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-October 2013
O: It wasn’t just that you picked cotton—of course, the slaves, the African Americans were the main labor force—and it wasn’t just who sold the cotton, you had to distribute it, you had to finance it, you had to ship it. So, you can imagine railroads, banks, cotton compresses, cotton gins, all grew up around the cotton agricultural crop. That was the main economic source of the Delta for about a hundred and fifty years, in the early 1800s through the 1940s. After the end of World War II, cotton started going down for a number of different reasons: one is that India and other nations began producing larger numbers of more and more cotton, lower prices. So, now, the biggest cash crop here is catfish. Catfish farms, you'll see all up and down the Delta. If anyone sees anything they want to take a picture of, please just stop us and we’ll—I guess it looks like Daniel’s already . . .

Marna Weston: That was a good stand up you had before I missed it, so I just decided to bring out the recorder.

O: [Laughter] Okay, the recorder. Last year, when we were here, was this one of the streets they had the big parade?

W: It was Second Street.

Amanda Noll: I think it was this one, coming up.

W: A left at the traffic signal.

N: Yeah.

O: Good morning.
Unidentified man: Good morning, how you doing? N: I'm glad you turned that on. I thought, when we were in the car, turn the recorder on, tell them the whole history. [Laughter]

W: Nothing like gnat sound. You know what we should do, we should take another picture of the group over—

Unidentified female: Another kind of group photo over there again.

W: Yeah, at the mural. How's that?

Deborah Hendrix: [Laughter] We're at the back again.

W: Oh, yeah. We're going to catch up, catching up to Paul and the telling of the tale.

O: You can see that a lot of—and you would see this if you went to Itta Bena or to Greenville, or even to Greenwood. Greenwood is a larger town. But basically, people are kind of struggling to find kind of an economic engine for a lot of these towns, up and down. Not just on this side of the Mississippi Delta, but on the other side of the Arkansas Delta. The problem in the Delta has always been overconcentration of wealth, so you have—in the late nineteenth century, you have these gigantic British companies that came in and bought up hundreds of thousands of acres of land. You had U.S. senators, like Senator Terry Eastland, who actually owned an entire county. I mean, he owned the whole county. He could always count on being reelected because he controlled the votes. He was a rabid racist, but he didn’t have to worry about black voting, because African Americans could not vote. So, the Delta always had—you had a
situation of top-down control and a lack of democracy, and so, this is one of the reasons why, when the civil rights movement, so much emphasis was placed on voting rights. A lot of people felt that voting—that education was a huge problem, civic representation, but unless you got the right to vote, you would never be able to change the system. It was interesting: in Mississippi, you had two U.S. white senators who really would get reelected year after year after year, and the number of votes they actually would garner for themselves were really small, because very few people voted. African Americans could not vote, and very few white folks even bothered to vote, because the power was so concentrated here. But, anyway, kind of the aftermath now is, again, a lot of these towns really trying to find a viable economic engine, if you will. So, when the B.B. King Museum opened last summer, there was a lot of excitement here about the potential that it had to bring more jobs and things to the town. This is at that—the mural is where we took our picture last year. I don’t know if we want to take one this year, or—

H: Yeah, sure.

W: Sure. The stand-up took place at the corner of Front Street and Second Street in downtown Indianola. This is August 19, 2009. Is this something you would describe?

O: Yeah, well, this was happening, I remember, right around the time of the first Freedom Summer reunion. They were talking about—they’ve always talked about downtown revitalization. There’s actually more businesses
open here now downtown than there were in the early [19]90s, when I first started coming out here. So, there is—there has been some positive impact from the Blues Museum, and I guess the catfish industry, as well. I’m trying to see if we know any of the folks on any of these particular plaques . . . well, B. B. King.

W: Of course. The plaques that Paul was speaking about are at a flag pole in downtown Indianola, with three lions, and then bronze plaques indicating generous contributions to the 1997 to 2007 revitalization campaign. We’re now walking toward the B.B. King mural. Mural. Not mural—mural.

O: . . . which now has kudzu growing on it.

Unidentified female: Is that kudzu?

O: Or, is that another kind of creeping plant? Yeah, that definitely was not there last year. Anyway, when we were here last year, they had these gigantic—like what were they, birthday cards or something? Like big posters? And we all signed them, and there was, like, to B.B. King, right or something like that. Okay, so we’re going—

H: Okay. [Inaudible 07:47] Indianola picture. Here we go, one, two, three. All right.

O: All right. So we have to get one with you in it, Deborah.

H: Okay.

Unidentified female: One, two, three. Got it.

O: All right.

Khambria Clarke: So, is the parade, is that only because of the museum, or . . . ?
O: Mainly it was the opening of the museum. They had the big—Deborah, Daniel, we were talking about, Kambria asked about the parade last year. I mean, the parade was really designed to try to raise the profile of the museum and the opening. Now, some of y’all last year were very astute observers, because one of the things you noticed and pointed out often was that there was clearly a divide between the folks coming in from outside the Delta, who were coming in big limousines and very wealthy folks, and you even mentioned—some of you—how you talked to a few of the outside folks and you asked them questions like, well, where are you staying at? A lot of them were staying like in Memphis or Jackson. In other words, they were staying in these kind of posher hotels and coming in for the day, having the expensive dinner and then just kind of leaving. That traditionally, of course, had been the problem, is that you have people who come in for a day, maybe spent some money and just kind of leave. Any time you talk about building an economy based on tourism, that’s really the kind of problem.

H: You want to have them stay and spend the money there.

O: Yes, it tends to be a very unstable situation. Yeah, but that—they had the parades, and everyone came out with their stores. It was kind of like a, what did they call that? When I was growing up, they used to call that a—every month they had a sidewalk shopper day, or something. People—

W: A lot of local vendors. There were a lot of bands, as well. Everybody had their own little blues quartet.
High school bands came out and played, yeah.

The high schools came out and then did a parade, that was really nice, too.

