.

I later found out, I guess it was my great-grandmother was the offspring of a plantation owner, and the, uh – because the town between Macon and Haddock was a town called Gray, and the plantation owner was evidently a major figure in Georgia during the Confederacy, Madison Gray. And my uncle, my uncle was named after him, Gray. But evidently, this was a fairly, um, I guess open-minded or – because he left part of his land to my mother's family. So, that was the land that they had when I went as a child to visit them.

JM: Yeah.

WS: [Speaks with drawl] In Georgia. [Laughs]

JM: Which branch of service?

WS: Marine Corps.

JM: For your father, Marines, eh?

WS: Oh, no, he was in the Army. I was in the Marine Corps.

JM: Yeah.

WS: Yeah.

JM: He was killed where?

WS: Oh, God! I think in the Italian, in the Italian [5:00] campaign.

JM: Yeah.

WS: Yeah.

JM: Um, you've written in certain places about, um, kind of part of the family and community world you grew up in, in Roxbury, and it included, obviously, uh, through I think, um, a cousin of yours, an early acquaintance with, uh, Malcolm Little. Yeah.

WS: Yes, I just recently wrote about it. I tried to, to, uh, recapitulate that because there's been a recent biography of Malcolm X, which, to which I take great exception. And I wanted to establish that my recollections came from personal experience and not from secondhand experience. Because I met Malcolm when I was very young, because he was a very good friend of my cousin, whom I say in the article was my hero, because I would be at my aunt and uncle's house, and girls would call him from New York, and I thought that was the coolest thing in the – [laughter] was the coolest thing. So, I wanted to grow up and be exactly like him.

The, um -- but they also were part of a group, which on later reflection I think may have been, may have been significantly West Indian. Um, because my cousin was – his father was, was Bar – was Barbadian. The, um – Uncle Jake was his name, Jake Edman. And they – and my relatives claim that at some point in my youth I said that, uh, Uncle Jake – I called Uncle Jake “the man too mean to die.” [Laughs] But he was, but he was cool. And, um, and he was also a numbers maker. The, um – and so, I grew up with numbers sheets all around my aunt and uncle's house.

But Leslie [Edman] got out of the war, and he came – he got into a – I don't know what the cause of it was – he got into a hassle, um, down at the, on Tremont Street. In fact, I really think it's the same poolroom where Malcolm met Shorty Jarvis. And so, he came home and [clears throat] and got his pistol and went back and whacked [i.e., killed] one or more of the people. But because my uncle was in touch with the Irish Mafia, he got Leslie the best criminal defense attorney. So, Leslie only got a year and a day eventually. So, he was in Charlestown [Prison] at the same time as Malcolm.

JM: Hmm.

WS: So, when I met Malcolm later, when Malcolm came to speak at Harvard, I went up after his, after his talk, mentioned Roxbury and, and Leslie, and then we were tight until he died.

JM: Umm.

WS: Um-hmm.

JM: Umm. Let me ask a little bit more about, um, about your personal, uh, history in those years. Um, obviously, it was something of a unusual, quite unusual thing, still, for an African American young man to be up through Boston Latin and into Harvard. I'm interested kind of in your recollections of that, moving through those experiences.

WS: Well, there may or may not have been a quota, but there were only eleven of us out of a thousand guys at Harvard. And because of that number, you knew all the black guys who had gone to Harvard ten years before you, or twenty years before you and twenty years after you. So, it was, uh, an infor – and then they would – you know, they had – there was a little socialization process when you arrived. They would say, "Well, most of the people whom you will encounter here will believe that you're only here for one of two reasons, that you're some

maid's son or that you're a genius. And your responsibility is to demonstrate Point B." So, there was a nurturing, um, group presence in Cambridge, in Cambridge for us.

JM: Um-hmm.

WS: And I remember Harvard. I have [laughs] very fond memories of Harvard. Harvard taught – you know, like [W.E.B.] Du Bois. You know, Du Bois started writing for newspapers when he was in, uh, a high school student at Great Barrington [Massachusetts]. And when he got to Harvard, he flunked I think it was English I. It was an introductory – because they used to have a compulsory freshman writing class for everyone.

And I had been [10:00] similarly favored. I skipped kindergarten, and they wanted me to skip, uh, first grade, and then, I had done well at Latin School. And so, when I got into the writing class, I was a little florid with my language. And, uh, we had an English teacher, Mr. Russo, who said to us, "And now, young men, I am going to teach you the secret of good writing. The secret of good writing is *rewriting*." [Laughs] And so, I was able to carry that on, to carry that to, uh, on to Harvard. But it was – I have very pleasant memories of Cambridge, actually, yeah.

JM: Uh, you –

WS: Except when they asked me to leave them all my money, leave them all my money in my will, [laughter] little money that I have, yeah.

JM: Let me, um, I had meant to ask earlier – I just want to make sure I – I bet it's here. Yeah, your birth date is the fourth of January, 1937. Um, so you entered – you finished at Boston Latin in –?

WS: '54.

JM: '54. Oh, so basically, with *Brown* [*v. Board of Education*], coincidentally with *Brown*.

WS: Yeah, I wasn't thinking about *Brown* at the time, though.

JM: Yeah.

WS: Actually, that's not quite true, because I was – let me think about that – because I was involved with the NAACP Youth Council when I was in high school. And they had, uh, a slogan, you know, “Free by '63,” you know, the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. So, the, uh – I had forgotten, Jesus, I had forgotten that I was involved with the NAACP Youth Council. Yeah.

JM: Well, on that point, you've kind of anticipated what was going to be my next question, which is: Were you a – had you come from a “race family,” and were you a young, were you an adolescent with much of that question on your mind?

WS: No, not particularly. It's, um – there were, you know, episodes. I didn't think about them at the time, but they crystallized, the significance of them crystallized later. Going to visit my – well, as I said, my Uncle Gray, who was another role model of mine, he had to leave Georgia, because he, he, uh, he had a girlfriend, who I also remember as being, you know, quite striking, and some white guy was pursuing her. And I don't know whether he killed him, but they had a confrontation. He at least beat the hell out of him, and then he had to leave. He went to Detroit to live with his older brother, my uncle, in Detroit.

But I, but later on, when I got to Harvard, as I mention in the Malcolm article, and was in this graduate – they let me into this graduate seminar with C. Eric Lincoln and, uh, and Whitney Young. And I had – I started going to, uh – as I said in the article, “Race was all around me.” And I started – had run into Malcolm again. And I started going to what was then Temple

Number Eleven, which [Louis] Farrakhan, who was then known as Louis X – and listening. As I also say in my notes to you that I was very attracted to the, to Malcolm's worldview, but I – um. And so, I started thinking about going to Georgia, and you come out of the train station, and etched in stone in the building you see “Colored” and “White.”

Um, and also I had been in, I had been in the [Marine] Corps, as well, and I remember – this is – you said that you had interviewed the, the Sherrods [Reverend Charles Sherrod and Mrs. Shirley Sherrod]. The – I remember being called in to – they asked – [laughs] for my next duty station, and they asked me how would I like to go to Albany. And the only Albany I knew was Albany, New York. So, I said, I thought to myself, “Oh, that's super! I can swoop down to Harlem, et cetera, et cetera.”

And then, I went down to Howard [University] because one of our rival fraternities, the Kappas, had a big social event called the Kappa Dawn Dance. [15:00] And I had almost gone to Howard, um, because I had been offered a super scholarship, and they had brought me down to Howard, and I walked across campus and saw a million girls who looked like Halle Berry. [Laughs] And, uh, I had a neighborhood friend, Carl McCall, who was treasurer or lieutenant governor of New York at some point, and he had gone to Dartmouth [College]. And he was there with, uh, a guy, whose name will come to me, perhaps, who was a little older, whose mother was the principal of the famous – I think she was – or he had gone as an undergraduate to Dunbar High School, the famous black school in Washington. And this guy was a basketball player, and he had left Dartmouth, gone to Howard, and then returned to Dartmouth.

So, I was talking to my mother and friends about going to Howard and then going up to Cambridge. And they said, in effect, “Schmuck! [Laughs] Take your behind to Cambridge!” So, uh, the, um – of course, back in those days, you were – there was a community, so it wasn't

just you and your family. Your church knew, you know, about your exploits and the, and the, your ach – your accomplishments. So, you had – in essence, you had the responsibility of the race, because we were told we had to be twice as good as white people, you know, white competitors. So, you had that, that responsibility.

But I must say that if you, if you grow up in – well, if you remember the famous movie, *Ten* – well, if you grow up in a, in a community where you believe that the women you encounter are all eight, nines, and tens, and then you go to Howard and see that they're really only fours and fives, [laughs] you – socially, you say, "Woo! Have mercy, Jesus!" [Laughs] The, so, what they said, "No, you go on to Harvard, and Howard, Howard can wait." And so, it did wait.

JM: Um-hmm.

WS: But then, to finish the other story, it's just that when I looked at my – while I was at Howard and looked at my [military] orders, I saw that it wasn't Albany, New York, but Albany, Georgia – or, as the natives pronounce it, "All-banny."

JM: Um-hmm.

WS: And that was another – the Marine Corps was a very important formative experience, because most of the people – the military, I assume, still is fundamentally a southern institution. And the people that you had in the Corps were, especially the officers et al, were, um, Southerners, and the enlisted men were Southerners and/or young guys whom the judge had told, "Well, you have two choices: the joint [i.e., jail] [laughs] or the Marine Corps." But it was – but I learned about, uh, dimensions of white America that I never would have learned otherwise, had I not been in the Corps.

JM: When were you in the Marine Corps?

WS: '56 – '59.

