

SRC 30

Interviewee: Will Campbell

Interviewer: Susan Glisson

Date: May 17, 2003

G: This is Susan Glisson, and I am here with Will Campbell in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee. It is May 17, 2003, and we are here to talk about the Southern Regional Council. How are you doing today, Mr. Campbell?

C: I am doing very well.

G: Could we talk about how you came to know the Southern Regional Council and what you knew of their work?

C: Before I graduated from Yale Divinity School, I knew about it. I knew about George Mitchell [former director of the SRC] and was with him on a few occasions, casual occasions, conferences and such where he would be speaking. When I graduated from Yale Divinity School, I took briefly a parish church in north Louisiana and lasted weeks and weeks. I was there a little over two years. They thought that I was cute. You know, this was a little mill village, and the mill was owned by five brothers and their wives, their families. They thought they were very sophisticated college-educated people, and they thought that they had a cute little preacher because he'd talk about how our children are going to go to school with little "darkies" and labor unions. I would go to speak to where there would be a strike, a paper mill strike, and that would get in the *Shreveport Times*, and they began to kind of say, what's going on here? I went there in 1952. But then, May 17, 1954, not too long after that, they began to notice that, well, maybe this little idiot knows something we don't know, because prior to that, they'd go to the club in Shreveport or wherever and say, we've got the cutest little preacher. He talks about how our little children are going to go to school with little darkies. Isn't that cute? Then after May 17, though, they [thought], wait a minute, maybe he knew something we didn't know or suspected something we didn't know. Even still, I was fairly secure, but then in August, I got the job at the University of Mississippi. I had not been in any close touch with the Southern Regional Council while I was a pastor at **Taylor**, but when I got to the University of Mississippi, I deliberately sought them out when there would be a conference. I remember once **Paul Anthony** was speaking. Paul was about as low on the totem pole with the SRC at that time as you could get, just a youngster, and he was meeting with a group at Jackson State, which was about the only place you could meet interracial. It was unthinkable to have an interracial meeting at the University of Mississippi, but we met at Jackson State and Paul Anthony was there. That was my first close introduction to the SRC, and then after that, I was with them often because I represented a constituency that they didn't have much contact with, the religious community. After I left Ole Miss, I worked for the National Council of Churches. But even when I was at Ole Miss was when we had the Religious Emphasis Week fiasco. No use going into

that because it has all been reported so many times. George Mitchell was still the head of the Southern Regional Council when he came to Cincinnati, and he was pretty much calling the shots. He was a funny man. He said, you've got to go, and some of the New York people who worked for the national YMCA didn't want [Jack] Kershaw to go. They said, what if they kill him? And Mitchell said, they don't kill white people in Mississippi, yet. He's the one who told that funny story about Uncle Remus and things that he couldn't get away with today, you know, stereotypical language. Kershaw, who just died recently and I just talked to his widow not many weeks ago in Louisville, wasn't sure that he should go to Ole Miss to speak at Religious Emphasis Week. He had been on a national television program answering questions on religion and jazz and won a bunch of money, \$32,000, and dropped out and said he was going to give this money. Now, one thing that has never been cleared up in any account... All of the accounts say he said that he was going to give the money to the NAACP. That wasn't what he said. He was giving it to the **Inc. Fund**, which was a totally different organization from the NAACP.

G: I didn't realize that.

C: Yes, but that has never been written. In any account that I've ever read, it still says he gave money to the NAACP. **[The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc?]** was the legal arm of the NAACP and was a totally different charter and everything, and that's where he gave money. But he said, one of my wife's and my favorite charities is the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Somehow, Kershaw knew Mitchell through the Southern Regional Council. The man who was head of the **Southern Region College YMCAs** was headquartered in Atlanta – he, incidentally, was a very conservative fellow – and he did not want Kershaw to go, either. Without boasting, I prevailed that he had to come. Mitchell went along. He said, they don't kill white folks at Mississippi yet, and they may meet you at the border, and probably will, and not let you in, not let you cross the Marshall County line into Lafayette County, but nothing is going to happen to you physically. I was very, very close to the Southern Regional Council because there weren't a lot of resources for neophytes such as I at the time. Mitchell was a legendary figure; the Mitchell family was [legendary]. He didn't last a long time after that, a few years, and then Harold Fleming [another former director of the SRC] was the next one to run the show, and there was some friction between those.