Yeah. You know, what historians are doing now—I mean, this year is the lead up to the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, or SNCC. Some of you are reading Charles Payne’s book, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom*, or John Dittmer’s *Local People*. So, what historians are trying to figure out is, why did the movement start in places like Indianola, or down the road in Greenwood, or Itta Bena, where Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer was from? What was it about these very small towns that nurtured a sense of organization and possibility? Some scholars have said, well, it was because of the kind of strength of the black church in some of these areas. Other people have talked about the influence of women’s civic organizations. My sense is, because this is the fiftieth anniversary of SNCC, we’re on the verge of kind of a revolution of historiography, if you will. There’s going to be brand new interpretations of why the civil rights movement started here, how it progressed, but then, also, how it changed over time. Tomorrow, we’ll be meeting Hasan Jeffries and Emilye Crosby. Now, Emilye wrote her book—she’s a prof up at Suny Geneseo—she wrote a book about women and the movement in the Delta, specifically. You’ll love her, she’s really cool. Hasan just finished his book on the civil rights movement in Alabama, in Lowndes County. They’re giving us new interpretations of the movement.
So, even—you’ll hear connections that they make to Charles Payne’s work, for example, but there’s also newer ideas coming out about who was in the movement. I mean, that’s another big question. Because now, of course, it’s just like anything—any big huge event—it’s like everyone will say, oh, I was involved in the movement, but then when you talk to other people behind the scenes, they’ll say, well, so and so says they were in the movement, but really, they were just kind of on the sidelines. But, what did it mean to be in the movement? I mean, that’s another big question. Did you have to go out on a march with a picket sign? Did you have to protest in front of the county courthouse for the right to vote? That’s kind of a—in some ways, it’s kind of a top-down, dramatic interpretation of what it means to be in a movement. One of the sites we’ll go to next is a Freedom School. The Freedom Schools were organized by SNCC all up and down the Delta, and many of them were targets of violence. I’ll talk about that, I guess, when we get to the Freedom School. I wonder if you could walk there from here. It’s not that far. Do you have the—

W:  You mean, down at the end of the block and across the tracks? Actually, it is kind of a—

O:  Oh, it is?

W:  Yeah.

O:  So, should we get back in the van and—okay, we’ll get back in the van and then drive down there.
W: Do you have any thoughts on the collaborators? I know we were talking about the White Citizens’ Council. A lot of information has come out through the Sovereignty Commission documents now about blacks who were paid by the White Citizens’ Council to—

O: Yeah. You had, I mean, the so-called collaborators, people who would spy. It’s kind of like the situation with the labor movement, right? Any time you start an organizing campaign, you’ll find people who actually end up, are spies, or giving information to folks. I mean, that’s also another point of controversy now, because people back then—in the early [19]60s—knew that there were these people who were referred to as stooges or so-called Uncle Toms, and that. But then, I’ve interviewed people who’ve said, look. I was identified as a sellout, as a person who refused to be a part of the movement. That really wasn’t true. What people don’t understand is, I was a schoolteacher and I had to be very careful, because if my students were seen participating in this stuff, I’d be fired. What I was trying to do is, teach my kids how to live lives of dignity; I was teaching them about the Constitution, I was teaching them about the rights of citizenship, but I couldn’t be out on the street. Even though people now look at me as a collaborator back in the day, I really wasn’t. So, I mean, that’s what I mean, we’re trying to figure out, what did it mean to be in the movement? Not everyone—or, I mean, if you’re a sharecropper and at a big plantation. One day, you have a picket sign in your hand, the next day you’re going to be on the side of the road without a job.
W: Because the person that owned the land would throw you off the property.

O: They would throw you off the property. So, again, often sometimes the activists would look at folks on the plantations and they would see kind of static people who are stuck, uneducated, maybe unwilling to take chances, but then, when you talked again to some of the civil rights activists thirty or forty years later, they came to realize, it’s like, we didn’t really risk as much in terms of our economic livelihood. We were college students. You know? We came down here for one summer, and we weren’t going to face any repercussions when we went back home. But the Sovereignty Commission papers are just—I mean, we’re just starting to, there’s a lot of things that have not been opened yet that will open.

W: You were talking about the sense of what it was like to be in a Delta town where bombing had taken place. Walking out of Indianola now, what are your thoughts about that type of understanding or empathy or reflection?

O: Well, my thought is that this is an incredibly historically significant place. Every time I come back here, there’s a mixture of feelings. When you’re on a site where people are bombed or attacked because they were trying to live, claim the rights of citizenship, it’s always a really moving experience. To me, going to the post office gives me chills, because that’s a story that—even after the end of the civil rights movement was a submerged story. Very few people wanted to talk about it. Now that you have a plaque there, I mean, that’s not everything, but it’s something. It’s a level of progress.
W: Yeah, it's weird. These streets are kind of close. I can't imagine bombs going off on the street.

H: Yeah. Do you know of a specific place that was bombed?

O: Yeah, we'll go to two or three of them. There was a bombing that occurred downtown, a lawyer's office was bombed right in the middle of the street. Actually—I don't know what side of the street it was on—in *Mississippi Burning*, there's a reenactment of the bombing. The next time you pick up the film and you look at the opening sequence, you'll recognize this area, yeah.

W: How long have you been coming to Indianola?


H: [Laughter]

W: Okay, there's no address, so—yeah, it just says, left on Roosevelt.

O: Okay, so we'll look out for a marker. Yeah, one of the things in the Delta is, you always wave to people when you're going by. It's very—what's the term?

W: Rude.

O: Not civility, but it's—

H: It's neighborly.

O: Neighborly, yeah.

H: It's what you do.
W: It’s certainly rude not to, especially when you’re looking at the people, you’re looking at them riding by and you don’t wave or anything.

[Laughter]

O: Yeah. Yeah, I don’t remember how far the marker is. I know it’s on Roosevelt. So just, everyone, be on the lookout for a marker. There’ll be a—

H: We saw one. [Inaudible 19:08]

W: Oh, here’s the center.

O: Okay. Yeah, here’s the Head Start center. We’ll actually stop in here.

W: This is where the dinner with John Lewis was last year, and—

O: Yeah.

W: That’s the B.B. King. Also, this is where we met with Constance and heard the testimony from one of the children that went to the Drew school system, May Beth’s children.