JM: '56 – '59. What were some of those – what would be examples of some of those things that you learned?

WS: Well, the Marine Corps has a culture, and they instill in you a – I don't know what they're doing now, because all their uniforms look alike, and, uh, the whole period of, of training is not the same as it used to be. But they – if you make a distinction between who you are or were as a civilian and then as a Jarhead, there are things that you do when you're a civilian that are civilized. If it's raining or snowing, you go inside. The, uh, and what they teach you is when you think that you cannot take another step you can run five more miles. So, you become acquainted with reserves, personal reserves that you would never otherwise have known. And that creates a certain, um, image, identity, which also can work against you, because people then think they're, you know, [20:00] they're, uh, invulnerable.

Um, it does – I mean, you develop a kind of superiority attitude towards civilians and to the Army and the Navy, the Swabbies. The Army shoots from the three hundred yard line. We shoot from the five hundred yard line. Uh, so they instill – for some of these guys, um, the Corps was their mother and their daddy. I mean, I don't know – you know, I knew some of their personal stories, but for some of these guys, the Marine Corps was everything for them. And that – and trying to understand, um, where those needs came from was educational for me.

And then, also you become more, you become more humble, because I remember being in boot camp, and the, uh – in Paris Island and then at Camp, and then later on in [Camp] Lejeune, that, um, I'm walking across the base and find myself humming the Everly Brothers. [Laughs] You get indoctrinated in an, in an, in an atmosphere, because I had, you know, been going to Storyville and The Stables and was deep in, and was deep into jazz, um, and R&, and

R&B. But when you're enveloped in an environment, it's interesting how it can creep into your consciousness. I'm walking around the base humming "Bye Bye Love," you know. [Laughter]

And I'm still in touch with – one of my old buddies, although we weren't in the same outfit, just came up to visit me from – well, there was a big event in D.C. for the Buffalo Soldiers. He's living in Savannah, where they just murdered, uh, outside Jackson, where they just murdered Troy Anthony Davis [put to death September 2011 by the State of Georgia, despite much controversy as to his guilt].

JM: Yeah.

WS: And he rode his bike up. He was also – uh, he came up, he wants to sell his house in Boston, then he, and then he rode up here to Amherst to, you know, to visit me. So, there is this, there was this, there is a fraternity that stays with you forever, actually.

JM: Yeah.

JB: Joe, let's –

JM: Let's pause –

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're back.

JM: Yeah. Um, so, coming out of the Marine Corps, you went into – you went to Harvard.

WS: I went back to Harvard, yeah,

JM: Yeah. Had you – and you'd already enrolled there briefly?

WS: Yeah, sure.

JM: Yeah, okay. Um, so, um, I'm interested, too, moving through the last half of the, of the '50s, things like, um, things like, huge things like, um, *Brown* and Montgomery and Emmett

Till and Little Rock and all, kind of your – I’m just wondering about how you’re watching those things unfold and thinking about them at the time, as best you can conjure and recall.

WS: I wasn’t thinking much about them. The thing that I think struck the consciousness of everyone and subsequently was the reason, I later discovered, why many people of my generation joined SNCC was the murder of Emmett Till, because *JET* [Magazine] had his picture displayed.

Um, and then, at Harvard I took an English course with a very famous professor of literature at the time, Howard Mumford Jones, and he had us reading Richard Wright, *Uncle Tom’s Children*. *Uncle Tom’s Children* will blow your mind. And people still – I talk to my friends, colleagues in literature, about the significance of that book, because to me – I mean, I teach it in my, when I teach, um, [sounds like furniture is being moved] civil rights or my “Malcolm and Martin” course [formally, “The Political Thought of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr.”], I start the students off with *Uncle Tom’s Children*. I want them to understand just how capricious racism, southern racism, was, and how the least little thing could suddenly become a matter of life and death. So, I read *Uncle Tom’s Children*, and that helped.

And then, Jimmy Baldwin [James Baldwin], in *Notes of a Native Son*, he has an essay, in which he, in essence, he says, “Has there ever been a Negro who at some point is not consumed with rage and wants to –?” And I said, “Oh! I’m not the only one.” [25:00] [Laughs]

So, and then I was at Harvard, and that’s when I, um, joined NSM [Northern Student Movement]. NSM was, as I mentioned, was started by a young white undergraduate at Yale, Peter Countryman, and it had city projects all around the country, in Chicago and Detroit and Boston, Hartford, and New York. Um, and they had, were somehow connected to NAG [Nonviolent Action Group], because that’s how I first met Stokely. Uh, I left out – Chicago,

Detroit, Hartford – and Hartford, as well. And then, when Peter decided to go back to school, they asked me to, they asked me to become executive director, and I agreed to do that.

JM: Yeah.

WS: So, that took me going to visit, you know, the city projects around the country, um, created opportunities so I could meet people like James and Grace Boggs.

JM: Yeah. I have a range of questions about all that, but can I just – can I just wind back just a bit and ask you one more thing? Uh, uh, I'm just interested, um – is there anything more to say about, um, your mother and her influence?

WS: Her influence was, was, um, incalculable. I mean, she, in effect, devoted her life to me. Um, and that's another reason I tried to do well: to honor her, her commitment. You're gonna make me cry.

JM: Happens lots in these interviews, yeah.

WS: Yeah.

JM: Yeah.

WS: But she was a great, great person.

JM: Yeah.

WS: I had great relatives – and my aunts, uncles – I had great relatives.

JM: Yeah.

WS: And that's what I see missing with this generation. There's no, there's no community. I mean, you kind of belong to the community. And where I lived on Walnut Avenue, the – it was still, you know, Jewish, Irish, um, Armenians, the, um – and I went to Henry Lee Higginson School [in Roxbury]. That's – it was from the Higginson that I went to Latin School, so you had all these different nationalities in your, in your class – in your

classroom. But the black community in your neighborhood, um, mostly went to the same church. But you were, you were – you belonged to everybody, and you [were] recognized.

For example, a few years ago, Grace Boggs was telling me about Detroit, and she was saying, “Billy, we can’t go out and organize the way we used to, because you’ve got these gangbangers. I mean, you’re taking your life in your hands just walking out in the street.” Um, so the changes, the changes are – I mean, truthfully, the race is in limbo as has never been before. And the – there’s a confusion. The younger generation is ahistorical. It’s not, not their fault, but they don’t have what we had. They don’t – [phone rings]

JM: Let’s stop.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JM: We’re back.

WS: Yeah.

JM: Okay.

WS: I mean, we don’t have black newspapers. We don’t have black radio stations. Five corporations control the media. The – so, there is a difference. I don’t blame the young people, because you didn’t – in our previous history, you didn’t have to teach people what it meant to be black. Um, there was continuity. But now, we are – because most of our history, we have been a southern people. But now, we are two and three generations removed from the South.

And now, you have all this confusion about gender identity and sexual orientation identity, where women, black women, identify as female – gender – before they do, and gays identify as gay before black. And now, you have the census with all these different definitions. Are you “Hispanic White”? And now we have “new,” quote, black people here. You have black

people from Africa [30:00] and from the West Indies, uh, who don't have America's history behind them.

So, you know, I remember, you know, being in Harlem, being passed by black cab drivers, well, phenotypically black. Or you, or getting off the, uh, or flying to D.C., and you have African or Indian, uh, Ben – Ben – Bengals, that may or may not pick you up, because they want to take white people to Virginia to the suburbs. So, there's a great confusion about race in America today, um, which, of course, the evil people take advantage of. They used to divide you by color. Now, they divide you by gender and whatever.

JM: Yeah. Which was the church in Roxbury, your church?

WS: My church? Charles Street A.M.E.

JM: Charles Street A.M.E.?

WS: Um-hmm. Reverend Walter Cornelius Davis. [Laughs]

JM: Um, did you move into your early adulthood still feeling a close tie to the church, either spiritual or social?

WS: Not particularly, except in the service. You, uh, you become religious when you're being shot at. [Laughs] No, but I've never been – um, I mean, I enjoy the church experience. But like I approached it – actually, I mean, a good black preacher will just, you know, uh, when he starts rapping, or *she* – I've heard some very good female preachers – it's a whole different milieu. It's a whole different, yeah, experience. The, um, a good preacher will – I will respond, independent of whether I believe in the theology. But I will certainly respond to a good preacher, um-hmm.

JM: Yeah. Tell me about – you mentioned, too, the, uh, that one of the things that you felt in those years – I'm thinking now late '60s; you're moving back into Harvard – that you felt

and quite understandably felt a great deal of rage. Was NSM your principal sort of institutional mechanism for acting on that?

WS: I think I did keep in touch with the NAACP, but I was in Cambridge, so going back to Boston wasn't like being in Boston in high school. I think NSM, um, because you saw the situation of black people in different regions of the country, and, um, so that was educational. And while I was – our office was adjacent to Harlem, not quite in Harlem.

JM: This is when you moved down in '63?

WS: Yeah. And I worked with another great guy, whose story needs to be told, Jesse Gray, the Harlem rent strike leader. And that was another question. You see, and that introduced me to the whole question of, um, the history of black Communists, you know, and the, uh – how they had been – when they insisted that race trump class, how that was a non-starter for the party. And Jesse had been with another, Josh [Lawrence], had been in the Merchant Marines, so I got that history of struggle, you know, of black leftists.

And then, Jesse taught me something about organizing, because, um, he had an office like in East Harlem, like East 114th, East 115th [Street]. And then, when people wanted to, got fed up with being exploited by the landlords, and he, and he was known – he was written up in the papers – they would call the office, and then we would go over to their apartments. And he would give them, you know, tell them what they had to do, that you had to keep collecting the rent money and put it in the bank or somewhere, so that when [35:00] the strike was over, when they came to kick you out, you could pay the back rent.

