

SRC 33
Day 1, Tape B
Conference

Leslie Dunbar:get away with saying such and such and that freed editors, too. It freed business structures and I think is one of the crucial developments in the post-1954 South. **Patterson** and I can claim to have known **Gene** intimately. I knew him and worked with him. But I know **Patterson**. If you read all of his things they just clearly changed. They moved up a notch or two every year, that was remarkable. He was a man of great decency. I know he called me up, this was in 1964, I know this date, he called me up to say the FBI showed me these tapes. They made me listen to this tape about Martin King over in hotels. Well, I said, I don't want to listen to them. But then I didn't. The good thing about **Gene Patterson** is he never mentioned that. I don't think he ever mentioned that he was one of the editors who heard this scandalous FBI tape. He was a decent person. That was of great importance.

Paul Gaston: You used the wrong tense there, past tense. Present tense - is a decent person.

Brian Ward: Is a decent person. (Some laughter)

[Unintelligible]

John Dorsey Due: I was at the 1965 Conference of SNCC and I was not conscious of some revolutionary things that was happening at that meeting. Number one, I was in another room when **Bob Moses** said some of

us have been involved too long and we need to leave and he walked out. We haven't seen him until just a few of years ago when he came back to Mississippi in 1994. Also decisions and discussions were made, and I was in another room, that whites no longer be a part of SNCC. White folks need to go out and organize white folks and this was the beginning of black power. Since Ms. Curry was part of **American Friends Service Committee**, I remember when I was interviewing for a job that you can burn out by being involved in this kind of stress on a continued basis and you need to recognize that and you can change. Connie, since you were so intimately involved with SNCC at the beginning, can you explain from your perspective as to what happened and what this meant? And then Paul I'd like to know what did this mean to the Southern Regional council when blackness became the thing in the movement.

Connie Curry: Well, John, as you know, I had left SNCC and had gone to work for the **American Friends Service Committee** by 1965 so I was not at that meeting. There was sort of two generations of SNCC, the first generation and then the second, and I was in the first one. Those of us who were there in 1960 through Freedom Summer of 1964. In that first group there was **Cacey Hayden**, (we're talking about white

people) **Penny Patch, Joan Browning, Sue Thrasher, Bob Zelner**, and a lot of other white people who were involved. For them the decision that white people should go to work in white communities was very painful. It's very interesting now because if you ask **Julian Bond**, and other people they'll say that it was a political more than a racial thing because it was the beginning of the top down, the more hierarchical, business, then the grassroots up, which is what **Bob Moses** and a lot of other people sort of believed in. It was a political rather than a color decision in many way. **Julian**, and a lot of other people who were in and out of that meeting, say that they didn't believe in it. It was not a black power thing. It was a philosophy of how things should be run. That's when **Bob** changed his name and went to Africa because he was very upset about it. It was complicated because in 1964, which is before all this happened, there was the advent of the thousand people coming from the North. A lot of the women and people that I know from that era, the white women, they came down and worked only in the summer of 1964. It was the beginning of a lot of grassroots people saying we don't like these white Northerners coming down and taking over our agenda and telling us what to do when we've been used to being led by the people in the community. So you had sort of the first and second generation, the beloved community,

before the shift to what was called and, I don't think **Stokely** and the people who were talking about it at that moment really saw it as much of a black power thing as I say as they did the political thing. The other crucial thing is the fact that you have to remember in 1964 there were 90-some church burnings in Mississippi. People had been killed by **Moses** probably never got over the fact of feeling responsible for **Herbert Lee's** murder. **Schwener, Chaney, and Goodman**, I mean the murders, the violence. And then there was Atlantic City which was the greatest set-back. Bus-loads going up to Atlantic City with **Fanny Lou Haymer** and everybody singing freedom songs. And what happens? They get to Atlantic City and they're allowed two seats. It was great rejection. It was disillusionment. It was heartbreak. A lot more than it was black power. That's the way I see it. I want to say one thing about the press real quick, about **Claude Sitton**. The other thing a lot of people don't know is a lot of movement people used to say when they were afraid they'd say God if we can only get the **Claude Sitton's** room.