O: So, this is actually one of the outcomes, if you will, of the civil rights movement. One of the main themes was how to equalize American education. A lot of people don’t realize this, but Head Start is actually one of the contributions of the civil rights movement. The idea behind Head Start, at its inception, was to try—again—to provide a supplementary, more equal education for young students, young kids who did not come from privileged backgrounds. Now, this Head Start center is actually one of the oldest in the country. It was one of the early ones that was built, and it’s still an operating center, but it’s also like—it became, over time, like a
community center. So, people have meetings and all sorts of activities here for kids, like summer camps and stuff. The B.B. King park is new. I'm pretty sure that wasn't here when I first started coming out here in the [19]90s. Of course, B.B. King gives a lot of money to the local area, because he's from this area. Marna was saying, last year when our team came out, we had the big dinner—the civil rights reunion dinner—here. Congressman John Lewis spoke. There are some dramatic reanctments of the movements, where you had young kids—some of the Head Start kids, actually—performed scenes from the civil rights movement. So, it was a really fun night.

W: It's ironic that Head Start was used as kind of a divisional tool as well. Dittmer talks about how, because black nationalists were more interested in teaching kids some things that, overall, they didn't want in the curriculum, that funding for—I think it was the CDGM, or CDGM, was held up. There were competing organizations for the grant money and it kind of turned into the downfall of the movement, at the end, was over Head Start.

O: That's one of his arguments, and I'm not sure that argument is going to stand the test of time. It definitely created divisions over curriculum, but that's definitely true. One of the things I was going to say about Head Start is, when I was a kid, a lot of kids in our neighborhood did Head Start programs. I don't remember actually doing them, but it was politically—when I was a kid, it was still something that was seen, by many people, as something they were trying to stop. You know? Now, I don't think many
politicians attack Head Start as much as they used to. But, when I was a kid, it was like, Head Start is socialist. It’s a bad thing. You know, we need to wipe it out. So it always was politically contested, definitely.

Danielle Navarette: You said—at the last part we were at, you said, why here?

One of the feelings I got from the Payne book, when they were talking about Greenwood and Sam Block organizing in Greenwood, was that things were so destitute. Like, people were starving, didn’t have shelter, there were kids running around with no shoes, no clothes, in the freezing cold weather, and they were able to get them food, along with registering them to vote. You know, I was just thinking, I got the idea that, when things are so bad and then someone comes in to help you that you have that resolve, like this is something that I’m going to—then, a lot of people had the resolve to really stand up and say, no more.

W: Well, there were fewer jobs. There was domestic work, but there’s a period of time in the [19]60s where cotton production had fallen to the point where it was going mechanical, so the heavy physical labor of African Americans that had been used since slavery time was no longer necessarily needed. The people that owned the land can make the choice of deciding, well, do I want to employ people on my land or do I want to use these machines? By using the machines, that put people in the situation where they’re no longer to make money. Especially if you were political or said things, that was the easy thing to do, just don’t hire you.
N: They also—I’m sorry, one other thing—was not just that they didn’t have the job, but maybe the White Citizens’ Council, I’m not sure if that was the group, that they stopped the federal food supply—

W: Distribution of food, yeah.

O: Yeah. Basically, one of the things keeping Mississippi and Southern agriculture going were these subsidies at different levels, right? One of the subsidies was, essentially, before food stamps, the government would provide agricultural workers with food subsidies during the non-harvest part of the year. This relieved the plantation owners from having to feed the workforce, right? So, yeah, you’re talking about this attempt to retaliate against you if you’re involved in the movement. I think one of the things that both of y’all are pointing out, one of the ingenious things that people learn in the movement, was that it’s one thing to try to get people to mobilize around abstract political concepts, like freedom of democracy. You’ve got to have a bread and butter component to it, too. I think that’s what both of you are pointing to. Education was at the foundation, and parents were huge in the movement. That’s why—if you look at these old pictures of people who do end up getting involved in these things, many of them are in their fifties, sixties, and older, because the civil rights movement was all about this notion of equal education and economic justice. So, these were not abstract things; these were things that people lived, every day, in the Delta. I think that was one of the keys to the movement.
 Especially the food distribution, because the United States Department of Agriculture, local boards were determining who got the food. That became a question of elections, because they were trying to do the Freedom Vote elections, so they were teaching people how to vote, and a lot of that was blocked. They also tried to carry out an election to control the boards locally. But, the way the formula worked out, even if you’ve won a bunch of votes in one county, you had to win a bunch of votes in other counties in order to get representation on the board. The effort was defeated, but it was another example of getting people to organize. One of the sad implications was, when they lost that vote, now those boards were more aware of who was active. That had implications on the distribution of food from the federal government through local boards.

Keep on going on Roosevelt to find that marker, okay?

Sure. Is anybody going to be in the center? Stacey and company?

Yeah, I’m guessing there’s probably things going on there. What is the marker on Roosevelt? Is it the trials marker, or—

Here are you are, sir.

Yeah.

Congressman Benny Thompson was here last time, as well, with John Lewis.

Yeah. He, Thompson is here—he was here when I was here in 2004, too.

Head Start center.

This was one of the first ones ever?
O: The ones in the Delta were the first, in the first cohort of Head Start buildings. I don’t know which one has pride of place of being the first. I don’t think this is the first, it’s one of the earlier ones.

W: Is this the end of Roosevelt, or does Roosevelt go further?

O: I don’t know. You know, I think we might have passed that marker.

W: Or maybe if we could turn the other way and find—

H: I saw a marker. I think it said Irene on it.

O: Oh, you saw a marker? Where?

H: Back—

Candice Ellis: It’s kind of, like, when we first started driving.

H: Yeah.

O: Okay.

H: It’s back on the main drag, we have to turn right.

Amanda Noll: It’s in front of a house, right? Yeah, I think that was the house that, an older woman lived there and she opened it up to let people, like the SNCC people, in. I think that place was firebombed, too.

O: Yeah, the Irene Magruder house. Okay, that was back on—

W: Front Street.

H: You go right.

O: Bow, or By, or something.

H: You know, if you go right at the stop sign, or—I mean, where did we turn at?
O: We'll hit that on the way back. Yeah, that's the Magruder house. Early in the sixties there used to be a store here. The Freedom School [inaudible 29:34].

O: Here, the Freedom School is . . . oh, the Freedom School is on Jefferson, so we'll hit that on the way back. We'll stop at the Magruder house and then the Freedom School site. Freedom School's on Jefferson.

W: Okay.

O: We go down here a little ways, now.

W: On Roosevelt? Looking for Jefferson, is Jefferson on this map?

O: Well, first, let's see what you find on the Giles store. The Giles—Alice Giles, I interviewed her in 1995. Her and her husband opened her house to the civil rights workers. They provided them with a physical place to actually stay at. Yeah, we must have passed it. We'll turn around.