Uh, but it was an very important lesson about how to organize, that the secret of organizing is convincing people to organize themselves, although they may not realize that's what's happening at the time. They're ready, and then you give them what needs to be done so

that they organize, actually, they organize themselves. So, that was a very important lesson. And Jesse was a great spirit.

JM: How old was he at that time, approximately?

WS: Oh, God! I guess he must – well, everybody seemed old back then. [Laughs] I guess he was probably – because he died young. I guess he was somewhere between forty and fifty.

JM: And you were mid-twenties, twenty-six, twenty-seven? Would he have been –?

WS: Let me see – if he was in the Merchant Marines, and then World War II, and then '68, yeah, he was probably mid-forties, probably mid-forties, yeah.

JM: Well, I wanted to ask, um, and this is maybe the connection. I wanted to ask – one of the very interesting things about NSM, as you've noted in things you've written, is that, um, after some early efforts, say, on tutoring black youths in communities, there was a more structural shift in the thinking and the critique. And organizing became, community organizing became a big focus, obviously. And under your – in your tenure as executive director predates, I think it's important to note, SNCC's later community work in some ways. Is that your sense?

WS: No. No, uh-uh, because SNCC influenced us.

JM: Okay.

WS: I don't – it would be difficult to draw the line of demarcation. People may have been doing community organizing even under Peter. But it became, after everybody began to understand the problem was much greater than tutoring kids, um, SNCC was a major influence on our thinking. And then, we had, you know, in Detroit, um, we had, you know, the – you had the union folk and you had the guys from Detroit who were organizing. Um, and although they weren't in NSM, per se, we were in touch with them. And so, they were a role model.

And there was a great guy whose history needs to be told named Kenny Cockrel. And Kenny was one of the organizers with a guy named General [G.] Baker of the Black Youth in Detroit, and he became a lawyer. And he was the only person I have met who almost could rap like Malcolm. He was a fantastic rapper. He became a lawyer and he had a few wonderful cases. He had a case with this black policewoman, who got into some altercation with a white officer in the police station garage, and he got her off. And then, there was another case of a black worker on the line, who also had another – he may even have killed the coworker, and Kenny got him off as well. And then, he ran for office. He was elected to the Detroit City Council and decided that that was, um, duplicitous to try and convince people that that City Council could make the changes that were necessary, so he resigned from the City Council. And then, unfortunately, he had a heart attack and he died in his early fifties.

JM: Umm, umm.

WS: But he was a – as we used to say, he was a bad motorcycle. [Laughter]

JM: In, uh, after you make the shift to New York in '63, and across '64, you're obviously, as you've mentioned, traveling to see NSM work in the cities where it's involved and, uh, you'll go to Mississippi, as well, in '64. But I want to ask you about how this [0:40:00] relocation to New York brought you back in contact with Malcolm and how that – how the arguments you were hearing him present, how you took them up and considered them in relationship to what you were observing, through NSM, through SNCC, through –

WS: Well, as I mention in that, in that critique, you know, I'm in high school, and we're watching Martin [Luther King Jr.], and Martin is saying things like, "If any blood is to be spilled, let it be ours." And we're saying, "Oh, no, no!" We said something a lot stronger than that, actually. [Laughs]

JM: [Laughs] You mean that was not an argument that persuaded you?

WS: No, no, we were not. We were not persuaded by that. But when I got to, uh, into New York, as I also say in the article, Malcolm was everywhere. He was always having these rallies on 125th Street. So was Michaux [Lewis H. Michaux, who operated the National Memorial Bookstore in Harlem]. There were these guys, uh, Eddie “Porkchop” Davis, they brought their ladders or whatever and they would be rapping, um, in front of the Hotel Theresa. And Malcolm, you know, would be walking. And then, I would go down to the restaurant. And as I said also, I had brought him – after we had reconnected at Harvard, I brought him up to Harvard a couple of times a week. As I also mentioned, I don’t know why – I assume because he knew Leslie [Edman, his cousin] – but he even visited me at my house before I left Boston. But he never tried to convert me. He never tried to convert me – because I wasn’t about to give up spareribs and, and chasing young girls. [Laughter] So, I couldn’t join the Nation [of Islam].

JM: Tell me about how you began to, um, think your way through the political critique, um, that Malcolm was advancing.

WS: Well, people don’t appreciate, as I also wrote in there, Malcolm, as I wrote in the piece, in the same way that Marx is the fundamental critic of capitalism, and [Frantz] Fanon is the fundamental critic of colonialism, to my mind, Malcolm is the fundamental critic of American racism. The, uh, and he would be critiquing.

And what people also don’t appreciate is Malcolm was as hard on black people as he was on white people. He would talk about, you know, “You don’t want to – you talk about you’re outnumbered. If The Man sends you to Korea to fight nine hundred million Chinese, you don’t say you’re outnumbered. You don’t say you’re outnumbered there.” He got you thinking about, um, how you’d been brainwashed. And then, he would say – when he was critiquing Martin, he

would talk about the sit-ins, and he would say, “Well, who sits?” You know, “Cripples sit, old ladies –” well, he didn’t say cripples. “Disabled people sit, old women sit, babies sit! We don’t need to sit! We need to stand up!”

So, you know, he was, uh, he had a way – as I also said in a *Village Voice* piece, if you wanted to know what was going on in world events, um, or national events, all you did was walk on down to 125th Street and tune in on the X, because he was a prodigious reader. Um, I think I did mention – I may or may not have mentioned it in *Make It Plain* [Strickland’s 1994 book on Malcolm X], but I caught him once reading William [F.] Buckley’s *Saturday Review* and I asked him –

JM: *National Review*.

WS: *National Review*, yeah. That’s right. *Saturday Review* was Andrea Cousins. Norman Cousins and Andrea Cousins worked for NSM. In fact, she lives – she works right down – she’s a lay therapist down in Northampton.

Um, but I asked him why was he reading *National Review*? And he said, “Because you never can tell where you’ll come across a good idea.” And he had prodigious work habits and read every – several papers a day and magazines, always reading. Um, and his critique – I mean, to answer your question, I agreed with his critique of the, you know, of the Movement and the duplicity of the government.

I mean, we have him in *Eyes on the Prize* [PBS miniseries on the Civil Rights Movement] because the first rebellion in this country is in Birmingham in May of ’63, when there’s an attempt to whack Martin. They blow up, [45:00] they bomb the A.G. Gaston Motel [in Birmingham, Alabama] where he was staying. They also bombed A.D. King, his brother’s

house [brother of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.]. And it was then that the masses, the black masses of Birmingham erupted.

And Malcolm makes this point: that when [Eugene] “Bull” Connor was using fire hoses and whatever, Kennedy said he couldn’t intervene. But as soon as the black people erupted, he – they nationalized the Guard or – yeah. And Malcolm, we have this famous scene – well, it’s famous to me – in the, in the *Eyes* episode, “The Time Has Come,” when Malcolm says, “And there was no new law.” Um, so – yeah, and then, that’s – the SNCC – yeah. You had the March on Washington, Medgar Evers had just been assassinated, and SNCC workers in Georgia had been arrested, um –

JM: Capital charge of sedition, yeah.

WS: Um-hmm, for picketing outside the business, as I recall, of a juror. Yeah, and they invoked some nineteenth century law to arrest the SNCC’ers. And the FBI just stands around and takes notes, but does nothing. And then, in ’64, after [Michael] Schwerner, [James] Chaney, and [Andrew] Goodman are killed, [FBI Director J. Edgar] Hoover says that they’re not, you know, that they can’t protect civil rights workers. They could COINTELPRO us, but they couldn’t protect us.

And that’s where Worth, Worth’s statement comes from down the, a little later down the road. I mean, Black Power doesn’t drop from the sky. Stokely was jailed a zillion damn times. People get tired. As Mrs. [Fannie Lou] Hamer says, “People get tired of being sick and tired,” and relying on a government that does nothing for you and collaborates with these southern racists whom you were, whom we were confronting. Yeah.

JB: Let’s take a short –

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JM: We're back up. Yeah. Let me ask you, Bill, to talk a little bit – let's spend a little bit of time talking – you teach it, obviously, and have taught it in depth and thought so much about this. Let's talk a little bit more about, uh, Malcolm's critique of racism, its role and function in this society.

WS: Well, one of the things Malcolm used to say is that "history was the most rewarding of all subjects to study." And I remember being in the mosque, and he was quoting from a book called *Antislavery* [*Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America* (1961)] by Dwight Lowell Dumond, which is, of course, now out of print, and Malcolm was talking about the slave power. Um, see, but history is all about how do you contextualize it.

What would you think [laughs] – suppose you were E.T. coming down from space, and you're trying to understand – you've read about the glories of America. And then, someone was asking about the greatest presidents. And, invariably, in that lineup is Abraham Lincoln. So, then E.T. asks you, "Well, what president was he?" And you say, if you've done your homework, "He was the sixteenth president."

Now, what is your image of America if you are taught that, of the fifteen presidents before Abe, ten were slave owners? How does that square with the image of democracy? Or, again, in relationship to the government's treaties with the Indians, "Well, we understand that they broke the treaties." But how many treaties did they break? They broke all four hundred. So, where is the morality in which the society garbs itself? Where is it? The, um – and that's what Malcolm would do. Malcolm would just throw the history, throw the history at you, and make you rethink what you had been taught.

