

Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

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MFP-025

Interviewee: Hershel Kaminsky

Interviewer: Dr. Paul Ortiz

Date: August 2004

O: Your full name and why you are here this weekend.

K: My name is Herschel M.—I use my middle initial most of the time—Kaminsky, K-a-m-i-n-s-k-y. And I came here for the fortieth reunion of the Freedom Summer. I had worked in Mississippi in 1964 and [19]65, having come here with my first wife in August, late August of 1964. In fact, we came the very weekend that the Democratic Party Convention was going on, so there weren't too many people around. I had a history of involvement in social and political activism, and particularly in civil rights, that went back some years. At the time I came here, I was among the—I guess, the older volunteers; I was all of twenty-eight and I was a graduate student or, had been a graduate student, up until that point, at the University of Minnesota. In [Minneapolis], I had been active in the Congress of Racial Equality, and had served on the Twin Cities whatever, coordinating committee, executive board of CORE. It was a relatively new organization and we were involved there in a number of cases that involved the school system. I believe there were several, as many as four or five, black public schoolteachers who had had unusual difficulties getting rehired or having their contracts renewed.

O: That was in St. Paul, or . . . ?

K: This was in Minneapolis, yeah. In Minneapolis at the time. And, in fact, my off-campus activity that last year in CORE had really replaced, I should say, my involvement in my studies. Earlier on, as early as . . . 1960, I had

organized the support demonstrations for the student sit-ins when they began in Greensboro, North Carolina. Had, in fact, attended the—I guess it was the second SNCC conference in Atlanta, in October or November of 1960, where I had had the opportunity to meet people I had only heard about before. Who, I mean, we—Dr. King was there briefly, and stepping back further, I guess I'm going back, maybe started with my earliest years and then moved forward. I think it would be useful to talk a little about whence my commitment to social change causes and to social justice and equality sprung. I was the only son of a middle-class professional couple, and I grew up—because my father had lost some properties and had one property left—in what was then a Depression-era working class, poor neighborhood; I grew up middle-class in the midst of what was basically a working class or poor neighborhood where families didn't really begin recovering from the Depression until well into World War II. I had friends in the first grade who had rickets and suffered, really, from malnutrition, you know? And I was aware of that. It was also a neighborhood in which I was a lone Jewish kid and virtually everybody else was Catholic, Irish Catholic, except for the one black family on the block, and I believe there was—I know there was an Italian family who lived just across the street from us that was non-religious. So, I was quite aware of inequality from my very early years. And yet, despite the differences on our block, we had a—you know, there was something of a street gang. Kids were organized by streets, and our street, Park Street, was the one street that wasn't all

Irish Catholic and had a Jew and a black youngster, and, as I mentioned, this Italian who everybody thought was—thought his families were, you know, connected with Mussolini during the war. So, I would say I had some real awareness of what inequality was.

O: Did your parents talk to about inequality, or—?

K: No, not so much, though they were certainly what you would call, you know, New Deal democratic liberals. I shouldn't say that. My mother was kind of acutely sensitive to these things, too, and she was involved in organizing teachers in the community. She had had to stop teaching, as people did in those days, when she had—my sister was born. So, I think I got a good deal of my social conscience from my mother. In college, I went to an unusual college, Antioch College in the Midwest [Yellow Springs, Ohio]. I would say it was unusual for several reasons, which . . . having to do with the fact that, one, I think, after Oberlin—I'm not sure—the first co-ed school in the Midwest, maybe in the United States, for all I know, to admit black students. Free blacks went to school there prior to the Civil War. The school was founded in 1852 or [18]53. The school in the post-World War II era, it's fairly unique in the fact that there were a large number—not a large, but a significant, small number of black students there. I think, at one point, with the GI Bill before I got there—at least, I learned from a black senior, whom came to New Haven where I lived and talked about the college, that there were quite a few vets, black vets, and others who went to school there. And Coretta Scott King, of

course, though I didn't know when I went there that she had been a student there, too, in the late [19]40s. And Antioch was in Southern Ohio, which I think had a case, if I'm not mistaken, that was something like *Brown v. Board of Ed.* There was some instance of school segregation, still, in the early [19]50s in Ohio. And we had—it was, what? Did we have a chapter of the NAACP? I think we did, yes. We had a college chapter of the NAACP in which I was active, along with a number of others, including the current Congressperson from D.C., Eleanor Holmes Norton, who's still a friend of mine. We did sit-ins in Xenia, Ohio, a pretty segregated town which was the county seat, as I recall. Or, not too far away.