G: Between Fleming and Mitchell?

C: Yeah, between the younger breed and Mitchell. Today, it would be interesting to see him work. I remember one of the first times I was with him. It was before I was working for the National Council of Churches. We were at Tuskegee for some kind of a conference, and it was at night, and we were going to meet in the

gym. We saw this student, a black student, of course, and stopped the car. George Mitchell was driving and he said, hey, girl, where the gymnasium? We were young fearless prophets, liberals, you know, and we were all taken aback. She said, sir? He said, whereabout the gymnasium? He was that kind of guy, I suppose because of the reputation that he and his brother **Clarence Mitchell [had]**. Actually, they were an old Mississippi family.

G: I didn't realize that.

C: Yeah, they came from down around Water Valley. Daddy or Granddaddy \_\_\_\_\_, but I'm pretty sure those boys were raised there. I am not clear on how they got to be the young church liberals that they did, but they did, the whole family. One of the stories I remember was Clarence, George's brother, was getting a haircut in Water Valley and got his shoes shined. When the kid finished shining his shoes, he said, now, you get up there, and I'm going to shine your shoes. He said, you're going to make your living shining shoes, and you don't know how to shine shoes. I'm going to give you a dollar, and it's not worth a dollar, and nobody else [will pay a dollar]. Everybody else is going to give you a nickel or a dime. And, I'm going to teach you. He got down there, you know, spittin' and spent twenty or thirty minutes shining this little black kid's [shoes]. The little black kid was probably terrorized because all the other white people, the farmers around there, were looking and seeing. What was Mitchell doing, shining this little nigger boy's shoes? They were an interesting family.

G: It sounds like it.

C: I had a close relationship with George Mitchell, and then he went off to Scotland and got seriously ill and died.

G: But the nature of the tension between Mitchell and Harold Fleming, was it just sort of different generations?

C: I think so. I had a very high opinion of Mitchell. I remember saying once, and it was **Fred Ralph** who commented. I said, well, you know George Mitchell is a **man**. He said, he's a self-made **man**. That was the first time I realized there was that tension there. Later on, I would go in and George would be sitting in his office with his feet propped up reading a magazine or something and I'd say, what are we going to do about Little Rock? He'd say, ask the young Turks. They run the show.

G: Do you think he was okay with that?

C: No, I don't think he was okay with that. I think he was deeply hurt by it, but we never talked about it. But later I could tell, and I understand. God knows Harold Fleming and Fred Ralph and Paul Anthony... I never heard Paul say anything

negative about George, but the others, I did. And I understand that they were different generations. Here was Harold just back from commanding black troops in the Second World War and a graduate of Harvard and all this and Mitchell using stereotypical language about, hey girl, where the gymnasium? Harold knew better than that.

G: Can you characterize the post-war SRC, maybe before the Brown decision? At the time, it would have been seen as very progressive, and then there were folks who came in and thought that they didn't do enough at the time that they maybe could have. What do you think was their role in that post-war time period?

C: The ones who thought it should be doing more?

G: Yes.

C: I was agreeing with them, though I was not very active at that time. I think they were sort of preparing the way. They were sort of the John the Baptists of what was to come. Some of the people, like what was his name, the newspaper editor up in Virginia?

G: **[Virinius] Dabney?**

C: Some people just quit. They pulled out and said, we're not going to go this far. We're not talking about integrating the races. Did I tell you my grandson's story?

G: About mercy?

C: Mercy, yes. They were talking about mercy. They really weren't talking about justice. Maybe a form of justice. Then it was the **Ms. Tillys** and people like that who were really serious. I got to know her fairly well because the women who were most active in integrating schools, like the Little Rock example, were church women. That was Ms. Tilly's role; she was in charge of church women, particularly Methodist church women.