On one level, I mean, [50:00] all societies like to think well of themselves. That's not unusual. That's not unusual in itself; in fact, it's *de rigueur*. But America is very pompous

about it. And we've just seen it with Troy Anthony Davis. The whole world, the whole world, at embassies all around the world, there were protests. And I asked my students to try to get them to understand how they're being brainwashed, I said, "Did you watch the Arab Spring?" And they said – "Do you watch what's happening in Tunisia?" "Yes." "Do you watch what's happening in Egypt?" "Yes."

"So, let me ask you something. Now that we've established the fact that the American media can bring you onsite coverage from the Middle East, when's the last time you saw onsite coverage from Iraq or Afghanistan?" And the answer is – "Or from the West Bank or Gaza or Tel Aviv?" The answer is "Never." Never! Um, so you're being – [laughs]. And I ask them also if they have a language to read foreign newspapers, just to see how the – what stories are covered and how they're covered abroad, and what stories are covered or not covered, uh, and how they're covered here in America.

The, uh – because Americans are the most deceived, except, you know, for the people who want to be deceived. The, uh – but it's easier to maintain control over people if you take away their critical thinking. Um, and, unfortunately, that seems to be – mental retardation seems to be sweeping the country. [Clears throat] And I just wrote a quick piece. My friends were calling me about – they had been following these Republican [presidential] debates [of late summer and fall 2011] and they called and said, "What is happening in America? How can these people be potential presidents of your country?" The outside world doesn't understand what's going on. But America has lost, [clears throat] has lost its credibility in the world.

Well, it had lost it before under [former President George W.] Bush – there was no place in the world Bush could go where there were not protests against him, also not covered by the media. When he went, during his first term, when he went to London, he couldn't ride in a – he

had to take a helicopter to Windsor Palace [Buckingham Palace]. And the Lord Mayor [Mayor of London Kenneth Livingstone] – there were fifteen thousand security, and it cost every citizen of London two pounds to pay for his security – and the Lord Mayor said Bush was the most unwelcome visitor since William of Orange, and they would have preferred to s – to give five pounds and have him not come than spend two pounds for his security when he did come. But none of this, none of this unpleasantness is shared with the American people, so we live in a media cocoon, um, which is proving increasingly disastrous.

JM: I'm sure we'll come back to the media question when we talk about, um, the effort to develop, um, Black Studies curricula. Um, but let me ask you – holding that point for now, let me ask you about, uh, about, uh, your experience trying to help with an effort fundamentally to restructure the politics of Mississippi, and through that effort national politics of race, around MFDP [Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party], because you would go down to Mississippi in '64.

WS: Um-hmm. Well, this is – you know, the government was trying to, um, derail student protests. And there were two, and there were two opinions in SNCC. A lot of people were committed to sit-ins and protests. But the government talked about the power of the vote. And the, uh, so Bob [Moses] goes down to Mississippi, and they had organized the Freedom – because the, you know, the Mississippi, um, politicians had maintained black people were happy and content and weren't interested in voting, so they organized a Freedom Vote in '63, and sixty-three thousand people voted.

And that, [laughs] [55:00] that was also to acquaint them, as later Stokely, and, did in Lowndes County [Alabama], to acquaint them with the procedures. The, um, and out of those procedures, [clears throat] they decided to form a political party and to challenge three of the

white congressmen. And so, they nominated Mrs. [Fannie Lou] Hamer and Mrs. Victoria Gray and Mrs. Annie Devine.

And, uh, the lawyers went and gathered evidence as to the extensive nature of voter suppression in Mississippi. And then, that was a little *contretemps* for the Movement, because SNCC was working and the MFDP were working with the National Lawyers Guild on that one, and they were too leftist for, uh – of course, they got red-baited – um, too leftist for Allard Lowenstein and the NAACP. But I worked all the time with, uh, Bill Kuntsler and Arthur Kinard.

So, when I came – I came back to organize, to help organize the congressional support for the challenge. And the guy who was really most instrumental who has also not gotten the recognition that he deserved was William Fitts Ryan from New York. When the Congress reconvened in January, it is he who put forth the resolution, because Congress makes its own laws. And, [laughs] therefore, the three white congressmen had to step aside while the resolution was being debated. And when he raised it, then fifty or sixty other congressmen rose up to support him. Uh, and then when the vote was eventually taken, the MFDP got, if I remember correctly, a hundred and forty-nine (149) votes, which was not enough, because you had to have a majority of the four-thirty-five (435). But at least temporarily, um, we had demonstrated just how crooked the system is.

JM: Um, coming out of, uh, Atlantic City and then the January challenge, um, at that point, would those experiences have altered your and reshaped your basic perspective, or just confirmed it?

WS: I'm trying to – I wasn't in Atlantic City. I was somewhere else for some – was I back in Mississippi? I wasn't in Atlantic City. No, because they had left – come up in the buses. You'd better turn this off. I think I was –

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're rolling.

JM: Bill, I was going to – we're back after a short break just to get a drink for a moment. Um, I was going to ask [JB coughs] your perspective on that question before we stopped. Um, did the MFDP experiences alter, adjust or largely confirm your perspective at the time?

WS: You know, I was thinking about that. My strongest memory – not memory – the strongest impact the MFDP did for me was not quite about politics per se. It was sitting in Mrs. Hamer's room and understanding that, with all of my education, that there were people like Mrs. Hamer who could see the world with a clarity that was infinitely superior to mine, that they had a wholesomeness – [car horn sounds outside] see, you're going to make me cry again.

JB: That's okay!

WS: [Clears throat] Um, that, you know, if you weren't in touch with it, that you didn't, you know, you just didn't realize that it existed. Um, and it was different, like Malcolm was somebody that you could – there are two people that I would have, you know, followed anywhere. Malcolm was one, and the other was my second mother, Katherine Dunham. Um, but it humbled you to realize that all this book learning and whatever was secondary to a particular kind of acuity about what makes the world go round and what is important in the world and what's important in life. [1:00:00]

Uh, so I think that's the strongest impact, getting to know, you know, you know, people like – I mean, Bob was in Mississippi before I got there, and with Amzie Moore. And they tell

me that he was taking people down to register, and he got beaten up, you know, severely, and went back and took off his t-shirt and washed it, and then put it back on and went back down to the courthouse. But he said he was washing the shirt because he didn't want the blood to scare the people. Uh, I mean, there is a heroism that defies description.

So, those are the things that, um, but Mississippi – we used to call Mississippi “The State,” when you're going in. And then, that's actually one of the reasons I went ahead and got married, because if – I wanted something out of life in case I got killed. I wanted to partake of life. I mean, she was a cool woman. [Laughs] She was super cool. But I, you know, I had been a bachelor for a long time, but I just was trying – it was kind of like preparing your will, you know.

JM: What year did you get married?

WS: '60 – I think it was '65.

JM: Somebody you knew from the Mississippi context?

WS: No, no.

JM: No?

WS: No, I –

JM: But you'd come out of that by then?

WS: No.

JM: I mean, you'd had that experience by then?

WS: Yeah, yeah.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Did you –?

WS: And I went back, too. After the, after January, I went back to The State for a while.

JM: I'm sorry. You went back after the –?

WS: After January, I went back for a while. Uh, no, I married this very attractive young woman whom I met in New York. Turn it off.

JB: Okay.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're back.

JM: We're back after a short break. Um, February 21, 1965.

WS: We were in a – NSM was having a meeting in upstate New York, and all of our project directors and people were there when we heard that Malcolm had been killed. Um, I was – first it was unbelievable. Then you get pissed out of your mind. [Laughs] The, uh – but he was an – you know, every once in a while, history will produce someone. In this *Village Voice* piece I wrote on the twentieth anniversary of Malcolm's assassination, I was saying that Martin kind of embodied the personality of the South, but Malcolm embodied the personality of the Urban North black person. So, they didn't just kill a man; they killed a prototype.

Um, so we all just – we came on back to the city, you know, to find out what had happened and, you know, whatever. And then, that day, you know – well, later, for the funeral, yeah, I was just thinking, "Now, suppose Roy Wilkins had died. Would these zillions of people, you know, be trying to go to his funeral?" I didn't have anything against Roy Wilkins. It was just – had different – it was just a different kind of image. So, that was it, an irreplaceable loss.

[Pause]

JM: What were, um, what were your choices in front of you at that point, with NSM and graduate school and all? And how did you move forward from early '65?

WS: I was just thinking about that. I got married, went back to school. Um, I was still doing, riding back and forth to New York. I had a job at Columbia for a while with, uh, Gizmo's father. [1:05:00]

JM: I'm sorry?

WS: I'm trying to think of her – oh, that's right. Vincent [Harding] called me again, and I went down, because we put together this TV program called "Black Heritage," which was on CBS. And many of the people whom he had – Vincent and John Henrik Clark – um, in essence, it was, you know, the first representation of black studies, certainly on television. But CBS would put it on, you know, at five o'clock in the morning. You know, TV in those days would go off at one or whatever, and then it would come back on. I forgot what they used to call it when it used to come back on at five or six. And then, the very first thing on would be "Black Heritage."

And then, years later, some students were trying to track it down. And I don't remember whether it was CBS or whether it was later HBO, because HBO did the trial of James Earl Ray, and then denied that they had done it. Uh, so we did – and as I said, most of the people – the Boggses [James and Grace Boggs] and Lerone [Bennett Jr.] and the people who were involved in that "Black Heritage" series – Vincent, uh, invited to Atlanta after Martin was assassinated. And Coretta [King] asked him to, uh, to become director the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Center.

JM: Yeah. Um, when did, uh – I think I had a mistaken sense of when "Black Heritage" aired. It began airing –?

WS: I have no –

JM: Approximately?

WS: Somewhere between, I think, '65 or '66, maybe '67.

JM: Okay, I was thinking '67, '68.