Paul Gaston: One very quick answer. **John** asked me a question (and then you're question Brian). Blackness did make a difference at the council after **Paul Anthony** resigns about 1971, 1972. The executive committee was determined that it was gonna hire a black executive

director. There had always been that kind of, well that was the beginning I think of that kind of that tension. It wasn't black power but the executive committee was divided and they were determined to find a black executive director. **Andy Lewis** said he wouldn't take the job, and **Harvey Gant** said he wouldn't take the job. Then George Esser appeared who, quite white, but with very good contacts with the **Ford Foundation** and they said he'd be good. (Laughter) So he would be good. One other personal thing. I was in a university in Richmond, Virginia, a black university at about this time and I had gone over to do some consulting. One of the students said would you like to come to a rally? We're having a rally tonight. I went to the rally and they were talking about what things they were going to do: poison the water supply and so on. I said well look I'm getting a little anxious. Yeah don't worry we got bottled water for you. Question Brian?

Brian Ward: Yeah I've got a couple of questions. We've been working Les pretty hard on this press theme and you've given us a long list of very distinguished journalists who worked with or for the SRC quite intimately. Yourself and **David Chalmers** given good testimony about the power of new South and then of Southern changes as SRC publications, but it occurs to me this is all print media. I'm just wondering how much effort the SRC actually made to court radio and television, which, in many ways, were as important for a

different constituency during the 1950's and 1960's. You could argue more important than the print media.

Leslie Dunbar: Your question is what did we do with radio and television, and we did darn little, partly because we didn't know how, mainly.

Television was just itself coming in and came in in a rush during the later 1960's. I don't think we had on the staff or anybody who really knew how to do radio and certainly nobody who knew how to do television. So we didn't. There used to be a man named **Ed Friendly** who had something called **Friendly World Broadcasting** or something like that and Ed would make these tapes and ship them around to the network radio stations that he had contacts with. They were all race relations, brotherhood, peace kind of things. Details are a little foggy in my head now, but at SRC we did sort of subsidize him once, for a good purpose I hope, but essentially we did not know how to do radio and we did not know how to do television and we didn't do it. I appeared on radio several times. There was one radio station over in Birmingham, Alabama, **which _____ us**. And our lawyers actually got me equal time. It had never happened before, so I got equal time over at this station over in Birmingham, Alabama. We're not Communists or what not.

Brian Ward: Actually it's just anecdotally, **Pacifica** actually once read out the whole of

one of Les's articles in the journal of politics which I'm sure was riveting listening. They certainly gave you good air time there, but it was someone else reading out one of your articles. So **Pacifica** may have been a radio network that you had some success with. The second question is really for all the folks up there and it's sort of something that's been gnawing away at me as I've been listening to many of the papers today and the panel session. By the 1950's and into the 1960's you've got an organization in the Southern Regional Council that is in various ways pushing for integration. And yet one of the stories that hasn't emerged from what's been said today is what was going on within the Southern Regional Council and the councils for human relations themselves. What was race relations like within the body of the council and within the human relations councils. And then, picking up actually on something Les has said again, what were gender relations like within those organizations during the 1950's and 1960's and was there a discernable change over those decades?

Paul Gaston: Brian has his schedule to end at three thirty and so there's thirty eight

seconds to answer that question. I'll take a part of those to welcome the president of the Southern Regional Council who just walked in. Greetings, Charles. Do you want us to take time to answer that?

Charles: I want your best five minutes, Paul.

Paul Gaston: Well, I'll give it to someone else. John's ready to go.

John Dorsey: I just want to say that, when I got active with the **Unitarian Fellowship**

which was kind of a sponsor of the Tallahassee council in human relations, I was the first black who was not part of the academic world at FAMU that wanted to be part and interact with whites.