G: For the SRC?

C: Right. She worked for the SRC. Of course, there was always a party at 5:00 on Friday afternoon, and they'd always have to wait till Ms. Tilly [was gone] because she would read you the riot act if she found any liquor in anybody's office. So, they would have to wait till Ms. Tilly, who was a saintly woman, [to leave]. Before she died, she reverted back. She would say nigger. Then, it really bothered the young church that she formerly would read the riot act to if she heard them using that word or saw them with a bottle of bourbon in their office. She was a holy woman, but some of that old South rearing came back. Maybe it will to all of us. I don't know. Maybe the woman was right getting after me.

G: I don't think so.

C: I don't think so, either.

G: How would you characterize the way the SRC responded to emerging mass black activism in the mid 1950s and into the 1960s?

C: Harold Fleming was a very wise man. He was a little bit cautious, but he knew when it was time to get to know Martin Luther King, Jr. and when it was not time. Now, I can't tell you the exact sequence of events there, but I do remember that there was a time when a part of the not mythology but actuality when there was some party or something and Harold was a part of it, and then he got to know [Dr. King?]. But he never saw the Southern Regional Council's role the same as the role of SCLC. We were pals, and he called me his pastor and all that, but he thought sometimes that I was in a little too deep. Like when Little Rock was going on, I would call every half-hour and report on what was going on. Always, the inference was, where are you guys, why aren't you here? And he didn't see it as their role to be there.

G: What did he see their role as being?

C: Propaganda. He would say, I'm a propagandist, and he meant it in the finest sense, as a writer and a news...

G: Education.

C: Yeah. He was very close to John [N.] Popham, who was then covering the South for the *New York Times*. [He] came into that through Ralph [Waldo Emerson] McGill [editor and publisher of the *Atlanta Constitution*]. That's how he haggled to get the job. He was very close to Popham and McGill and the man in Little Rock – they are all dead now – Harry [S.] Ashmore [editor of the *Charlotte News* and later the *Arkansas Gazette*] and all of that fraternity. They were real characters and played a role, and they knew what their role was. Harold would say, my role is not to get out there and get my head bashed in. What's that going to accomplish?

G: Do you think that there was any unease that African-Americans had ceased the initiative and were taking action?

C: No, I don't think that at all. They approved of that, but they saw their role as getting the news out to Johnny Popham and later after Johnny [the guy] who took Johnny's place [Claude F. Sitton]. Anyway, their dispatchers were getting the news all over the world, not just in the White House. Harold was very close to a number of people in the legislature. He and Gary \_\_\_\_\_, the senator from Wisconsin, had commanded black troops together in World War II. They were

friends, and Harold had a lot of friends. Some of this is splashing over from when Harold left SRC and went to the Potomac Institute, where he was a highly efficient propagandist, as he called himself. He said, I'm a propagandist, that's my role. He didn't mean by that gossip, of course, [but] news gathering and getting the news out. They all saw the role of Southern Regional Council as being kind of the leader of [the white liberal]. They never quite – got over is not the term I want to use here, but – quit being kind of the leader of the white liberal. They saw that as being an important role, and I agree that it was an important role, but a role beyond that was absolutely essential. I mean, to stop with, say, the celebrated Birmingham meeting...

G: The one in 1938, you mean?

C: Yeah, and that was a wonderful thing, but if you stop there, what have you done? What have you done without Montgomery? Also, what would you have done without SRC, because they got the word out to an awful lot of people and they interpreted it through the literature and through their contact with the news media people like Harry Ashmore and Johnny Popham and Ralph McGill and had a lot of influence on them. McGill, for a couple of years there, after May 17, McGill didn't do anything on that paper. Now, how much Harold and his association with them had to do with his coming out as being a truly crusading sort of editor, I don't know. **He was** a part of one package in a sense.

G: You mentioned Montgomery. What do you think SRC's take on nonviolent direct action was? Did they encourage it?