WS: Yeah, somewhere – it might even have been '68.

JM: Okay.

WS: Somewhere, I think, in that three-year period.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Well, are there – I'm sure there are many, but are there especially interesting things that you would want to say about the shift of context now back to graduate school and, uh, you know, finding your academic life now engaging these same questions, but from that angle?

WS: Well, I had discovered another hero to study: Frantz Fanon and “La Guerre d’Algerie,” the Algerian War. The, uh, [loud traffic sounds outside] so, plunging myself into the FLN [Front de Libération Nationale of Algeria] and appreciating Fanon, so –

JM: So, you had discovered another hero. Was that, was Fanon someone you met, I mean, you came across –?

WS: No, well, Fanon emerged in the Movement, because many people who were opposed to Martin’s nonviolence would quote Fanon, because Fanon would talk about “[burying] colonialism within the bowels of the earth.” And so, many people who, uh, never read *Les Damnés de la Terre*, never read *The Wretched of the Earth*, and didn’t know squat about the Algerian War, but they would, they would just take, uh, an excerpt from Fanon and use it to, uh, contravene Martin’s notion of, of nonviolence.

So, then I decided to read the book. [Laughs] And then, and then, from there, I decided – you know, I went on to try and understand the whole, you know, the whole hi – because every other thing, all kinds of other things opened up – you know, the contributions of French Africans in World War II. In the liberation of Paris, the Allies insisted that the black troops not march.

They went and got anybody who didn't look black, Egyptians, whatever, other Europeans to march, you know, down the Champs-Élysées and the Arc de Triomphe. I mean, the racism was incredible.

Uh, and, you know, so that just opened up a whole different, broadened my perspective of what Malcolm was talking about and how rewarding a subject of study history, history is. But you begin to put things together. Because history is just – I tell my students history is just – it's not about dates. You understand the significance of dates in events when you understand the continuity, [1:10:00] how things are connected. Then you remember; it's not difficult. But just to remember dates abstractly doesn't mean anything to you. What is the flow of history? How do we get from A to B to C to D? Hmm? And once you begin to understand the flow, then things become remarkably clearer, and you may even remember them. [Laughs]

JM: How did the graduate faculty at Harvard respond to the work you were doing as a graduate student?

WS: Well, I was, um – studied with Erik Erikson and initially I was going to be a shrink, because I loved, I loved Freud. And they had told me – what was this class I was taking? Boring, Edwin Boring, it was a psychologist, interesting guy. But the, uh – we went to a mental hospital in Waltham, and there was a black guy there. And at the time we were studying this English guy, nondirective therapy, so when you're involved with a relationship, um, in that dyadic relationship, the two of you, you're never supposed to impose yourself. And so, you know, the typical technique is when they say something, you simply repeat it. So, he asked me, "Are you one, too?" And I said, "Am I one?" And it turned out he was a World War I vet, and racism had driven him crazy.

Um, and then, the field changed. The field went from psychoanalysis to drug therapy. And, uh, and then, when I discovered Fanon, I said, “Well, that’s the psychology I’m interested in!” [Laughs] “Liberation therapy, yeah, that’s what I’m interested in!” So, I made the switch from Freud to Fanon.

JM: Yeah.

WS: In fact, years ago, I brought Madame Fanon here to speak before she died. Actually, she’s alleged to have committed suicide, which I don’t understand, Josie Fanon. Have you ever been to Algiers?

JM: No.

WS: Paris?

JM: Yeah.

WS: J’aime Paris.

JM: Yeah. [Pause] Let’s talk about, um, the emergence after – well, actually, maybe stop and, uh, ask you about, um, the events of spring of ’68, and, uh, how they would in their course, in a year or so, lead to the notion of the IBW [Institute of the Black World].

WS: Yeah.

JM: And maybe this would be a good point, too, to talk about, um, you know, kind of your long view of Dr. King.

WS: Well, as I said, my initial view of Martin – I met Martin a couple of time in the course of the Movement, um, but he didn’t make any particular – and, of course, I had been at Selma, and when he turned us around, I –

JM: Oh, you were there?

WS: Yeah, I was in Selma for the third march, because there were three.

JM: Yeah.

WS: And, in fact, SCLC, uh – you know, the original march was supposed to be to carry Jimmy Lee Jackson’s body to Montgomery, but SCLC toned it, toned it down and made it a voting rights march. So, they called for us, and I came down with NSM people. But, in fact, you will not be able to recognize it, but we were captured in one of the, in the *Eyes* [*Eyes on the Prize*] episode “Bridge to Selma.” You see our bus pulling into Selma, and NSM people and I are getting off the bus.

But then, after he turned us around, and then we found out that a deal had been made, it did not enhance my view of Martin. It’s only later in Atlanta with Vincent [Harding], listening – because Vincent was in Albany [Georgia] with, uh, with Martin. And he lived across, and Vincent also lived across the street from [1:15:00] Gladys – Gladys Knight went to the church across the street from Vincent’s house, and Bernice [Johnson] Reagon lived on the first floor of, of Vincent’s house.

But when Vincent started – when we, you know, started researching, because our initial, um, project was to try and understand the Movement that had just ended. The – when he started talking about Martin and his relationship with Martin, the things Martin had done and the things that Martin had been subjected to, and then later, when I started teaching on Martin and Malcolm and read, um, [David] Garrow’s *Bearing the Cross*, I gained a greater admiration for Martin, because Martin was converging toward Malcolm. There’s a quote that I use in *Make It Plain* [Strickland’s 1994 book on Malcolm X] that he made six months before his assassination, where he says that everything that he has been doing so far has been in vain – the whole thing has to be done away with.

JM: And by “the whole thing,” he means the whole structure of the American political economy.

WS: Dabba-dabba-dabba-do! [Laughs] Um, so Martin – and this is – it’s the same disillusionment that leads to Black Power. It’s the same disillusionment that most of the Movement people, you know, went through, I mean, when they – Malcolm is attacked for being a hater and preaching violence. As I said, he was as hard on black people as he was on white people. But the critical question is not whether or not Malcolm was a hater. The critical question is: Why did tens of thousands, and thousands more, of black men and women be sympathetic to Elijah Muhammad’s description of the white man as the devil? That’s the question.

But America can’t face itself. It can’t face evil in its history. Everything it does is supposedly, you know – so, it talks about, again, to go back to the Lincoln example, “Oh, yes, it was – there was slavery here. It was a little blip. It’s a little blip, um, unfortunate blip in our history.” But in 1860, America was the greatest slave-holding country in the history of the world, you know, *of the world*. So, as I say, when you start re-contextualizing things, you draw much different conclusions.

So, I began to – after his death and principally through Vincent and through the research that we did at IBW and subsequent research on my “Malcolm and Martin” course, I began to gain much more respect for Martin. I mean, if you just look at him, one of the things that he and Malcolm had in common, they were *always* on the road. And, um, and Martin had this whole responsibility to raise money for SCLC. And then, the jealousy that he had to contend with. So, I began to appreciate him much more as a, as a, you know, a very, very significant, distinguished, important person.

JM: Um-hmm. Tell me about Vincent Harding.

WS: Vincent. I met Vincent at – we were at, I think, Miami [University] of Ohio for some kind of mini-conference. We were on a panel together when we first met. And then, we stayed in touch. And then, you know, when “Black Heritage,” uh, came up, he and John Clark asked me to participate in that.

JM: I’m sorry, who asked you?

WS: John Henrik Clark.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

WS: And Vincent.

JM: Yeah.

WS: So, I participated in that. And then, when he told, when he told me about the IBW, uh, and asked me to come join him in Atlanta, you know, I said, “Yes,” because the Movement, the formal Movement had died, and there were all of these – you had, um, all these different things going on, all these different ideologies. You had Pan-Africanism. Baraka [Amiri Baraka, previously Leroi Jones] had, Baraka was leading Pan-Africanism before he switched to Marxism. And everybody was changing their name [1:20:00], [laughs] which I thought was ridiculous.

In fact, there’s a very interesting debate between me and Stokely on this whole question of, um, of his All-African People’s Revolutionary Party. I said, “Tricky, we’ve got – this is our struggle here, uh, and go organize your mama.” [Laughs] You know, you have to, you have to – to mobilize people and to inspire them, you must talk to them, as Mao Tse-tung said, “You must talk to the people and,” as I’m paraphrasing, “in the language they understand.”

Um, so IBW had been – there was a concert in Howard to which Walter Rodney came. And we had – and Bobby Hill, who was the [Marcus] Garvey scholar at UCLA, Bobby and

Walter had been at Mona together, the University of the West Indies [founded 1948 as the University College of the West Indies, at Mona, Jamaica]. And then, they had – they had gone – they had been together in '68 at a black writers' conference, I think, in Toronto. And then, the Jamaican government, the JLP [Jamaican Labour Party], did not allow Walter to return.

So, Walter was, um – went to Tanzania and was teaching at the University of Dar es Salaam [Tanzania], um, but – probably something before that, because he did – he may have been in Guyana at some point. Because, anyway, he came up, yeah, '71 or '72, he came back – let's see, wouldn't he have gone – he had gotten a job to teach in Guyana, but they, Forbes Burnham [Guyanese leader] wouldn't let him. So, what we – um, Immanuel Wallerstein and James Turner and I had – yeah, this was later, then. We would get speaking engagements for him to, to help him raise money.