W: Well, actually I see the—well, I see where Fansonia is. It's not on Fansonia, right? It's on Roosevelt?

O: Roosevelt, yeah.

W: Okay, well, we're on Roosevelt, so . . . check it out.

O: What's that?

W: The camera turns on when you go in reverse. It gives you a reverse view. Checking the tires around—

O: Oh, that's a trip.

W: I can't believe you guys had all this technology, and you just like—

H: Hoarding it? [Laughter]
W: Yeah, you weren’t telling us anything. It’s like, oh, your quaint little van. Yeah, get back in it. No wonder you didn’t come back. No wonder, we lost you. Say, oh, go visit for a little while and come back. Nope, see you.

O: So, the thing about the civil rights movement—and especially with SNCC, because so many of the activists from SNCC were from parts of Mississippi, but a lot of times they would be college students who went to a historically black college, like maybe Mississippi Valley, which we passed by on the way down here. Often, they were outsiders to these communities. So, finding a physical base that you could actually stay in was absolutely vital. If you could not find that, then you really couldn’t stay in a community. So, people like Alice Giles and her husband—I can’t remember her husband’s name now, but it was in the article—they had a store called the Pennysaver Store. It was just a small, kind of general store situation. They would allow the activists to actually live and also meet in their store, in the back of the store area. When the White Citizens’ Council found out about this, they bombed the store. They also bombed the Magruder residence, which is another place that civil rights activists were housed at. There was one night where there were four of five places bombed almost simultaneously. One of them was Giles, the other was Magruder, and there were three other sites. That’s how you had a sense that these were not random bombings. These were very well-planned, very strategic, designed to terrorize the local community into stopping any kind of civil rights activity. So, let’s—somewhere on Roosevelt will be the
Giles marker. This, another distinctive marker that you know you’re in a black community in the Deep South is the number of churches. You’ll see a church on many, many street corners; not just one church, but in this one, one, two three.

DN: So, in other words, there’s no main black church here? Like even earlier than the civil rights movement, was there one central one?

O: No, there were just a lot of different types, different denominations. You’ll see Church of Christ, you’ll see Holiness churches, you’ll see a lot of Baptist churches. You’ll see Methodist, but not any one, like single—generally, in African American communities in the South, the Baptist congregations will be the largest congregations, but not always. Sometimes, it’s the Methodists. Even within the black Methodist traditions, there are different tendencies. There’s African Methodist Episcopal Church, which traces its history back to actually the time of the American Revolution.

W: CME.

O: CME, Colored Methodist Episcopal.

W: Missionary Baptist.

O: Okay, so . . .

W: Oh, that’s the end of Roosevelt.

O: No . . . we’re just missing it. So amazing. Okay, so I’m going to go . . . So, this is Cox streets. This is named after the Cox family. Like I said, I don’t know—when I asked, in [19]95 when I was doing interviews, I was told
that the whole Cox family had moved out of here in the early twentieth century. If we see anyone, let’s see if we can get directions. If we can’t find them, we’ll just go back, ask Stacey or something.

W: Oh, they kind of left us on our own for today?

O: What’s that?

W: We’re sort of on our own, on our own today.

O: Yeah, she’s teaching today. See, Valley started back up this week. They’re having their—well, it’s kind of like UF, they’re having orientation and stuff. Okay, so we’re going to go . . . yeah, once we hit that street we came down in downtown, let’s just go ahead and take a left and we’ll hit the Magruder house.

W: That was the street—

O: That was the street? Oh, that’s right, okay, I’m sorry.

Unidentified female III: [inaudible 38:05] predominantly black turnout, or is it like there’s a white, maybe, mixed section, and then African American section, or is kind of—

O: There’s the address. Yeah, it’s kind of—we’re going to park in the shade and then I’ll get out and answer your . . .

W: How are y’all today? So, could you restate your question, please?

Unidentified female III: I was just wondering if Indianola is, at this point, predominantly black or if there is a white section and a black section, or . . .

H: That’s a good question. With the neighborhoods, kind of . . .
O: The fortieth anniversary of Freedom Summer, this was one of the markers that was actually unveiled during that time. Again, it was really the work of the Sunflower Civil Rights Organization that got the marker installed.

W: Would you care to read the writing?

O: Oh, okay. At this site was the home of Irene Magruder, 1898-1973, who was the first African American in Indianola to open her home to civil rights workers during Freedom Summer in 1964. Their efforts greatly influenced the civil rights movement in Indianola. The house was firebombed and destroyed on May 1, 1965. That was the night I was talking to—May 1, 1965, there was a series of bombings that evening. I think that the Giles' Pennysaver store was bombed that same night, also.

E: The person I interviewed last time, Bright Winn, he was in this house when it was bombed.

O: That’s right. Do you want to tell everyone?

E: He said the bomb actually went through his bedroom window, but he was out in the living room when it happened, so he was able to help get everybody out and help Mrs. Magruder out as well, because she was in there. They basically just had to watch the house being burned down because the fire department wasn’t doing anything.

O: Yeah. When you use the term firebomb—the idea behind a firebomb, there is an explosive percussion impact, but the main goal of a firebomb is to burn something down. So, the house is mainly made out of wood, and the notion—these are kind of like Molotov cocktails. You throw in; they
explode; they catch fire; they have gasoline, or some kind of ignitive fuel.

But, yeah, Bright Winn, really cool guy, too. Where was he from, do you know where he was from?

E: He’s from either San Francisco or somewhere in the California area, and he still lives there.

O: Yeah, he still lives in California, yeah. The folks who came down in Freedom Summer, the stereotype is that a lot of them were from the North or from the West. It turns out that a lot of them were actually from the South. They were going to Southern schools and Southern universities. A lot of UF and FSU students were active in the civil rights movement—not necessarily here, but in Florida. But, what I try to tell students in my courses is that, if you’re a UF student in 1964 and you volunteer to go help Dr. King in St. Augustine during the big campaign in St. Augustine, when you come back to classes, you’re going to face suspension, probation, expulsion. A lot of UF students who actually participated with Dr. King in that St. Augustine campaign were actually either kicked out of school. If they were work-studies, a lot of them lost their work-study status. In other words, the school retaliated against people. Today—this is what I talked about earlier, about how everyone says, hey, I was in the movement back then. But, see, schools like UF are equally culpable for kind of messing with the record, the historical record, if you will. Because a lot of schools will claim, hey, we always were for civil rights, right?