O: This was in the late 1950s?

K: No, no. This was in 1954, [19]55, yeah. It was around the time of, I think, the Montgomery Bus Boycott. But there had been a NAACP chapter at the college—NAACP youth chapter at the college—before I got there. So I had that; that was a large, important part of my background, too, by the time 1964 rolled around. I had thought, in [19]61 or [19]62, I guess, to become a Freedom Rider, but I was still, I'd say, too—quite committed to becoming an academic. I didn't want to take the risk. I was in American Studies, and I had a Bachelor's degree in History. So, where does that bring us? We're up to [19]64, and there were a number of people in Minneapolis who did go down early in the summer. I was married that summer and, after I was married, my wife and I went on our honeymoon, you might say, almost, to Mississippi. And we're assigned to be Freedom

School teachers in Indianola. It was the tail end of the summer. People were leaving and there was a question, big question is, what to do now after the Freedom Democratic Party challenge? People coming back, coming home, many of them—at least, the ones I met—both tremendously energized and, at the same time, saddened and disturbed because they didn't want to take just two seats, as Mrs. Hamer said. We didn't come here for just two seats. And, as I remember, though, with the departure of a huge number of people, there was kind of a—something of a letdown and a period of, well, what shall we do next? And the people on the project, Indianola, people had worked first in Ruleville and then had come to Indianola, I believe, sometime in July, if I'm not mistaken, after having worked some weeks in Ruleville. And we continued doing things in the Freedom School, having classes with the kids. And the young people, in particular, wanted to do a lot more. I think only a matter of a few days after I arrived, a number of people, including Otis and—Otis Brown—and McKinley Mack wanted to go down and integrate the local movie theater. That resulted in my—a number of us getting arrested, including myself, and I spent the next three days shaking in my boots in the white cell in the local jail. [Laughter] And with everyone, the other whites who—three other whites confined there who were talking about the damn Freedom Riders. I passed myself off, I had some—I didn't look like a typical Freedom Rider. At that time, my hair was short. I didn't have a beard, I didn't have a mustache. I was wearing—I think I had a Army Surplus or military fatigues

and a light military jacket, something. So I kind of passed, I believe, I passed myself off—as what, I cannot remember. But I remained silent, particularly whenever the local—it wasn't the Chief of Police who came to see how everybody was doing, I think it was the Sheriff, it was Bill Hollowell. He would come and not even blink at me, but he knew who I was, and I think, from what I learned about Hollowell later on—since he had FBI training and was supposed to represent this new, more, what can we say? Responsible breed of Mississippi lawmen, believe it or not. [Laughter] Okay. He had taken on that special training with the FBI for something like six months, so he probably was fairly concerned about—he didn't want anything to happen to me, but, nevertheless, the local chief had made the decision to put this newcomer in with the whites, where as [George Winter], Fred Winn and, I think, Jim Dann, were in the cells where the black kids were. I think there—there were a number of, well, in particular, one or two terrible things happened in the first few months I was there. And we saw, both my wife and I, became acutely aware of the difference between what poverty I had seen as a youngster—growing up in Connecticut and then, you know, other parts of the country where I had lived and sometimes worked and gone to college—and Mississippi poverty. I had never been south except—further south from Baltimore, with the exception of that one trip to Atlanta in late 1960 for just a weekend. And there were a couple of children who had clearly died of malnutrition or something related to that, little—they weren't children, they