But Walter came to the – before that, Walter had come to the summer research symposium that we conducted in Atlanta. And we became great friends, so I went to Africa in '71 or '72 to visit him in Dar. And that was also another eye-opening experience, because you had, you know, Nyerere was being, like Nkrumah had been previously, was being idolized in the black world. And it's like they had been – these American black ex-pats who had gone to Ghana. You had these black ex-pats living in Tanzania. And I just found them very funny, actually, because they were living in this country, but they hadn't learned the language. Um, and then, when I got off the plane and ran into them, I just thought it was very revealing the questions they asked me, you know, "How are the Green Bay Packers doing?" um, et cetera.

Which was another important lesson I learned, which was reinforced after I went to Cuba. You may rail against this country, you may call it all kinds of names, but you have no idea how it has crept into your mind. What are you used to? You go in – it's dark in a room, and you turn

on the lights. Well, what happens when you're somewhere where there is no electricity? Or you're going to take a shower, and you shower in water being pumped from the sea? Or there are no – well, going to visit my grandparents in Georgia, I was used to outhouses, so that wasn't [laughs]. But still, you gain more appreciation of the extent to which – you may have disagreements with a particular society, but how it has affected you in ways that are beyond your ken, um, and that you then have to come to terms with. You then have to come to terms with the degree to which you have been socialized by the forces [1:25:00] that you are railing against. So, uh, that was an important lesson for me in, uh, in Dar.

JM: Yeah. Tell me about the, uh, tell me about the mood and the project of IBW. It was a – it's an ambitious mission statement that emerges.

WS: Um-hmm. Well, it was the black studies thing, so we had a major conference and we brought in the people who were, uh, initiating black studies. As I should have mentioned, in terms of the MFDP, the person who was organizing, um, out of Washington, was Mike Thelwell, who was here, just retired from here. The "wayward Jamaican." [Laughs] The, the, um – but initially, as I said – well, there was a, there was a little tension, because the advisors of the King Center wanted it to simply be, you know, "Hallelujah Martin!" Um, and they almost wanted us to take an oath of, of nonviolence, and we said, "No. Later, baby. We ain't doing that stuff." [Laughs]

So, then we split and became inde – and became independent. And we had newsletters and we were commenting on current events. We had students that we were teaching, um, some of whom had been kicked out for protesting, out of Morehouse [College] and elsewhere. And then, we had a relationship with Wesleyan [University], so we had students from Wesleyan, who came down to our summer research, who came down to study with us. In fact, you're working

with one, James Early. Early was one of my students, whom just I have disowned subsequently. [Laughs] No, that's not true. We stay – he calls me "Papa," [laughter] because we also have a mutual, uh, tie to Cuba.

JM: Um-hmm.

WS: Yeah. Um, but then, we – you know, we got – I'm sure – the office was broken into several times. I'm sure we were COINTELPRO'd.

JM: Yeah.

WS: And, uh, and then, of course, the powers that be, after we separated from – as I said in the piece, after we lost our "Martin benediction," it was much more difficult to get foundation money. So, we had to decide to try and be as independent as we could.

JM: Yeah.

WS: So, some of us who had degrees, uh – Vincent left and went, went to his Quaker – because Vincent is a Mennonite. Um, I guess that's one of the ties between him and – religion is a tie between him and Martin.

JM: Yeah.

WS: So, he went to Pendle Hill. Chester Davis, who had taught at Sir George Williams [University, later Concordia University] in Canada, and who was our education person, he came here. And here, at the time, at UMass, [Mike] Thelwell was here, whom I knew from SNCC, and Ivanhoe [Donaldson], whom I knew from SNCC, and there was a guy whom I didn't know, Cherif Guelall, who was with the FLN [Front de Libération Nationale of Algeria], and he used to teach the Fanon course. So, Ivanhoe and Guelall – I hope I'm pronouncing his name – when they left, they asked me to come, uh, and take their places. And so, that's what I did. And in those days, it was no big thing, because you could fly from New York to Atlanta for ninety

bucks. So, we all computed back and – commuted back and – did I say computed? – commuted back and forth for many years.

And then, um, Howard Dodson, who had been one of our – had come in with Andrew Billingsley from California and George [Napper] – what is George? George became Police Commissioner of Atlanta [named Chief of Police in 1978 by Mayor Maynard Jackson], um, but he had been a student of Billingsley's. Howard then became director of IBW. And then, after Howard, we had two, Jan Douglass and Pat Daly, ess – essentially, who ran IBW. So, IBW lasted till 1983.

JM: Yeah. I've read that, uh – well, and we talked about this before we started today. There's a new book about IBW by, um, Derrick White. And in a piece that he did last year – I still haven't seen the book yet, but in a piece that he wrote a year ago kind of on IBW in *Journal of African American History or Studies*, I think, um, he said that he described you in kind of the tally of the faculty and staff who emerged at the early IBW, that, that you were a disciple of Malcolm and a black – and a political nationalist [1:30:00] in that context. And, uh, I wonder if that is, is the way that you would have made the description and, whatever your answer to that is, how you would have described your kind of political philosophy and perspective.

WS: Well, I never, um, thought about how to describe myself politically, actually. I think Manning Marable wrote a piece once, in which he described James Turner and me as left nationalists.

JM: Um-hmm.

WS: Um, but if I were to pick one, I would say, you know, if I'm anything, I'm a Malcolmite. Malcolm is the fundamental guiding political influence of – in my life, yeah.

JM: Yeah.

WS: I have to see. As I say, I just got Derrick's book. I have to see how, uh, he tells the story. Although I read his dissertation, and what I read seemed to me of the treatments so far I think he's done the best job.

JM: Yeah.

WS: But it's hard to describe. I mean, IBW was the first and the only independent black think tank in this country's history.

JM: Yeah.

WS: The, um – and trying to – I mean, there's – one of the most important elements of struggle is who defines. I mean, there's an African fable, they tell me, that one day the little elephant comes home from school and asks his mother, he says, "Mother, in school the lions say they're the king of the jungle, and I thought we were the king of the jungle." And his mother tells him, "Well, they will always teach that in your school until we run the school." So, there's a dialectic there.

And the history – Negro history begins first trying to excavate, you know, black people's contributions to the land to try and advance the case, "Please treat us as equals." But then, uh, Black Studies comes along. When you begin to dig up the suppressed lacunae, you begin to get a whole different history of America. And then, you begin to get, uh, when – you know, when people talk about Malcolm as a critique, you have to put – in my judgment, you have to put Malcolm with Jimmy Baldwin, uh, because *The Fire Next Time* – Jimmy lays America down on the couch [laughs] and analyzes it, uh, and he analyzes the psychology of racism.

Black people, you know, uh – he says, "Suppose you have a bucket, and when black people are the bucket, and then America stands on this bucket. And when you pull the bucket out from under their feet, they go topsy-turvy. So, you must keep this hierarchy. It's

fundamental to the maintenance of America's identity. So, Jimmy must – in my judgment, you know, along with Malcolm, is the two sharpest, you know, critics of the contradictions of American society in their time period.

JM: Yeah. Did you, uh –?

JB: Joe, let me stop.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're back. [Coughs]

JM: We've certainly touched on it, and are right now, but I still feel in some way that we haven't quite, um, done what we might. And I think it'd be very valuable in this series to have you say a little bit more about the full nature of the critique, as you're hinting – well, not hinting – but, you know, describing it in some reform. Are there more things that you would like to say?

WS: Well, what you – to go back to your earlier point, I mean, Vincent was a tremendous influence. I mean, Vincent does, um, he does *There Is a River* [*There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*], that history up through the Civil War, giving his – it's a – “there is a river that the streams of which make glad the people of God” [Psalm 46]. And then, we had a – we thought we had a contract with a D.C. television station, WETA, alright, to do something like “Black Heritage.” And so [1:35:00] we put together a history – because it was supposed to be, yes, it was supposed to be for, uh, the Centennial, 1976, I think. Um, but then, the station got bought or some – anyway. Oh, no, *Roots* [major TV miniseries in the 1970s] came, and they said, “Well, one black thing is enough.” So, they had – so *Roots* took our, um, was the black, um, historical television story for the year.

So, Vincent took what we had done, and he published it as *The Other American Revolution*. And then, later he's done a book, *Hope and History* [*Hope and History: Why We*

Must Share the Story of the Movement], how to teach the history of the Movement, you know, to high school young people. And then, he's done *Martin: The Inconvenient Hero* [*Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero*], because, as I again tell the students, "What do you –" all they know about Martin is the March on Washington and "I Have a Dream." But the next five years of Martin's life go down [George] Orwell's memory hole. And that's what Vincent does. Vincent explains the whole history of Martin, and especially those last five years, Martin's development and his evolution.

So, Vincent was a tremendous influence, on me, at least, and I think on everybody. He and Lerone [Bennett Jr.] helped me think about how to write better. And, as I also said, he has the gift of communication. As I said earlier, you know, your mother could be dead, and by the time Vincent explained it to you, you'd say, "Oh, Ma's gone." [Laughs] The mellifluous one, I call him. [Laughter] He just turned eighty. Yeah, but he's still out here, he and Grace Boggs, who's ninety-five, going around the country trying to form alliances between seniors and young people, in addition to the oral history project at Iliff [Iliff School of Theology in Denver, where Vincent Harding teaches] that he's been directing for the last decade, decade and a half, probably.

JM: We haven't, um, we haven't done but bump up against it, but I'd be real interested to have you reflect about COINTELPRO and the whole effort by the state to smash domestic dissent.

WS: Well, we always said The Man was everywhere. Um, but, you know, we thought FBI, CIA – we didn't know – after Malcolm, we found out the MI-5 [British spy agency] and the Sûreté [French National Police, who were later known as Sûreté Nationale] and the Mossad

[Israeli Secret Police] and everybody was tracking Malcolm, um, and Martin, too, and the State Department, everybody. Malcolm seemed too much of a danger to too many people.