H: Mm-hm.
O: The UF case is definitely—the presidents were publicly opposed to the movement, and they were not very happy with any professor. If you were a professor who got your students involved in movement activities in the 1960s at UF, you lost your job. You were denied tenure. There were a number of high-profile cases that we studied in the seminar, that we did an oral history last spring.

W: Did an interview with Dan Harmeling in February where he talked about that, and then an interview in March, both 2009 with Marshall Jones, down in West Palm Beach, where he talked about the trip to St. Augustine and them being arrested, and the implications. It was only because of the way the judge ruled in their case that they were able to not have the students be suspended. Dan was quite emotional about that. I’m sure you recall that, Deborah.

H: Right.

O: He was a UF student in the 1960s. When his professor came up for tenure, his professor’s name was Marshall Jones, who Marna also interviewed. The president of the University of Florida at that time, J. Wainwright, was sitting as chair of the tenure committee. Basically, all the professors on that tenure committee said, here’s a professor, Marshall Jones, who has great research, a great teaching record, a great service record, let’s give him tenure. So, President Reitz’s response was, okay, I agree. He fits the profile. He’s done a great job as a professor, however—

W: I read his book and he wasn’t impressed. [Laughter]
O: No, no, this is even better—I mean, this gives you a sense of what it was like in the [19]60s, that President Reitz said, all this is true, however, any professor who has a student who, under his guidance, marries a Negro woman, is not qualified to receive tenure at the University of Florida.

H: Wow.

Unidentified female III: So, he was married?

O: No, one of his students, Dan—

E: Harmeling.

O: Was it Dan Harmeling?

W: Dan Harmeling.

O: Yeah, who married an African American woman at the time.

Unidentified female III: He spoke at the—

E: Yes, he was that the—

O: Yeah, Dan spoke at our March 17 event, yeah. He was really emotional, and—

W: But he didn’t speak against the relationship, that’s what the president was saying. He should have mentioned, him not to do that.

O: Yeah. The president was saying that interracial marriage was against our traditions, right? So, on those grounds, he fired Marshall Jones, denied him tenure. That case actually became a national cause celebre, because the American Association of University Professors—which usually was very hands-off on cases like that—actually, to its credit, came to Professor Jones’ defense and actually filed a motion of censure against the
University. The University of Florida was on the AUP censure list for a number of years.

W: The infant United Faculty of Florida also got behind a fought for him.

O: That’s where the faculty decided, hey, we needed to unionize, because you have a president here who talks about freedom of speech and academic freedom, all this stuff, and he fires someone because—I mean, essentially, Professor Jones was fired because he took his students to St. Augustine to work with Dr. King. That was really the thing. But, again, now, our universities—we celebrate Martin Luther King Day and we talk about how everyone was involved and everything like that, but in the Oral History Program at UF, we contain a much more complex record of things. It gives you a sense of what you had to be willing to sacrifice to be part of the movement in the [19]60s. I mean, in the Delta, if you were a sharecropper or a house painter, you risked your job, your livelihood. You could get bombed. It wasn’t likely you were going to get bombed in Gainesville; I mean, there weren’t that many huge acts of violence. However, right down the road in St. Augustine, there were bombings. There were large-scale acts of violence.

E: There were bomb threats in Gainesville.

O: Yes.

E: Because I know, in the Reverend Wright interview that we made a podcast out of, he was talking about getting bomb threats.

O: Yes.
W: There have been bombings in Florida, I mean—

O: Oh, yes.

W: Harry Moore and his wife were killed.

E: I don’t know exactly when that was—

O: 1923.

E: That was before, yeah.

H: Way back.

E: That was way earlier, yeah, I forget when that was.

O: Yeah.

W: 1951, on Christmas night, Harry Moore and his wife in Mims, Florida, were bombed and they both died, him immediately and her nine days later.

O: Yeah, they were assassinated. They were leading a voter registration campaign in Florida in 1951, and he had been warned to stop registering people to vote, and the Klan took them out with the collusion of the police forces. Here, there’s still a lot of anger and concern over the role that the police played, up and down the Delta, in suppressing the civil rights movement, and somehow never finding out who bombed these residential places and churches and stuff. There was a bombing that took place in Alachua County, which we’re actually going to do some research on this fall. There’s a man who’s going to come down, his family was going to this church during the time of the bombing, and it’s going to be like this journey of discovery for us. I didn’t know that this had occurred in Alachua County, but apparently, the church was bombed sometime in the 1960s. But, yeah,
Reverend Wright had to literally flee for his life from St. Augustine. He was one of the people who called in Dr. King, you know, who contacted SCLC and said, we really need you to come down here. St. Augustine was in a situation where its entire government was controlled by the Klan, and it was a real tough spot. So, should we head on down the road, unless there are any questions?

H: White Citizens’ Council in Gainesville, or no?

O: Yeah. Well, I mean, there were actually White Citizens Council chapters in Florida.

H: Okay.

O: Now, in Gainesville proper, I’m not sure. I wouldn’t be surprised, but I know in places like Tampa and Orlando, you had chapters of the Citizens’ Council—even though the heart of the Citizens’ Council chapters were really Mississippi, Alabama, some in Georgia.

W: Okay, leaving the Magruder home.

O: [Inaudible 50:13] We can either see that tomorrow, or . . .

W: The Freedom School marker is at 607 Jefferson Street. Right on Fansonia, left on West Percy, right on Front Street, continue West Girard Avenue, left at Jefferson. So, Girard is a street over.

O: Right, okay. Well, this is Front, right?

W: Okay.

O: Well, actually, we’ll head on down to Clarksdale on the way, we’ll go and see that marker.
W: So we’ll go ahead and head down the road to Clarksdale, to the blues museum. Tomorrow, we’ll try to swing by where the Freedom School marker was. There’s an interview that we have with the woman who was the head of the Freedom Schools, the entire Mississippi Freedom School project, in 1965, [19]66, and her name was Liz Aaronsohn. Daniel, did you transcribe that interview?

E: I had it.

O: Oh, Candice, you did.

E: Yeah.

O: Tell us about that interview.