were infants, newborns. Not quite newborns. And I do remember our taking a collection to arrange to have them a proper, modest funeral, which I think the local undertaker provided for a small fee. Then, in October—I guess, the way I tend to recall things are by the crises. Because, you can see, there wasn't—most of the time, what were we doing in those early months, toward the end of the year? Oh, yes. Now I do remember. There was a big thrust to organize people for a huge, and a huge, a large demonstration to attempt to register to vote at the time the Congress was going to open in January of 1965. We put a lot of effort into that, mostly through talking to people and going house to house, but even more importantly trying—having mass meetings, what were called mass meetings every week in the Freedom School. During one of those mass meetings, there was some kind of Molotov cocktail was dropped from a crop duster right outside the school. That was the first attempt to bomb the school, but that just left a small crater. I don't think it was more than . . . maybe four or five feet wide. It was big enough, because it was dropped and there was an explosion and all, and people were shaken up. We were quite shaken. During a mass meeting, this happened during a mass meeting, yeah. And it was dropped from a crop duster, a small plane that used to dust the cotton crops. For a brief stretch of time, my wife, who was—her name's been mentioned before, Georgiana, and I went back to Minneapolis to talk about our experience and to raise money for the project. We did that for a while, came back, and I think we did spend—we

were here for Christmas and New Year's. We did build towards what was a very large demonstration in January, I think we had at least—I don't know, you'd have to ask others if memory is sound on this, but I think probably more than, maybe about a hundred and fifty people. Actually, hundred and twenty-five, a hundred and fifty at one point or another, came, marched around the courthouse. Charles McLaurin was shouting words of encouragement through a bullhorn to us, and it came off without incident. I think there were lots of incidents around in other parts of the state, and on that day, with those demonstrations. During the last six—oh, not really, more like five or six months that my wife and I remained here, I became . . . I got involved, I'm just trying to remember how this happened. One of the . . . SNCC prepared profiles, I believe, of each county or area where people went to work. We had a Sunflower County mimeographed brochure, pamphlet of, maybe, eight and a half by eleven, ten, twelve pages, double-spaced which consisted, primarily, of research that had been done by SNCC's—what can I say? Exceptional research director at the time, who, Jack Minnis, who dug up a great deal of information about who really owned the large plantations here in Sunflower County and, also, what little industry existed. And, not unlike other parts of the South, it exposed the kind of colonial relationship between the Southern economy and the larger national economy and even international, if you will. While Senator James Eastland was a large, one of the largest landowners, in the county, the largest landowner was an English company. They owned, I

think—I think I do remember the figure, thirty-eight thousand acres which were, I think, mostly in cotton. Perhaps there was something else as well. And, in addition, the pamphlet described the largest employer—not, probably the largest non-agricultural employer, okay? In the county was a textile firm which was part of Ludlow Industries out of Ludlow, Massachusetts, which you could trace, I suppose, to the Ludlow Massacre and then to James Russell Lowell, and so on and so forth. [Laughter] Long American tradition of, well, James Russell Lowell, you'll have to—you probably remember better than I was. He was an abolitionist, though not a radical abolitionist. He certainly was an anti-slavery man, yeah. Ludlow employed about four hundred people, of whom perhaps about a quarter were black men. And they worked in the most environmentally—under the worst conditions, where they probably were at more risk than anybody else to, what is it called? The opposite—grey lung, or? The disease?

O: Oh—

K: Grey lung? Brown lung? It's not black lung.

O: Lint . . .

K: Yes, I think it's called brown lung, if I'm not mistaken. I think it's referred to as brown lung. And most of the rest of the employees were super exploited; perhaps, they were the super-super-exploited workers, and a large portion of the rest were white women. And they had a contract with the federal government to produce . . . oh, let's see. USPO bags, or they

were producing some kind of bags that were used by the United States Postal Service, and then something for the Defense Department, if I'm not mistaken. And we knew there was an Executive Order that—this was before the establishment of the EEOC and before the passage of the [19]64 Act . . . right, you'll have to refresh my memory. Voting Rights Act, Voting Rights is [19]65, Equal Employment is [19]64, right?

O: [19]64.