C: I think they were sort of baffled by it, to tell you the truth. That's what we all were, black and white, for the most part. There is a lot of that story that I think has not been written right. [Who was] the man who was so active with A. Philip Randolph and who was so active in organizing the Washington March?

G: Baird Rustin?

C: Baird Rustin. A very, very important character in terms of nonviolence becoming [big], because Martin was not a nonviolent cat when he went there. He had the day before, was my understanding, applied or was about to go down and apply for a permit to carry a gun or have a legal pistol in his possession. Another person who worked for the old Fellowship of Reconciliation, a Methodist preacher back East...

G: Was it Reverend Jim Lawson?

C: No.

G: Was it Glenn Smiley?

- C: Glenn Smiley, exactly. Glenn Smiley was, I think, one of the...unsung heroes is probably not the term, but he was very influential with King and in talking with him because FOR [Fellowship of Reconciliation] was a nonviolent organization, and the truth is, [for] the black southerner, not the group, that wasn't part of.... It took some doing. I remember one time Kelly Miller Smith at a meeting. Kelly was the leader of the Nashville part of the movement. Things had gotten pretty tough, and we had a meeting early in the morning, six or seven o'clock in the morning, and he said, we are talking strategy here, now. White people make all the razors. We don't make them. We've got some, and we talk about using them, but they can be taken away from us because we can't make them. White people make all the guns. White people make all the dynamite. He went on. White people have all the laws and so on. This is all we've got, is to go in there and sit down with our mouths shut. This is all we've got. I forgot what your question was, but that's the answer.
- G: If nonviolence initially baffled folks at the SRC, did they come to appreciate it as a strategy?
- C: Oh, I think so. I think without question they came to [the conclusion] that we are colleagues, that we are brothers, maybe step-brothers, but we are in this thing together, but we have different roles to play, and we are not going to get in the way of your role. We will get the news out and all of the other things. By the same token, they would expect, now, don't y'all get in our way, either; try to appreciate that we're not against you just because we're not out there marching with you.
- G: Now, on the other side of the coin, what, if anything, did SRC do to try to get southern whites to comply with the Brown decision? Do you know?
- C: It was all that, you know, the literature that they put out, the conferences that they were holding, and the state organizations on human relations, the Alabama Council on Human Relations being one of the more successful ones with **Bob Hughes** and **Father \_\_\_\_\_** from over at Spring Hill College who was president of the Alabama Council. So, yeah, I think they were very supportive of all that.
- G: Were they vilified by folks who resisted integration?
- C: Who, the state council?
- G: The SRC.
- C: Oh, yes. Maybe not as much as they should have been sometimes.
- G: Really?

- C: Well, I mean, maybe they weren't as tough as they should have been to get the criticism, but there was criticism. The truth was that the person on the street really knew very little about the Southern Regional Council. This was a movement of not of the intellectuals but of the sophisticates. The press knew about it. The university community knew about it.
- G: We were talking about whether or not SRC had been as tough as they might have been in trying to encourage whites not **towards** integration. You talked about how they weren't really known by the man on the street. They were more sort of known in the university circles. Do you think there was a difference between the SRC Atlanta-based organization and the state councils? Were the state councils more activist?
- C: In some places. In Alabama, in Mississippi, somewhat in Tennessee. We had old Baxton Bryant here and **Kay Jones**. Georgia, of course, with what's her name, just died recently. She was about 100 years old. I can't remember her name now, but she headed the Georgia Council on Human Relations for a long time.
- G: Do you know anything about the Voter Education Project that the SRC worked with?
- C: Well, I don't know how much I'm expected to know about it, but I know when it started and how it started.
- G: How did it start?
- C: **Harold Fleming said Les Dunbar said John Lewis was Les Dunbar's ninety-six theses** that he nailed on the cathedral door. Here you are, here I stand, God help me, I can do no other. Of course, Field Foundation funded it and went broke. Not just on that, but it gave away.... I guess it was the only one of those big foundations that I know of that said it's immoral to just keep all this money for gratuity, that it should be given away. I thought Les was right in that. That was what kicked off VEP [Voter Education Project], and then **Vernon Jordan**, of course, came to run it. He came over an intellectual. I believe I have this right. Lewis headed it up first out of New York, but then Vernon came to Atlanta and ran it from there.
- G: And there was a gentleman named Wiley Branton, I think.
- C: Wiley Branton was a lawyer from Pine Bluff who handled the Little Rock **Nine** case. That's how I knew him. He would come here and work. My office was in the same building as the Tennessee Council on Human Relations. I'll never forget, once the Florence Crittenton Home, do you know what that was?
- G: No.