E: She was mainly just talking about the Freedom Schools, and really, her history with the civil rights movement. She was talking more about how she kind of came and went back to, she left, kind of, to do—oh, what was she doing? She might have done the Peace Corps and then came back to Indianola, but she was talking really more about her involvement in it, not so much the movement itself, I’d say. Then she did speak about the Freedom Schools and stuff like that, and just her kind of homecoming. She got a call from a friend and she said that she had offended a lot of people here, but never really kind of gave any examples about what she did. She said that she kind of was hesitant to come back, and spoke about that for a while. Then she got this call and she came back, and it was like coming home, so it was pretty interesting.
O: Yeah. I mean, the Freedom Schools, this is what I was talking earlier about the new generation of scholarship. When you think about the movement, like we pass by City Hall, you often think about the media, the news media. The cameras would be on City Hall. Lines of people lined up, trying to register to vote, but what was going on behind the scenes? The Freedom Schools were one of these things. The Freedom Schools were really an experiment in democratic education. So, we have a lot of these young college students, like Liz Aaronsohn—or, Liz Fusco at that time—and she comes down. The movement sets up this Freedom School, and the idea is that to try to find out from the kids and from the parents, what kind of education do you need? We know you’re not getting it in the schools. The schools here are profoundly underfunded. So, what kind of education do you actually need? So, that was kind of the idea—how do we get to the hotel back, right or left?

W: . . . left.

O: Now, the Citizens’ Councils saw the Freedom Schools as just as dangerous as the notion of black people actually voting. John 3:16, which is—

W: For God so loved the world that He gave his only son.

O: Gave His only son, yeah.

W: Sunday school. [Laughter]

H: I’ve been there.

O: The question of why they would bomb a Freedom School is, this Freedom School was seen as this potentially revolutionary place, where young
African American kids were actually getting an education—and an equal education, perhaps, for the first time. That was seen as dangerous, because a linchpin of segregation, of course, was to keep the schools unequal, to keep black people undereducated so that they would not be able to qualify for good jobs, for example. But the Freedom Schools were an effort for these young teachers to kind of meet kids and meet parents in the middle in a sense, right, Candice? I mean, do you think, based on that interview?

E: Yeah. It was interesting, too. She was actually talking about Bill Crosby and everything, and how he was almost criticizing the inner city neighborhoods and the people. I guess he came from an inner-city neighborhood as well, and she took offense to that, just because she’s kind of talking about how these people are given no chance to rise above. Even things like ebonics were kind of misconstrued, I guess, in contemporary media as this kind of—this grammatical solaces, when in reality, she’s talking about how it’s just this beautiful language in its own part. So, I guess these Freedom Schools, just giving them a chance to rise above and then just Bill Crosby talking, accusing people of I guess not really doing anything to get themselves out of that situation, when in reality, they’re kind of trapped in it. Yeah, so . . .

O: Yeah, a Freedom School is sometimes the first place where you actually had black history being taught, because it certainly was not being taught in the main public schools. Teachers were not allowed to do it. I interviewed
some African Americans who had been schoolteachers here in the
[19]50s, and they said, if the principal knew that you were teaching the US
Constitution, or teaching any kind of black history, you would be fired
summarily on the spot because they did not want the kids to know
anything about the Constitution. Why wouldn't they want kids to know
about the Constitution?

Unidentified female: Because of equality, and rights—

E: Because students might ask questions, and—

O: They might ask questions, yeah, right. The Freedom School was a place,
it was a space where you would pick up—as a teacher, you’d have a copy
of the Constitution. You’d say, hey, let’s read over the Fourteenth
Amendment. What does this mean to you, what does this mean to us?
What does this mean to your relationship as a white person and mine as a
black person? You know, how does this—so, things like that would
happen in the Freedom Schools that could not happen in the public
schools at that time. That’s why they were seen as being so potentially
revolutionary, almost. I was just going to stop in and get—I have a thing of
Gatorade, I don’t know if you any of you folks wanted to get anything
before we head out. Clarksdale is about a forty-five minute trip.

W: This was Fannie Lou’s hometown.

O: Slow down [inaudible 57:21].

W: True. Center for it in Drew.

O: Fishing—
Dan Simone: Never heard of a fish and cue.

W: This place is significant, but Drew did leave an impression.

O: So, last year, you guys drove all the way down here?

W: Yeah.

O: Wow.

W: Went to Ruleville and went to Drew.

O: Well, that’s right. That’s where the pictures, those pictures came from. For some reason, I just forgot as . . .

W: Well, we got split up and you weren’t there with us.

O: Oh, yeah, because I stayed and did interviews.

W: Mm-hm. Fannie Lou Hamer gravesite and recreational complex, that way.

O: Clyde, where is his name? Clyde Kennard [inaudible 1:00:14] was an African American man who tried to gain admission to the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, where Curtis teaches now. But Mr. Kennard tried to get enrolled in the USM in the [19]50s, and he had all the qualifications; he had really good grades, so they couldn’t really legitimately keep him out of the university. This was where the Citizens’ Council was involved, they actually framed him up on the charge of stealing—well, I think a bag of chicken feed, from a general store or a white farmer or something like that. He ended up in Parchman. But, like what Marna was saying, they put him in Parchman because he was, in a sense, a civil rights activist, trying to get admission to historically white colleges. When he was in Parchman, I think he was in there for two or
three years, he got really sick. There was this national campaign to free
him, because obviously he had been framed up and was in prison
because he was trying to integrate the University of Southern Mississippi.
They finally were able to get him out of prison, or out of Parchman, but he
died very shortly afterwards from whatever sickness he had gotten in
Parchman. But, yeah, you'll hear Margaret Block talk tomorrow about—I
believe her brother Sam may have spent time in Parchman for voter
registration activity. Stacey said this, too. The same thing was that they
were trying to—the state has a right to substitute blues history for black
history.

W: From the struggle, yeah.

O: Because blues is something you can say, well, we all love the blues, and
we've all lived the blues, haven't we? [Laughter] It's like—you think of this
road, twelve miles west, is a road that's disseminated blues musicians
year after year after year, many of whom spent time in Parchman. You get
discharged and would get to ride up this road, and at some point, we'll
come up on the fabled crossroads, but I can't remember—I believe that's
where 49, I could be wrong, but I think it's where 49 intersects with 61.

W: You're talking about the Robert Johnson crossroad?

O: Yeah.

W: You believe that?

O: What's that?
W: Do you believe that, that he sold his soul to the devil at the crossroad at midnight?