K: Okay. And maybe there was something before with fewer teeth in it. But, in any event, because of that act—or, I'm not quite sure why we invoked [it]. For whatever reason, it seemed wisest if we were going to try to address that situation and with an organizing perspective; that is to say, there were not that many black men in the community who were ready or prepared to take the risk of involvement in the freedom movement for very, very clear-cut economic reasons, those who were employed in particular. In fact, the men who came to meetings in Indianola, in addition to Mr. Giles, as I remember, they were, for the most part, people who were sharecropping just a little outside the boundaries of the town. And we thought, well, perhaps one way of involving people politically would be to see what could be done, pull together a group of men who worked in Ludlow to see if something could be done about their situation there, and also to bring them in to see that there was reason for their involvement. The movement was more than just about the right to vote, too. And we were successful in getting some action there, which followed—occurred—

I'm not sure. I know it was after I left in June of 1965, but we wrote many letters to Washington and we got a hearing and went to Greenwood. I went to Greenwood with a number of people who worked out for—there were, maybe, really, there were only, it was a small, quick group, really. There were about six or seven men who became involved in this, and the core group, the group that was always there, numbered only about four. And I must mention a local person who was the reason this all happened. I'd forgotten about him. He was here at the—he came to some of the activities in the year 2000, and that was a fellow who had worked there named Robert Cableton, who [is] still a resident of Indianola. I do believe that, when you were here in 2000, you may have interviewed—not Robert Cableton, who had worked in Ludlow but was no longer working there when he first started coming to meetings and talking to us, in particular to me, about the people at Ludlow and what was going on there—and the other person, whom I think you may have interviewed, was a man named Elmo Proctor.

O: Yeah.

K: You did. I'm pretty sure you did an interview with Mr. Proctor. It was great to see him when I came back here, I'm going to give him a call. I was hoping he would be, you know, at this—some of the events this week. So I consider that my major contribution, really was, in addition to illustrating fliers for mass meetings, which I used to do with copying old illustrations which I know were used, I guess, during Reconstruction to mobilize the

vote of the freedmen. It was come to the polls, ye sons of freedom, or something like that.

O: Had you done this before, or did you—

K: No, no. This was—had I done anything like that before?

O: Yeah, I mean, did you know about that Reconstruction-era tactic before you did this, or did you find out after?

K: No, no, no. I had studied Reconstruction in American History and I had been a . . . a teaching assistant in a social science sequence in which we, I taught with such books as John Dollard's *Caste and Class in the Southern Town* and a couple of other books like that, yeah. So, I was familiar with that period, and I had, in fact, many years before that in New York, I had taken a class with W.E.B. Du Bois, an eight-week class, yeah, some few years before he left the United States. I had forgotten about that.

O: Wow. What class did you take with Du Bois?

K: It was just a—I think it was, he was talking mostly about Reconstruction, but it was on African American history. So I remembered that. So I would do some illustrations with, come to the polls, or something like that, ye sons of—

[Break in recording]

K: So it was a very exciting time in which I certainly grew a great deal, and getting some sense of how—what can I say? How difficult, not just social and political change is, but the enormous risks that some people are

willing to take to make it happen. I mean, I think of Elmo in particular and then—whose job was on the line all during that period. In fact, I got lectured by a guy from, was it, the Justice Department? I'm not sure who came down to look into the case about how, couldn't I have picked, I forget, some other issue involving what was going on or something like that? [Laughter] Because, you know, these people were at risk, their jobs. But that particular experience, I was told later, had contributed a little to the organization by which union—I can't recall—the Louis Grocer [Company], which is a big [trucking] company here, I'm not sure what they did. I was trying to find out today. It wasn't the Teamsters who organized, even though these guys were driving over the road. It must have been the Teamsters, but there is a local union hall here, which is not Teamsters, where we had our first reunion in 1999. And Otis told me at that time that there people among the six or so guys who were at Ludlow at the time, were people who had brought in a union organizer when they went to work as drivers for Louis Grocer. And the women. The women in our—particularly in the little, I can't remember the name of it specifically, that little area where people said they lived, other than folks who didn't live with Mrs. Magruder, there was another place which was off of—it had a name like something Hollow. But, you know, that's, of course, Appalachia. But this was like, not Cat's Cradle, but . . . I mean, it had a name that suggested it was a dirt-poor street. Byas Street, was Oklahoma Street leading off of Byas Street. Every single woman who lived on that street

seemed to, was a real committed movement person who went to register to vote and talked movement to other people. And they made a big difference for, particularly, my wife, and then for me as well. They were kind of, what can I say? They enveloped us with love. And, while there was all this danger on the outside, we knew there was a lot of comfort there and an enormous amount of warmth and real courage. And I'll always remember them. There's—I don't know, did you talk to a Juanita Brownlow a few years ago? That's someone to talk to, because Zellie [Rainey] knows her.