- C: Florence Crittenton Home – I suppose they don't exist any longer – was where pregnant, unmarried girls and women went to have their babies. Maybe somebody from Colorado would come to Nashville, and, well, where is Sue Ellen? Well, Sue Ellen is in a very fashionable school in Nashville or wherever, while Sue Ellen was [really] up there in this Florence Crittenton Home. I gave work to six or eight of them doing jobs there. Wiley was up there doing his law work. Incidentally, he claims that \_\_\_\_\_ was his great-granddaddy, and it's probably true. Anyway, these young girls in their various states of pregnancy were trotting up and down the hall going back and forth to the bathroom. Finally, Wiley came into my room and said, what do these girls do? I said, they do clerical work here for the National Council of Churches, and we pay them a little salary. He shook his head. He couldn't figure out who they were and said, why are they all so big around the middle? But he was a great guy. Did he actually run the VEP for awhile?
- G: I think he worked with it.
- C: I knew he worked with it.
- G: I don't think he ran it. I think he was kind of a field person.
- C: Yeah, I think so. Vernon was running it then, I think.
- G: What were some of the obstacles for black voting, and what did VEP do to try to overcome them?
- C: Well, it was what it said, voter education. They would have schools to teach in places where you had to interpret the Constitution or memorize something. They would teach people that, but they also encouraged them to try to register. It was really SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], of course, who made it what it became. Later, some of the SNCC kids would look down their nose at VEP, you know, and call John Lewis an Uncle Tom. Well, if John Lewis was an Uncle Tom, then we needed more of them in this country. Vernon may [have been] an Uncle Tom, but he was a damn rich Uncle Tom. He was our rich uncle.
- G: Do you know how they decided which projects they were going to fund through VEP?
- C: I don't. I think they sort of recruited, like they would come to someone like Baxton Bryant here in Tennessee and say, we want to start a chapter in the two counties in west Tennessee. Would you help us introduce [it] to the people? But I really don't know for sure.
- G: Do you think that there were any pitfalls in terms of the SRC being the conduit for the money? That because they were the power brokers, per se, of the money,

did that cause any problems?

C: Well, by then, there were some problems more, I think, imagined. The young Turks, and I don't mean that as a derogatory word, but the young blacks with SNCC coming along and so on were beginning [to feel], this Uncle Tomism, you know, and we don't really need that. People like Vernon knew that it was needed, and John Lewis knew that it was needed. I think SRC handled it pretty well in that they just didn't pay much attention to this kind of criticism. They went on with, this is what we do, and we're not going to turn the world upside down. We're not front line soldiers, we're support troops, [and] that's all we've ever claimed to be.

G: And that's an important role.

C: That's an important role, and we're going to go on playing it.

G: How would you sort of summarize the philosophy and role of the SRC as the civil rights movement gained momentum in the 1960s?

C: I think it was still important what Fleming called the propaganda role. When you say SRC, to me, you're going beyond this little two or three rooms up there in that church on **Alban Avenue**. You're going to Washington, and you're going to the Field Foundation, and you're going to the people who came through there and then went on. By the time Harold got to Washington and set up the Potomoc Institute, with this, too, the Southern Regional Council, he had cultivated a vast order of people he knew from foundations, like the couple who gave all their money away and then died in an airplane crash.

G: I know who you are talking about, but I can't remember the name.