O: Well, that’s what his fellow musicians said. It’s a great story.

W: It’s a terrific story.

[Break in recording]

O: Has generated about, I would say, fifty-one percent of what we talk about as being American culture, whether you’re talking about the blues, the jazz, a lot of the religious traditions of country, all coming out of the Mississippi Delta. I mean, the mistake that people often make about the Delta is, you drive around these huge expanses of land and it looks as if it’s always looked that way. You know? It looks as if it’s kind of static. But the Delta is really one of the fastest-moving places in the entire country. You think about the river as a metaphor for that. The Mississippi River is constantly changing its course; it’s constantly trying to break out of its—there’s a constant battle between the Army Corps of the Engineers, trying to keep the river in a certain direction and certain, but it’s always fighting, it’s kind of a constant fight with nature. That’s a—no, that’s a private facility. I was going to say, that’s correction something of America.

W: Correctional Corps of America?

O: Yeah. That’s a private prison.

W: Ever since . . .

O: Born in Clarksdale, 1931. You Send Me, Shame, A Change is Gonna Come, Chain Gang. He would sit outside of Parchman prison and watch
chain gang, people on the chain gang, doing work, and that's how he came up with the song *Chain Gang*. Yeah, he moved to Memphis in the early [19]60s. He was a gospel choir and a lot of the blues musicians would go back and forth between secular and sacred music.

Sarah Eiland: It took the two years? He was born here, but moved to—

O: Moved to Chicago, two or three. But spent a lot of time in Memphis, and that's what [inaudible 01:06:34] is.

W: [inaudible 01:06:41] There's a more extensive biography of Sam Cooke on this side.

H: You get the [inaudible 01:07:09].

W: Oh, yeah. The UPS guy would know everything. Khambria, would you mind narrating?

C: Sure. Sam Cooke, one of America’s most popular and charismatic singing idols, began his career with his brothers Charles and L.C., and sisters Hattie and Mary, in a family gospel group, The Singing Children. Their father, Charles Cook, a preacher and Clarksdale oil mill laborer, brought his wife Annie and the five children to Chicago in 1933. Sam later sang the Highway QC’s and developed a national following on the gospel circuit as a member of the renowned Soulsters. In 1957, he made the controversial move to cross over from religious to secular music, adding an e to his surname to establish a new identity as a rhythm and blues and pop singer. Cooke’s appeal transcended boundaries of race, age, and gender, and his musical sensibilities were equally diverse, ranging from ballads to teenage
dance numbers. He recorded a number of songs in the blues vein, including *Little Red Rooster*, *Somebody Have Mercy*, *Summertime*, *Frankie and Johnny*, *Laughing and Clowning*, and several Charles Brown tunes. Asked to name his favorite singers, in a 1964 interview, Cooke replied, Muddy Water and John Lee Hooker, Louis Armstrong and Pearl Bailey, also have a strong feeling for the blues. According to his brother L.C., Sam also liked B.B. King, Bobby Bland, and Junior Parker.

W: Start here, please.

AN: An avid reader and astute, independent-minded businessman, Cooke was one of the first African American recording artists to establish his own record label and publishing company. He also made civil rights headlines in 1961 when he refused to perform at a segregated concert at Ellis Auditorium in Memphis. Cooke was shot to death at a Los Angeles motel, December 11, 1964, under circumstances that continue to generate controversy. More than 45 years after Cooke's death, his prophetic *A Change Is Gonna Come* was received as an anthem in the new political era where Betty LaBette and John Bon Jovi sang in an inauguration celebration in the country's first African American president, Barack Obama. Although L.C. Cooke never became as famous as Sam, he also made his mark as a vocalist, and in fact crossed over from gospel music before Sam did. L.C. was born in Clarksdale on December 14, 1932. His R&B career began in 1956 as a singer with the Chicago vocal group The Magnificents. The Cooke brothers were the first of the number of noted
performers in the soul music field to have emerged from the Clarksdale area. Other include Charles Wright, leader from the Watts 103rd Street Rhythm Band, famed for Express Yourself and other hits, Sir Mac Rice, composer of Respect Yourself and Mustang Sally, Chicago veteran Otis Clay, Southern soul recording stars OB Buchana, David Brinston and Luther Lackey, the local favorite, Josh “Razorblade” Stewart.

O: Some of them went into jazz, some of them went into blues, some of them went back and forth. Handy was also distinguished by a certain type of piano style, which I cannot for the life for me remember now—oh, he played ragtime music, which enjoyed a renaissance in the [19]70s because of the particular movie called—

W: Ragtime.

O: Ragtime. But there was another one, The Entertainer, which had Robert Redford and who else did it have in it?

W: Jackie Gleason?

O: No.

W: He was in the second one, because there were two.

O: Yeah. Right, right. Well, it had Redford, and it had Paul Newman. The soundtrack to The Entertainer was ragtime music, and so there’s this big renaissance of ragtime in the [19]70s.

W: Dun da dun da dun dun.

O: I bet you the museum is right around here someplace.
W: May I have another narrator, please? Anyone? Just read this little section. It’s nice to have different voices. So I’m asking not because I particularly want to embarrass anyone—

E: [inaudible]

W: Wow, awesome. Thank you.

E: W.C. Handy, father of the blues, composer, and family, lived at this site from 1903 to 1905. In Clarksdale, Handy was influenced by Delta blues, which he collected and later published, as well as his own famous and influential music. 1873—1873 to 1958, W.C. Handy.