Unidentified male: Oh, I think she mentioned—I was talking about her tonight, John mentioned her.

K: Maybe. There's another Juanita who's here, but there's Juanita Brownlow, and I had hoped she would be here. I didn't see her. My first wife was quite close to her, and then a woman who spoke briefly in the chapel of the church this morning who had a walker and spoke about the Freedom School, some memories, what it meant for her and her family. Mrs. Wilson was someone whom my wife was quite close to and worked with. I was surprised, this morning, that Alice Giles, who was really a stalwart in the movement, too—as much as her husband, in her way, though he was kind of a spokesperson—she was always there. And she was a real fighter, in her quiet way. I should mention, also, there was kind of an interesting historical connection that I was responsible for. One of the—I knew from years ago, when I was in high school, I had met one of the people who

had been involved early on in the organization of the Southern Tenant Farmer's Union with H. [H.L. Mitchell]—he was a coworker of H. There were several people there. Some came out of, like H. L. Mitchell, came out of the Socialist party, and this preacher, Claude Williams, came out of the C.P. But he had been kicked out, okay? [Laughter] He had spent a short period in there, but he still had pretty party politics, I think. And I had met him through some friends in New York and New Haven when I was only in high school. He had come north to collect money to do what he had done; he was living outside of Birmingham, a big steel town and a working class suburb where there were both—I was rather surprised, both black, some, a minority of black steel workers who managed to, I guess, find a little enclave there apart from the larger number of whites. He was trying to do what he had done many, many years before at Commonwealth College in Arkansas. Claude had this Institute of Applied Religion, People's Applied Religion in Helena, Alabama, does that ring a bell? Anyway, it was a suburb—right, and there was, perhaps not. It was a town outside of Birmingham [Bessemer].

O: Start with an H? Hueytown?

K: Whatever, but it was a town where there were mostly people, working class whites and a small number of working class blacks. He had done a few unusual things there, I gather, in the [19]50s and early [19]60s. Like, I guess he had raised money in the North to build a swimming pool right on the edge of the black and white community, and I think, occasionally,

white kids would get so hot they'd jump in. He was quite an unusual character. But his experience, really, experience like the Tenant Farmer's Union and then he had had some kind of connection with the UAW in Detroit, because he moved north in the late [19]30s and worked in Detroit as sort of a . . . what are you calling disenfr—they call them labor priests. He was like a labor pastor or something or other, and had been out in the streets during the Detroit riots in [19]43. He had a small congregation there, which I think was probably mostly black. Anyway, I knew Claude, and I knew he really could relate the movement to the Bible and do it in an absolutely compelling way. So I invited him to come, and he came and spent about a week or so in Indianola, and we had some little meetings with the people at Ludlow. He really clicked with them. Here was a Southern white who had grown up as the son of a . . . sharecropping father in a sharecropping family, and had gotten the calling, you know, when he was in—I don't know, he was in World War I. He got the calling to be a preacher and then became a preacher. He wasn't schooled. He was self-educated and all, and here was someone from a poor white background, religious orientation, who really talked the language of the people here. He went over to, I'm not quite sure how to—Unita Blackwell in Mayersville, and he spent a number of time, he'd visit her a number of times, I know. That was the beginning of the movement over there. Claude and she grew quite close for a stretch. Ah, I forgot something very important, sort of events or activities. The second large anti-Vietnam War

demonstration in Washington occurred in April of 1965, and I was a, I guess you'd say, founding member of SDS at Port—here, I was at the Port Huron [Conference]. While I was active in [19]62, mostly not with organizing the chapter at the University of Minnesota but involved in some of the discussions that were going on nationally, and so I had connections there. I got a call from the person who was the national secretary who said, can you get people to come from Mississippi to that? It was primarily—it was an SDS-organized demonstration; it was, as I say, the second large one. There had been one the previous November, in November of [19]64, I believe, which attracted some—I think it was about 25,000 people, and they were hoping to increase the number by April of the following year in [19]65. We got I don't know how many buses. We had quite a number of buses going from Mississippi, including a large group from here. And it was right around the time that Muhammad Ali had refused military service and had said no Viet Cong or Vietnamese had ever called him a nigger, and there was a big banner—the main banner, where we encouraged people to, and people came up with themselves, generally because people were getting called up here at that time, certainly. My struggle was here in Mississippi, not in Vietnam. That was it.