Black folks really didn't want to interact with white folks in

Tallahassee. It was only through **the _____ movement**

we saw white students who reached out from the University of

Florida and FSU to reach out to **Patricia**. **Patricia** was also a

different kind of person. You have to realize that you can't just

blame the white folks in the council of human relations not reaching

out to blacks. A lot of times the blacks didn't want to reach out to

whites. It was just that way. It was the mis-education of Negroes **by**

Woodson was the reality in the South. And fear. What do they

want? They must be Communists, you know, that kind of thing.

Leslie Dunbar: I don't know what I'm supposed to say. We had a wonderful staff at

SRC made up of a lot of accomplished and talented people.

Accomplished and talented people sometimes find ways to rub

each other. So we used to have, now and then, little flair ups of the

staff and we'd have to deal with them. We also had them with the

councils in human relations. I spent a lot of my time on that. I just

remembered one woman who worked running the memiograph

machines and, let's call her Jane Doe, for a moment. I can

remember in frustration sometimes saying my god I wish we had more Jane Doe's around here. I never have any problems with her. She leaves precisely at five o'clock every night, she's gone. She never works over time. She causes me no trouble. Right after I left she led a black power movement at SRC, so you can't always tell. I don't remember what else to say...

Connie Curry: Like I say, I really never worked at SRC, but my perception of it was that it was mostly white male led, but there was some women like **Maggie Long** and certainly **Mrs. Tilly** who had been there. There were a lot of women who were deeply involved.

Paul Gaston: My staff experience was only one year from 1970 to 1971 and that may be illustrative of some of the tensions it had. Vernon Jordan had just left the staff. John Lewis had recently left the staff. One other distinguished black leader had just left the staff. Almost over night the staff had changed from being integrated at the top level with project directors and so on. The year I came down as a visitor that as not so. We were all a bunch of white boys. I was the research director; Pat Watters was information director; Reese Cleghorn edited South Today. So it was really illustrative of the problems the council had. Those things came and went and one could find that kind of example at other times and dwell on it a long time. It's a very interesting topic. But there is another side of it and that is for

the council membership itself. I thought of this this morning when we were talking about how people change over time and what opportunities were presented to them to change over time. Now one of the cliché's about the Southern Regional Council is that it's a family. We often talk about the Southern Regional Council family and from almost the beginning it was a membership organization, and then it became a hundred men and women of good will. So the members would come together once a year, the executive committee more often. It was a large family of people who felt a certain kind of kinship because they belonged to this organization. Like many families they had a lot of quarrels, and the quarrels they had from 1944 to 1951 we've already discussed. Those were significant quarrels, and some of the people left the family. We talked about how **Virginia Stabney** couldn't stay in the family. Others were strengthened by family ties and developed good family values 'cause they learned. The point is that over time, and you would meet these people all over the South or you'd meet them, oh you're an SRC person, whether black or white. It was a bond, and I think, for someone who might want to write a book about the Southern Regional Council, I would suggest that he, well she if there is somebody, but if a he was writing this book, I would suggest that he explore that dimension of the council and how it thought of itself as a family and how all over the region you could

drop in a town and meet somebody who was a member, black or white, and learn from them and be educated because of that advantage.

Connie Curry: I want to say something real quick. John Boone, I know you have to leave and I was just wondering if you'd like to say a word about the work that you did with SRC on the prison program 'cause I don't think a lot of people know about that.

John Boone: Yes Connie, I'll say a word or two. I think that after I was appointed at _____, **Indiana**, and encountering J. Edgar Hoover fighting what me and **Merlin Alexander** director was doing. He said nothing like that would ever happen. I had the authority to implement a **furlow law**. Of course he said you can do that only over my dead body. We did get a chance to do it though, but after he had died (Laughter) in the District of Columbia. In the District of Columbia they had a four hundred long school with only ten men enrolled. I got there and walked and walked and walked. They had had a riot after Martin was assassinated. Every time they had a riot in the District it would spill over into the prison. So we **caught hell** trying to keep that stable. Anyway, to make a long, long story short, I sat day and night telling the guys look, I'm going to invent a new law come hell or high water. If you can assume the responsibility I'm gonna send

you in school after you get your GED to get an education. So we did. The other day they inaugurated the **Cleveland in Art College in Atlanta**.