W: According to a kiosk at the entry of the Delta Blues Museum, the birthplace of the blues, attributed to Peter R. Aschoff, A-s-c-h-o-f-f. Coming out of the Civil War, the Mississippi Delta was a frontier, the Southern equivalent of the Great Plains and Wild West. Instead of cattle, the Delta’s economy was based on cotton. Cheap, rich land was available. A cash crop could be grown. The Mississippi River brought easy access to a ready market. Investment capital flowed in. The pre-industrial nature of the region’s agriculture, timber industry, and levy camps attracted armies of African American laborers. All of this combined to create the unique geographical and social environment known as the Mississippi Delta’s cotton kingdom. It was this atypical setting which produced what is today called the Delta Blues. The Delta quickly became a region whose population was overwhelmingly black. It was also a segregated society, in which African Americans were closely supervised in the public arena but
were largely ignored in their own communities. Keith Dockery, whose family continues to own Dockery Farms, one of the most famous plantations in the history of the blues, has said that their family paid little attention, if any, to the goings-on in the quarters of their enormous farm. In addition, the Delta was largely isolated from social and artistic trends in the rest of the country. Few people passed through the Delta on their way somewhere else. As a result of this local and national isolation, African Americans in the Delta were free to develop their own music, to a large extent, free of the outside influences felt by African Americans in other parts of the country. Drawing on internal music traditions that included African American and African music aesthetics, rapidly becoming passé elsewhere, and the musics of their Anglo neighbors, the Delta gave rise to a style of blues that is frequently held to be more deeply rooted in the earliest days and culture of the African American experience than blues forms elsewhere in the United States. While it cannot be denied that the social and emotional situation in which black Deltans found themselves also contributed to the development of Delta blues, it was the land itself, a unique geographical setting, at just the right point in time, that provided the initial crucible in which African Americans in the Mississippi Delta created the artistic synthesis known as the blues.

Museum narration (many voices): I don’t think kids, white kids, would think about our reputation, and all because their mother and father were breaking up, you know? Find themselves the dirty blues. Why the dirty blues? I didn’t
know no better. Black folks were dirty? Black folk was dirty. The single worst thing that ever happened in blues was the oversimplification that the blues was totally and completely only about suffering, and represent nothing more than people whining and belly-aching about their problems. What that characterization did was, it made it seem as if the blues was something that ought to be forgotten, that ought to be overcome. Black people’s, in my race, is not getting into the blues, especially the young kids. They went the other way, you know. We got to make them live it some way, you know. I think the blues should forever go on. It’s almost like the less he played—sometimes, when he got older, he’d sit on a stool and he’d finally get up and start dancing around. [inaudible 01:17:54] I had the blues. I had ‘em bad. I couldn’t pay my light bill, I couldn’t pay my rent. I really got the blues, man. But, I mean, today, I can pay my rent and I can pay my light bill, and I still got the blues. I must have been born with them. [inaudible 01:18:09] That’s my religion, blues. Muddy was playing while I was plowing. Mules, that is. I call him, today, the godfather of the blues. My dad always told Muddy, he was going to preach. If you notice, he had a lot of that in his singing. You know, there’s this demon in me, and Muddy—everything, there’s a demon in everyone, just trying to express its way. There’s a dark piece in us all. Muddy had something about him that made the songs themselves [inaudible 01:19:32]. But what he was doing, at the same time, was inventing the rock ‘n roll combo. When Muddy Waters was talking to you, I was planting my feet. When he was talking, it
sounds like he was singing all the time. The most sexy blues man that I’ve ever encountered is Muddy, without a doubt. He’s bad, man. I think about it now and I get kind of trembly. I want you tell me, if you can remember, what it was that you made that blues [inaudible 01:20:09]. [Inaudible 01:20:10] in [19]38. Do you remember where you were when you were doing this thing? No, I mean, when you were sitting [inaudible 01:20:26]. Ain’t been mistreated by, just [01:20:31]. Well, I just felt the blues, so I’ll feel it till I die. The sharecropper made a settlement with the landowner at the beginning of the year, and he was furnished a house, he was furnished his food. Most farms had a big commissary on the them. Even farms printed their own money or stamped out their own coins to be used in the commissary in the store. It was sort of like a [inaudible 01:21:08]. We was as [01:21:19] for those was those that was depressed. My grandmother told me, when I first picked up a lot of money, after all my money, she said, now, son, you sinned, playing for the devil. The devil gets it, you know. What would be one, two things: a well-annointed preacher, a well-annointed musician. I couldn’t preach, so nothing left for me to but to grab a guitar. [inaudible 01:21:47] go around to the blues, he’s working for the devil. [Inaudible 01:21:58], but he been playing the blues, you know what I’m saying? Guys like Muddy Waters, you can’t be as great as Muddy Walters and Allen Walt without having another deeper level that has nothing to do with music. It’s based on experiences you have. The blues is more than music; the blues is a legend. It’s a story,
born out of the captivity of slavery, the frustration of newfound freedom. It's a voice in the Southern darkness, complaining about the human condition. [inaudible 01:24:12] have another concept of blues music, I suppose, it didn’t all have to be slow. We managed to get our way to America, and actually get to record guys, explaining to the studio. He said, oh, by the way, you might like to meet this guy. That’s Muddy Waters. There’s Muddy in overalls, and he’s whitewashing, and I’ll never forget, it’s the most amazing—Muddy’s great, big, beaming black face, and it’s all splattered with whitewash. I’m looking at my man, right, on the top of this ?? paintbrush, covered in whitewash, and that’s the way I meet Muddy. Yeah, that’s not a true story. That’s kind of Keith’s fantasy. Keith swears that’s what’s true, but first of all, if you knew Muddy Waters, you just know that wasn’t happening, you know? He just wasn’t in there painting the wall. He was always dressed sharp as a tack, he wasn’t about to be getting no paint spots on Stetson shoes or his custom-made suit, you know? The second day, we were unloading our guitars and stuff out of the van, at the studio. Somebody, the owner, said, you boys want a hand? We look down, there’s Muddy Waters. Eric Clapton, the [01:26:03], and all the people who was selling platinum records, but they came back and say, this is not new music. This is Muddy Waters’ music. This is new music to the white kids, as well, because they hadn’t really—they didn’t even know about it, and they’d say, where can we get this music? Just down the road there. Just go across the river and it’s there, you know? We had to come
across the ocean. You just have to go across the river. They’re all, like, surprised.

[Film repeats]

Museum narration: At that particular time, I don’t think kids, white kids, would think about our reputation, and all because their mother and father were breaking up, you know? Find themselves the dirty blues. Why the dirty blues? I didn’t know no better. Black folks were dirty? Black folk was dirty. The single worst thing that ever happened in blues was the oversimplification that the blues was totally and completely only about suffering, and represent nothing more than people whining and belly-aching about their problems. What that characterization did was, it made it seem as if the blues was something that ought to be forgotten, that ought to be overcome. Black people’s, in my race, is not getting into the blues, especially the young kids. They went the other way, you know. We got to make them live it some way, you know. I think the blues should forever go on. It’s almost like the less he played—sometimes, when he got older, he’d sit on a stool and he’d finally get up and start dancing around.

[End of interview]

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