O: So, you were here from August in [19]64 to June in 1965.

K: Yes, yes. I think it was a little later, actually. Let me try to—I maybe was here into a little of July. Yeah, beginning of July.

O: Okay. So, now, you had had—I mean, obviously, you had really significant pre-movement political activities that you had been involved in.

K: Yeah.

O: But thinking back to when you left Mississippi or were in the process of leaving, how had the experience impacted you, or how did it change your views on life? Or did it change your views on life, for the ten- or eleven-month experience.

K: Well, I think I—prior to that time, I had been involved in what existed of an organized left in this country and had been through a couple of sects. Actually, only one sect, okay? Considered myself to be something of a homeless radical, with something of a modest education in Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, and some others, though I think also, as a big an influence on me and my thinking then was: not early on, when I got interested in that literature, I had come across Dwight Macdonald's *Politics* in the Antioch Library. And—

[Break in recording]

Editor's note: end of Tape A, side 1. The interview continues on Tape A, side 2.

K: But most of all, I think what changed the way I saw the world was, I got a real sense of how . . . how much power people could have in certain . . . special historical circumstances. I also viewed it from some of a historian's perspective and that—and yet, at the same time, I had certainly developed a sense of the costs of making a commitment to changing one's circumstances. We always said, well, we could leave; we could get

up and go, and leave, and the folks who were really the movement couldn't. They were going to be having to deal with the same, to a large extent, the same kind of daily humiliation that they had known all their lives. And with, you know, behind that line; behind that oppression, there was enforcement of violence and, possibly, even possible death. And I do remember, in particular, watching. You know, we watched Lyndon Johnson's "We Shall Overcome"—must have been Voting Rights Act speech—with a number of local people. We watched that speech on television. There weren't all that many television sets, as I recall, in Indianola. Certainly, not as much as I was accustomed to having around. And people expressing a great deal of skepticism.

O: Local people—

K: The local people, yeah. While, of course, the sainted Kennedy, his pictures were already there in everybody's home or in living rooms all over. You saw pictures of Kennedy that had been cut out. I guess the idea of accepting a Texan who still had a drawl as someone who would keep a commitment was still very, very difficult.

O: Plus maybe the experience with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, had it with them.

K: Yeah, yeah. Certainly. So, I think what I learned was—or, what it gave me was one, a sense of . . . the tremendous difficulty of organizing. And, also, that this was—people, they were taking revolutionary steps. They were doing things that, for them, were really revolutionary and life-risking. But

the—I didn't expect, I guess I always had the expectation, this was going to result in something far less totally transformational than I think a lot of my peers, among those who had come—especially the whites—expected. That they had expectations that, with the response that the movement forced upon the federal government, there would be huge and striking social change; the beginning, as well, I guess, of some kind of social economic transformation and not just a political one.

O: That's interesting. So, coming back now for the reunion, this is the second time—you were here for the reunion in 1999?

K: I was here in [19]99 and I was here in 2000. I think Otis and I were the only two people who came from out of state in 1999. It was very modest. I think Zellie dressed—we had about twenty-five, thirty people in the hall, the union hall.

O: What made you come back?

K: I had often thought of coming back, number one, to visit. And I had, at one point after I finally got myself an advanced degree in social work, I had thought of possibly—through a connection I had in the school I went to, Columbia—with a program that involved a number of historical black colleges in the South, but not—I don't think Tougaloo was involved—there was no school in Mississippi. They had schools in Alabama. And they were helping these schools develop, improve their undergraduate social work degree programs; I guess they offered BSWs. So I thought at one point, and talked to someone about doing something like that. I had

thought of that while I was still working for the city of New York and the Human Resources Administration. Zellie had—who, yes, I got a call from Charlie Scattergood inviting me to his and Zellie's nuptials, which, tragically, never happened. That reminds me, too, of maybe coming back here sometime to see what Indianola was like forty years later.