Cleveland had his first when he was at D.C. University basketball team, predominately prisoners that went in. What happened, I was courting my wife, and I went to visit her and there was a thunderstorm. My daughter called me and said the superintendent wants you to come out there.

There's a riot here; all the lights are out. When I got out there the only lights there were fire trucks and police trucks from all over the jurisdiction, but I didn't see a riot; I didn't feel a riot. I said I'm going in to see what's back here. **Ken Hardy** was the director back then and he said you better stop that rioting. I walked in and told them to go get **Ken Hardy** to see if the superintendent will give me that bull horn. So he did and I said I'm going to walk in and see what's wrong - alone. That's what I eventually did, but I heard a **prison guard _____ in a powerful union** said let the son of a bitch go in there and he'll find out what's wrong when he gets in there. So I slowly walked to that prison guard **afraid under the bed doing everything**. Before I left **Delbert Jackson**, who later on became the director, said John can I go in with you. I said yes **Delbert** you can go in with me, but on the way in I remembered Delbert carried a .38 all the time and I didn't want any firearms in there, so I slowly went in the back door because I knew behind the front door was nothing but state police and everything. So I went slow, went in the back door, **the guy was**

afraid. I said look, when I give the signal I want you to come up front, that's where the light is. I went in by myself, but just as I was about to get out of the prison compound seven white guards were coming toward me. There were three guys who called themselves thugs vowed to support me and they saw these white guys coming. They started throwing bricks. A brick hit me in the back. I took it to Massachusetts with me after that, but it didn't hurt. Anyway, after that the prison was revolutionized, but I was too much for them. They had to get rid of me, so they terminated me and I was **sent to _____ in Indiana.** In Massachusetts the same thing happened. They say they had a prison guard riot going on. I went there and I didn't hear a riot, didn't see a riot. So I walked through that prison by myself **and _____ nothing** wrong. Those so and so and so don't know what they talkin' about. And so sure enough I told them I said look, I don't feel no riot. I selected twenty five guards, I said go over there, get a ball out of the dormitory, go **on recreation field** and stay there until it stops raining and the lights go on. The prison guard union had destroyed the auxiliary system so the prison was completely black, on reservation otherwise. But to make a long story short, that morning the sun was rising bright. One man had escaped. He got a guards union and walked out of prison. He came back the next day though. He went to visit his wife and all of that. He came back and that prison was revolutionized, but they had to get rid of me 'cause they had to keep these jails and prisons. So I went

down the drainpipe in the prison guard union, but what we started thanks to Leslie Dunbar, when I went to Massachusetts he gave me a \$250,000 grant I think to help us educate the public. And that's what it is, **Bill Farmer**, who is now dead, was a deputy of the public corrections in Massachusetts. He was a prisoner, I got him out, but I made him my associate in Massachusetts. You know how they made that terrible hard-hitting union system was. **Bill Farmer** died not very long ago. Ninety-five percent of the men went out on furlows and came back so I think the system is gone with the wind now. We do not need to pay all of that money on jails and prison cells. And I think the Georgia governor, my governor, realized that the other day. I **was** _____ **to** him we gotta shut down some prisons. So the time is right for some organizations to focus on doing that. It's a waste of time. I mean you can do some other things. Prisons eighty percent black. You know what that's **second Sunday** plantation system and all of that. Well that's enough said. I'll have to do it another time. Thank you very much.

Paul Gaston: Thank you, **John**. (Applause) Now we focused all day today

...[unitelligible]...this afternoon on the past of the SRC and we're only up to 1960, or 1970. Tomorrow we're gonna do the 1970's and 1980's. After you get a little refreshment we're gonna hear about the SRC of the future and **Louis Berrarrow** is going to tell us about her plans and how you can help her with it. But we're going to serve

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refreshment now.

Brian Ward: We'll talk half an hour and we'll take **Lou's** after four fifteen. Thank you all so much. Thank the panel. (Applause)

[End of Tape 4]

[End of Day 1, Tape 3.]