So, you'd always assume – I mean, your experience was you had seen the FBI doing nothing and/or virtually colluding with the forces of evil, so you had no – and Hoover, you know – you had no respect for them. And then, you have the other question. Not just COINTELPRO. You have the question of the behavior of the police. The police are the military arm of the racist state. And every rebellion – when we began talking about '63 – every rebellion in this country, with the exception of May '63 in Birmingham and the zillion that occurred – I think two hundred after Martin's assassination – every rebellion, not a race riot – every *rebellion* was in response to some police active racism, either actual or, or perceived. People thought they had done something, and so they blow up, um.

JM: Because of the context, obviously, history and the context.

WS: So, you ha – and that's why this whole history of urban rebellions – because race riots, it has the connotation like of two forces and also mindlessness, you know, "rioting," there's no reason, there's no political reason, there's no justification. People are just rioting. But I happen to have been in – I was in Harlem in '64 and I was in Detroit in '67, and the rebellions in Detroit were quite purposeful. The Lebanese, who call themselves Chaldeans, [1:40:00] were exploiting – they purposefully, uh – their stores were targeted, and not only were they targeted, requests were made. People were, "Do you want a TV? Do you want a –?" They would provide people – people put in their order. [Laughs] They would get whatever the merchandise was. And then, after they had satisfied all of the community demands, then they would, you know, crack, crack the, crack the store.

But I also was – the Newark Black Power Conference [July 1967], which was held after Newark, well, once again, the residents were – targeted particular stores. But then, the National Guard came in and perceived what was going on, and so they smashed everything to convey this notion of mindlessness. And the same thing in Detroit – the media would report, “Why are they burning down their homes?” Well, people were not burning down their homes! It’s because the wind – the fire department would not come down into the area, and the wind blew the damn flames over there.

But this necessity – because if rebellion is legitimate then America is illegitimate – and so, therefore, you must always define the behavior as illegitimate. So, those were the kinds of things that IBW -- and looking at what was going on, how America interprets events, that crystallize your concept of an analysis of the nation.

JM: Yeah. Let’s pause for just a second.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

WS: As they say –

JB: We’re rocking and rolling.

JM: We’re back on after a little break.

WS: Certainement [i.e., certainly]. [Laughter]

JM: Um, Bill, let me ask about, um, the project that culminated, I think, ’94, with the publication of *Make It Plain*, the book on Malcolm. And I’m interested in your reflections on – that, of course, was a companion to a documentary that was televised – and, um, I’m interested in your perspective on interpreting Malcolm in that kind of context, uh, for what will be a national popular audience, in some ways.

WS: Well, *Make It Plain* arises out of, um, an *Eyes on the Prize* episode. The episode was called “The Time Has Come,” and it was a half hour. It was one, and then it goes on to Stokely and the Meredith, Meredith March. But, um, Blackside [Inc.], Henry Hampton’s organization, who must be given great credit, because he got *Eyes on the Prize* funded during the Reagan era. But that episode got more response than any other episode in the *Eyes* series. And so, Blackside then entered into a, um, relationship with PBS to do *Make It Plain*. And since I had been a consultant for the *Eyes* episode, they asked me to consult on the – and, in essence, to be immodest, they asked me to be chief consultant. Um, and so, I did. I agreed to do that.

And then, they asked – they wanted a companion book and they asked a much more well known writer than I. And he presented a proposal, and I saw it and thought it was lacking. And so, I critiqued it and suggested how the book, the introduction of the book, should go. And they said, “Well, write it.” [Laughs] And I said, “Okay,” because at the time, you know, there was this great hullabaloo around Malcolm. The rap people, Public Enemy, was talking, every – *Autobiography* [*Autobiography of Malcolm X*] was in every bookstore. And I thought that people really didn’t appreciate – I wanted to try and describe why, as objectively as I could, why I thought Malcolm was a great man. And that’s how I tried to write *Make It Plain*. [1:45:00]

JB: Was that – I’ll just pause for a sec.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We’re on.

JM: We’re back after a short break. Um, let’s take just a minute here and, um, since we’ve just talked about *Make It Plain*, and, um, you obviously are, right now, are just publishing a piece on – in response to the new Manning Marable Malcolm X biography. And, in brief, can you summarize the critique of Marable’s book that you present there?

WS: Well, essentially the critique is that the book is full of historical omissions and historical gaffs and unverified speculation.

JM: Yeah, and the reinvention trope.

WS: Well, reinvention – reinvention places the agency in the hands of the interpreter. And what I, [laughs] and what I attempted to show in the article is that that methodology could be applied to anyone, uh, and could applied nefariously, if one was so inclined. Um, but, I mean, my, my – the tr – the trashing of everyone that Manning does, Betty Shabazz and Alex Haley, in addition to Malcolm, and the self-righteousness with which he puts himself forward as someone now who is going to give the world the real story, and there is, in fact, hardly – *nothing* that's really new. The assassins were identified in 1992 and '93, in fact, earlier. When Talmadge Hayer, with Bill Kuntzler, was fighting for a new trial, he identified the other four people, and that information was written, published in Zak Kondo's book *Conspiracys* [sic] [Dr. Baba Zak A. Kondo, *Conspiracys: Unraveling the Assassination of Malcolm X* (1993)] and was also published – most of it was published in Karl Evanzz's book, um, book, *The Judas Factor: Who Killed Malcolm X?* [*The Judas Factor: The Plot to Kill Malcolm X* (1992)]. And there's lots of attribution. Um, there are lots of borrowings from other people in Manning's book that are not attributed. He borrows heavily from Evanzz, Evanzz's book on *The Messenger* [*The Messenger: The Rise and Fall of Elijah Muhammad*, (2001)]. He borrows heavily from *Make It Plain*. It is truly unfortunate he is not here to explain himself.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Let me shift back to something that we wanted to cover and, uh, skipped over, the not small question of SDS [Students for a Democratic Society], and –

WS: Yeah, I had – the SDS had, you know, good relations with the original NSM, and I met them. We had a joint conference in Ann Arbor [Michigan] at some point in '63 – I think

later '63 in Ann Arbor. And then, SDS went into community organizing, as well. Junius [Williams] was in Newark. And we said, "What are you guys doing, trying to copy our shit?" [Laughs] And then, they did ERAP [Economic Research and Action Plan], too. I mean, they tried – Stanley Aronowitz was one of their major ideologues. They were trying to organize on an economic basis, and then they were trying to do community organizing, the most famous of which, you know was in Newark.

But we came to a little parting of the ways, because the first racial division of labor in the Movement, as far as I can tell, was what we did in NSM, years before SNCC. In fact, there's a famous – not famous but famous to me – uh, when SDS people and Courtland [Cox] of SNCC were telling me that what NSM had done was not appropriate, because we were all supposed to be one big happy family. But what I had discovered going up to Harlem one day, one evening, that, uh, the white girls were there with the dudes. [1:50:00] And they were sitting down on, um, these mattresses in the basement like at 157th Street and they were drinking wine and singing Wobbly songs [resistance songs of the International Workers of the World, who were know as Wobblies]. And then, they would take them down to, to Peter Bittenwieser's house. You look up Bittenwieser. He was a major force in terms of America's involvement in Vietnam. He also was a zillionaire. But they were exposing them to a life they could never have. They were exposing – and then you couldn't do anything with them after that.

So, what we did, NSM remained interracial. I just said, "No more white girls organizing in the ghetto." So, we still had white males working. Frank Joyce was the director of the Detroit project. Sam Lincoln and folk worked with me, and others. There was still interracial presence in NSM. I just said, "No more white girls in the ghetto," and that was in '64, I think. Um, and then, SNCC had an Atlanta – then, you know, the, um –

It's a whole – it's a problem about consciousness. Why do white people come, I mean, to join the struggle? And what's their idea of struggle? The – many of them remain American nationalists at heart. And they want to, you know, end poverty. They want to end, end the symptoms. And then, some – you know, uh, for example, when I was in Mississippi, we were going to register, taking people to register to vote. And this white girl wanted to hold my hand, you know, as a demonstration of, you know, of, you know, “we shall overcome,” or “togetherness,” or “we're going to defeat these crackers.” I said – I can't tell you what I said. [Laughs] But what I ended up saying is, “Are you crazy?” Because white people don't understand what other white people are capable of. So, she was going to hold my hand as a symbol of “we're going to defeat these people,” not realizing she could get us both killed.

So, it's that how do you people become acquainted with the J. Edgar Hoovers of the world and the Klan of the world? They just have no idea about what this country, what some Americans are capable of. And I said – so I just said, “No more white girls in the ghetto.” And, uh, in fact, I wrote a – it's in Charlie Cobb's book [Charles E. Cobb Jr., *On the Road to Freedom: A Guided Tour of the Civil Rights Trail* (2008)], um, because I've been pilloried, “Racist dog!” [Laughs]

And one time I said, “No, no, this is – this was the reality of –,” you know, let us suppose – what was it – this whole notion of “we must love one another.” And I said, “It's the Cold War, and we are facing potential – the destruction of humankind. And we are against nuclear weapons, so we are marching against the bomb. Are you asking the person who is marching with you against the bomb to love you? Is it necessary? Why must they love you? You see? Why must we bend down and kiss your foot because you've come to help us in our struggle? Okay?”

Um, so you had to separate the wheat from the chaff, in terms of white, of white supporters, who was real. People who may have meant well, but they didn't – or as [James] Bevel once said, you know, "We had high hopes, but we didn't know what we were up against."

JM: Yeah. Harding's made that point, too, I guess.