O: Have you had a chance to really reconnect with people now after three reunions and get a sense for—

K: Yeah. Not as much as I would like to. I mean, reconnecting with other people who had come from outside and come here, yeah. And, I think in 2000, we talked a lot among about the—you may have heard from Bright Winn, or whom we know as Fred, talk about the factions. [Laughter] There were about maybe three, I don't know, that developed in the post-summer, Freedom Summer, period. Then there was some, we talked a little about that, we've never been able to really say how we felt about the cliquishness of a few people who kind of spent their time—doing what, I was never quite sure. And then, suddenly, there were these jobs available through what's his name's program? Well, it was the CDGM, Child Development Group of Mississippi, which began in the summer of [19]65, suddenly they had control of the sum of money and jobs for local people and they made those decisions. But, apart from that, which really is not germane to your question, yeah, I've seen Bob. I spent some time with him, Cableton and Elmo, the last time I was here. I also had a chance to—I remember Zellie's mother well from those years. Talked with her,

spent time with her, Mrs. Giles and others, and that's been good. It gives continuity to my life, I guess, because I'd gone a number—I've had a very varied career, really; worked in a number of different things. After I left here, I went to teach at Talladega [College] in Alabama and stayed close to a number of SNCC people. Some of the students I taught there became involved in SNCC, and some few years later I worked for the National Sharecropper's Fund and Rural Advancement Fund, which had some projects in Georgia and I travelled down to Atlanta, though I was mostly in New York and Washington. There were a lot of old comrades from that time who were involved in those projects, yeah.

O: Well, I know it's getting late. I have one more question I was going to ask you, Herschel, about—there was a really striking phrase that you mentioned earlier about what you learned in terms of when you arrived here, the organizing experience that you had prior, and then what you got from working with people here. The phrase you used was, they enveloped us in love.

K: Mm-hm.

O: As organizers, that's not a very common phrase to hear.

K: And experience. It's not a common experience. [Laughter] For an organizer.

O: Exactly, but I've heard this—it's not the exact term, but it seems that it's very common hear people who were involved in the movement during

- those years use a term like this, in terms of the relationships between people in SNCC, the relationships with local—
- K: Yeah, beloved community.
- O: Beloved community, so on and so forth. And it's striking to me—excuse me for editorializing a little bit, but in my work as a person who does histories or tries to learn about histories of social movements, one of the things I hear about people today—adults, people, you know, between forty and on up—is that, you know, the young people of today just don't have that—I think, today, even, at one of the sessions—
- K: Lack of passion.
- O: Lack of passion. Some of the Teach for America folks were using that language as if they were kind of older folks, right? Like old timers, right? And I thought it was interesting, because they were suggesting the same thing, but I kind of—I kind of wonder about that.
- K: I was disturbed by their use of that phrase. [Laughter] If they're talking to young people there, and what they were saying about that generation is not something that is going to—I suspect—open up those young people. [Laughter] To new ideas or, well, whatever they're doing; I guess teaching critical thinking and . . .
- O: But I wonder—yeah, I mean, I know, it was really striking, and I guess I'm trying to formulate a question here that tries to bring this idea to bear on what people, or what we're trying to do today. I mean, even the people in that school, you participating in the union, myself trying to learn the history

of it, building a new social movement and trying to figure out how to get this concept, enveloped us in love, into organizing today. Because it does seem to me, that in my training as an activist in the [19]80s, that I never really came across this. I mean, I kind of learned, okay, door-to-door work, you know, canvassing, phone lists, things, kind of the nuts and bolts of organizing. But no one ever took me aside and said, look, this is really what organizing is about. And so I'm trying to figure out—you know, it seems to that there is a missing element of organizing today, but if there is a missing element, it's not that people are missing the passion—because certainly that's there—

K: Certainly, yeah.

O: But there is something missing here, or today, that—I mean, y'all were able to build in the early, mid-[19]60s. I'm trying to figure out, you know, okay, well, how do we—I mean, what would be a step today to either recover that or to create it anew? And kind of make that a part of our social justice organizing, so it isn't just a formula.

K: Mm-hm.

O: [Laughter] Any ideas?

K: Well, you've asked a big question. I've had a sense that some of the young people, younger people in their twenties, who—

[Break in recording]

[End of interview]

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