C: Anyway, he knew all of these people, you know, who did for a time give millions and millions of money to the SNCC element. I don't mean that derogatory, but the young Turks who really didn't know how to account for this money very often, who were, I understand, a little loose with their bookkeeping. I understand that because, my God, I would have been, too. I don't even have a checkbook. I don't know anything about paying bills and stuff.

G: There are some scholars who have argued that after a period of relative impotency that a revitalized SRC was kind of a response to this dynamic grassroots effort. How do you respond to the idea that SRC was reactive rather than proactive?

C: I don't because I was a, I suppose for lack of a better term, a dropout by the time that happened. I was not [a part of that]. I had moved on. I had my own little thing and my own magazine to edit and my own books to write. I wasn't hostile

toward it, and I saw this revitalization and actually received the Lillian Smith prize. I think **[I was]** the first or second one to get that prize when that process had already begun. So, I was not hostile toward them, but I simply wasn't close enough to be any judge of anything. I didn't go to the meetings.

G: Do you know what the relationship was between SRC and, say, SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] and SNCC?

C: Kissing cousins, I would say. I don't think they were close. Again, when you say SNCC, you say a number of different things because there were different elements, different periods. I mean, you're talking about John Lewis, and you're talking about Stokely Carmichael [Black Power advocate], two individuals who couldn't have been more dissimilar.

G: Would SRC have had a different relationship with those two different incarnations of SNCC?

C: I think so.

G: Maybe more favorable with John Lewis.

C: I think so.

G: ...and not so much with Stokely Carmichael. In fact, maybe Stokely Carmichael wouldn't have wanted to have a relationship the SRC.

C: Yeah, well, he said [things to that effect].

G: What about with the Kennedy administration? Do you know if they had a good relationship with the Kennedys?

C: It was a friendly relationship, but, again, I think it was, you know, this is a very complex problem and it's going to take many individuals and many organizations playing many different roles. The wisdom that the organization attracted over the years is appalling to me. I don't know of a stupid person they ever had sitting in that chair. But I think Fleming was there at its heyday and its development, and then the Lincolnesque Dunbar comes along who had but different skills, not different interests but different skills. What was your question?

G: What was the SRC's relationship with the Kennedys?

C: It was friendly. **King [Kennedy?]** was a gentle man. I am surprised **Jose Williams** would even speak to him, you know, because he was gentle. That was the way he had grown up. He'd gone to the finest schools and courted the finest women, or so I've been told. Who knows about that. It was a genial relationship,

but, again, people like Harold would say, this is a very complex problem, and it's going to take many different individuals and many different organizations playing different roles [to solve it]. We're not going down the same path, but we're aiming in the same direction.

G: What about their African-American membership? Did they work to try to increase that? Did they see that as a problem that they didn't have very many African-Americans on the staff?

C: I don't know. I know it was certainly true that there weren't very many blacks on the staff initially, although the treasurer, as I recall, was a black woman. It was a fairly important position in an organization that is using foundation and public funds. Ruth Alexander. Is she still around?

G: I don't know.

C: A very important person. You ought to find her if you can. There was another woman who ran for the school board and, I think, was elected to the school board. A middle aged woman, a dark-skinned woman. Ruth was tall and comely. My guess is that this was not something that Harold and Fred and Paul and Les thought [about]. I think Les would think more about it, that this would lead to Harold Fleming's take that here is this thesis nailed into the \_\_\_\_\_ door, and then went on to giving all the money away. This is not fair as long as there are poor blacks when he was thinking about it, when we were sitting on all this money.

G: I have a couple of general summing-up questions left. How would you summarize the strengths and the weaknesses of the SRC as you were involved with it?