WS: No, Vincent's a Mennonite. He loves everybody. [Laughs]

JM: Let me ask a final thought from my end. Um, [clears throat] how did you read the [President Barack] Obama election?

WS: I thought it was [1:55:00] a potential turning point for America. Um, I didn't get ecstatic about it, because the same percentage of white people who voted for [Senator John] McCain had voted for Bush in 2004. And the only reason Obama won is black people turned out in Virginia and I think, and Florida and North Carolina, ninety-eight or ninety-nine percent, so he could win the elect – elector – electoral vote. But it did appear – I mean, friends of mine in Spain and in Europe, everybody thought this – because, remember, he appeared to be the quintessential anti-Bush, and the world hated Bush. Um, Donald Duck maybe could have won [laughs] had he run. So, it seemed like maybe it was a chance. And then, now, in his campaign, the things he was saying, it looked like the possibility of real change.

JM: Yeah. Let me bring back to a final thought and, uh, you mentioned – you talked earlier about media and the construction of culture and the construction of what passes as history and consciousness and all. And, um, I'm just interested a little bit in – if you would talk a little bit about your perspective on what you regard as really well considered, a really well considered Black Studies curriculum.

WS: Well, it's, what I think now is not what I thought before, precisely because of the changes that have occurred. The, um, Black Studies, per se, to paraphrase Stokely, is necessary

but it is no longer sufficient. We are on a – we are all on a ship called America. And if the ship goes down, whether we are first class or working with the captain or in steerage, we all go down together. And America is going on its way to hell. We are the greatest debtor nation in the history of the world. The, uh, the people who are supposed – Obama, et al – who are supposed to confront the problem cannot confront the problem, because they won't admit what the real problem is.

You pay more taxes than General Electric and Bank of America. Corporations pay six-point-six percent (6.6%) of the federal budget. The masses, out of income tax and payroll taxes, contribute eighty-four percent (84%). And now, they're laying off the public sector, so the revenues will de – will decrease. We have a fifteen trillion dollar (\$15,000,000,000,000) debt. We pay a trillion dollars (\$1,000,000,000,000) on *interest* on the debt, which is never discussed. So, what do they do, all this discussion yesterday and today about [U.S. Treasury Secretary Tim] Geithner and the G-20? All the Fed is like a monopoly game: print money, print money, print money, print money! But it cannot last. And so what do you – the people who understand that it cannot last – what happens when the dollar is no longer the international reserve currency? What happens? This cannot last.

And the jobs are not coming back. The, the three million jobs are not coming back when you subsidize corporations to export jobs. The system is so corrupt. You have a little group called ALEC [American Legislative Exchange Council created and funded by far right conservative donors to draft and disseminate model legislation to conservative allies in state legislatures] that meets with the corporations and politicians – they've written eight hundred laws. There's nobody in Congress writing laws for the public interest.

The, and so, when you ask about Black Studies, we are now in a different era, because America was built upon the exploitation of – the confiscation of Indian land and the exploitation of black labor until the industrial society, so immigrants, white immigrants, could come, and they could get these jobs. But now, [phone rings] they exploit you, too!

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're back.

JM: We're coming back on.

WS: Yeah. So, I mean, this is the problem: There's no real discussion of the real problems, and therefore, there's no real solutions are being put forward. Just print more money, [2:00:00] or, because the same people, uh, have the same perspective globally as here in America, the only solution they have is so-called austerity. That means "screw the public sector." That cannot work. So, we have, you know, white family income – black people are disposable. We are now irrelevant. And increasingly larger numbers of white people are now economically irrelevant.

And they don't care about education. The – Reagan's, when Reagan came into office, they wanted to get rid of the Department of Education. All they care about is privatizing education, as they privatized prisons, as they want to privatize Social Security, as they want to privatize everything. Bush privatized twenty-five percent (25%) of the IRS, which people don't know. I had a grad student, and they audited her. She made twenty-two thousand dollars. They audited her. They don't audit – as [Warren] Buffett said, "They don't audit Buffett." And they didn't audit – we now find out the SEC destroyed nine thousand documents of investigation, and we now find out that the General Counsel of the SEC [Securities and Exchange Commission]

had two million dollars invested in Madoff [Bernard Madoff, convicted of massive financial fraud]. Corruption with a capital K!

So, how do we – and what have they done? We ask about Obama. Obama is irrelevant, because they have infiltrated all of the agencies. The foxes are in the henhouse, in the SEC, in the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board], in the FAA. You flew here in a plane thirty-five years old, monitored by an air traffic control system also thirty-five years old, and they privatized to subcontractors to take care of the planes. Everywhere you look, um, there is corruption and money *uber alles*.

But these people are different historically. Because one can make a case that slavery is logical. One can make a case that feudalism is logical. But these forces, they have let loose forces that they cannot control. And they don't care. They don't care about the ozone depletion. So what? And you have a clown like Rick Perry, who doesn't believe in climate change, while seventy-eight percent (78%) of his state is on fire and under drought, and cows, and cows are dying. These people are mad! We are in the hands of idiots and maniacs and racist corruption!

And I ask – I do not understand why there is not a revolution in this country. But there is no opposition that will explain to people what are the problems and what must be done. That's why, as I say about black people, just because our cause is just, like the Indians, does not mean we will triumph. No. And America is going steadily – you know. People – all around the world America has lost its credibility. We're on the wrong side of every question. It's unbelievable. But the American people, they're watching reality television and FOX News [right-wing broadcast network owned by Rupert Murdoch] and *Shrek 2*.

JB: It's *Shrek 5* now.

WS: [Laughs] Is it *Shrek 5* now? Right.

JB: [Laughs] Yeah. Can I, before we go on –?

[Recording stops and then resumes]

WS: It conveys –

JM: We're going to come back. Let me just say –

WS: Okay.

JM: We're back on and, during the quick break, um, Bill, we wanted to ask you just to stretch out and say a little bit more about the [JB coughs] rationale and the, the argument that led you to move white women out of the project of urban organizing.

WS: Well, the singing of the Wobbly songs – that was *their* legacy. That was their notion of politics. But you cannot, um, but you don't drink wine with people whom you're organizing. It's just like you don't have relations, sexual relations, with people whom you're organizing, although there were some people who believed [laughs], who believed that you had to make out with everybody, ugly women as well as good-looking women, so, you, across the, uh – not in our thing, but a SNCC person, an SCLC person whom I will – well, it was Bevel, actually, whose predilections, you know, were exposed at the end of his life, terrible revelations about Bevel [Bevel was convicted of incest in 2008]. So, and taking them down to the East Side, and then you have to go back to Harlem.

JB: Oh, they took [2:05:00] the people they were organizing back to their homes on the East Side?

WS: Down to meet people like – go look up, after this, who Peter Buttenwieser is.

JB: Buttenweiser.

WS: They're exposing them to something that had nothing to do with struggle.

JB: Well, that's kind of like the Tom Wolfe book *Mau Mau* – um, *Radical Chic*, where the, where the Black Panthers were taken to all the East Side parties in New York to raise funds, but it was, again, a similar kind of tension.

WS: Yeah. Well, I had a problem with it, in fact, with the Panthers, uh, because actually it was the white left and the European left that has lionized the Panthers, which is not to say some of them – but I had guys who – because, as we said before about the relationship between the black community and the police, to confront the police, to try and organize against the police, is quite logical and was important. But they got, friends of mine who were in the Jersey City Panthers, they got killed, cops just – like they killed Fred Hampton and Mark Clark. So, if you're going to – speaking as an ex-Marine, if you're going to take on the enemy, understand what you're doing. You don't announce, "Hello, I'm going to be out at four-thirty, parading, and we're going to get you, or we're going to pretend to get you." I mean, so people do not – it's like people do not understand what real, what a real confrontation with the police would entail.

As I said, I was in Detroit. If I had had my platoon in Detroit, we could have taken over the city, because the cops were shooting each other. They didn't know what they were doing. Um, an organized group, we could have taken over the city. We couldn't have held it, but we could have taken it for a day, for a day, a day and a half.

But it's like, um, there is no theory of change in America, because America is the best of all possible worlds. All we have are blips that we can correct – a little blip here, a little blip there. But there's no concept that the whole, as Martin said, that the whole thing must be done away with. So, we have yet to have – people may talk about Marxism or talk about this and that, but we have yet to develop – and that's something that Malcolm was working on, something that Boggs was laying out. But Malcolm was working on how do you really affect change in this

country? And he put forward, as I wrote it in the article, he put forward two things, nationally and internationally. “The ballot or the bullet” was the national strategy. But hooking up with – and exposing to the UN and elsewhere – hooking up with, um, international struggles. He was invited, he was invited to Algeria in March of ’65, he had been a – and he and Ché [Ché Guevara]. Ben Bella had invited them both to a conference in Algiers. So, he was conveniently killed two weeks, two and a half weeks before leaving for Algiers. Yeah.

JM: Bill, it’s been a, uh, it’s been a real privilege and an honor, and thank you for such a thoughtful and extensive commitment. Are there any final thoughts?

WS: I’ll think of a thousand things later. [Laughs]

JM: Yeah, sure.

WS: People I left out, people I should have mentioned.

JM: Sure.

WS: Yeah, sure.

JM: Well, thank you.

WS: Well, thank you.

JM: It’s been a great privilege.

WS: Because people have been asking me to do a memoir. And, uh, one of the things, I mean, I’ve been lucky enough to meet some great, great people. Um, and being able to explain from my limited viewpoint the significance of those people, as I try to do with Malcolm, is what may make me sit down and write this memoir called *Once Upon a Time*.

JM: Yeah. Thank you.

WS: Thank you.

[Recording ends at 2:09:32]

END OF INTERVIEW