C: That's a difficult question because it attracted people like myself who were what would now be called moderate, who weren't ready to go to Jerusalem. Now, there were those who tried to nudge us to the cross, but we didn't deserve it. We weren't worth their nails and boards. But again, playing an important role, I think. I run into people all the time, [and] I don't mean this to be boasting, but who say, you got me into all of this. I read such and such, and I had never thought about anything like that. There was that role. You know, I didn't choose it. I didn't say, this is what I'm going to do, that I'm going to be heroic but chicken-shit. You know, I'm not going to go to the cross on this, because I almost did go to the cross. I didn't know it at the time, but this fella told me just as he was dying that, I was with them, [and] I wasn't going to let them kill you, but we were going to have an understanding. We'd take you down there to \_\_\_\_\_ and beat the hell out of you. I knew all of them, even if they were wearing masks. I grew up with them, went to school with them, cousins [with] most of them, no doubt. But that was just something that just happened down here. I didn't choose that role. I'm not

sure anyone chose it. **Fred** \_\_\_\_\_, maybe.

G: But it was a support for you? You felt like it was supportive of your work? The Southern Regional Council?

C: Oh, certainly. By all means. They were sort of the conduit. I remember we had this thing which was important called **Southern Interagency Conference, SIC**, and they convened it. It was their's, and they convened it, and they presided. We were to elect a chairman, but Harold or Paul or someone would always be sitting at our right hand to say, here is what we are going to do on this. We are not going to let.... What was the organization that was considered too far to the left? SCEF [Southern Conference Educational Fund]. She is still living. I saw her not long ago.

G: Anne Braden?

C: Anne. I remember once it came to a vote whether or not SCEF would be allowed to be a part of SIC, and it was voted down. What was the old white student group which was kicked out of SNCC?

G: SSOC, Southern Student Organizing Committee?

C: Yeah. They had a meeting here and gave a little honor or something to Anne Braden and to me, and I apologized to her publicly. I said, I was a part of the ones saying, well, after old **Carl**, who knows? So much smoke, so much **violence**. We were all scared of Communists, you know. We weren't scared of them, but we were scared of being charred with that brush because it was the height of the [Senator Joseph] McCarthy era. I said I was wrong, and I was wrong, and I apologized.

G: SRC, I think, gave Anne Braden an award later, into the 1980s, maybe?

C: I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised.

G: I think **Steve Suits**....

C: That would have been in the last several years.

G: Yeah, as an attempt to try to rescind their earlier actions.

C: I never knew. I think Carl and Anne might very well have been Communists. So what? I couldn't care less now, but at the time, I didn't want anybody thinking I was a Communist, although that's what they thought down there in \_\_\_\_\_, that **Will Davis** is a Communist. I would say, I'm not a Communist, I'm a Christian, and that's two different religions. I didn't have anything particularly

against Communists. I didn't know any, didn't know what they were. I just knew that they didn't vote for [U. S. President] Franklin [D.] Roosevelt [1933-1945], although most of them probably did.

G: Why do you suppose that historians misunderstand or misconstrue the role of the Southern Regional Council?

C: Historians? I didn't know they did, but I probably just **tore it up**.

G: Well, the SRC has been relatively unacknowledged.

C: I think that's true, but **at the admission of the pricks** . . . They don't understand. They weren't around. It's easy to study these things and look back and say, well, had I been calling the decision there, I would have suggested that perhaps [U. S. President Dwight D.] Eisenhower [1953-1961] come down and meet with Harold Fleming. What nonsense. Part of the academy, I guess, but it's not our greatest hope. Don't ask me what our greatest hope is.

G: I was just about to ask you what the greatest hope is.

C: I don't know. It does not yet appear. It's down the road somewhere, but I don't think it's the academy.

G: Is there anything else that I should have asked you about the Southern Regional Council that I didn't?

C: I don't think so.

G: Last chance to immortalize yourself on this Sony tape.

C: There's a lot of mythology about who did what and when in the Southern Regional Council. It's only human because we all want to cast ourselves in a romantic light or a strong light or whatever. But I wasn't a leader in the movement, and I always knew that. I never claimed to be. There really were no white leaders in the movement in the sense of front line troops. There are still a number around who claim to have been, but they weren't. They wouldn't have been living if they had been.

G: Well, thank you for your time.