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BERNARD LAFAYETTE INTERVIEW
KING IN THE WILDERNESS
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BERNARD LAFAYETTE

Staff Leader, SCLC

Interviewed by Trey Ellis

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Total Running Time: 2 hours 29 minutes

00:00:04:00 TREY ELLIS:

We'll just begin with just-. Can tell us about meeting Martin Luther King and, you know, first meeting him, first impressions and your relationship with him.

00:00:13:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

The first time I met Martin Luther King was actually in Nashville. I was part of the Nashville Student Movement and we were having our sit-ins and we had been very successful in accomplishing our goals in Nashville and it was basically because we were trained by James Lawson Jr., was a student at Vanderbilt Divinity School and he had specifically decided to come to Nashville to train in nonviolence and specifically for the sit-ins. So, it was not just in general, but that training he gave us was so basic. It was about Martin Luther King; it was about Mahatma Gandhi and he'd put that together in such a way that it really resonated towards our interests and our passion, and we were all concerned about the problem of segregation and discrimination in the South specifically. So, when Martin Luther King arrived to greet us, it was at the gymnasium at Fisk University and after his address while doing his introduction even, actually, he said that he had come to Nashville not to bring inspiration, but to gain inspiration, because he had been observing our movement and we had learned from his Montgomery Movement and we maintained the nonviolent approach, even in the face of violence and that sort of thing, and he was really admiring us. And so, that was my first meeting with Martin Luther King.

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00:02:05:00 That summer of nineteen-sixty, there was a CORE workshop- Congress of Racial Equality- down in Miami, Florida. And they were asking for representatives from the different student movements to come because it was a interracial action workshop- that's what they called it- in Miami. And I was in Tampa, Florida already, so the group in Nashville decided I should go and represent them, and I did. So, I was involved in that workshop, which ended up of us being arrested for sitting in at one of the restaurants there and we ended up in jail for a period of time. Okay? But, during that workshop there was an opportunity during the break and Martin Luther King was there and we had a break and students got ready to go to the beach and they had the towels and bathing suits and they were running off from the hotel to the beach. And I was ready to go and I had passed by the pool and there was Martin Luther King sitting there, in suit, you know, clothes, alone. I looked around 'cause I was wondering whether or not there was somebody he was going to meet with and I waited around and observed and he was still alone. So, I quietly walked over and started talking to him and just the two of us spent almost an hour just talking. So, I got to know him better, but the main thing is he got to know me. So that was our real acquaintance, you might say. So that was my first actual meeting with Martin Luther King.

00:04:03:00 TREY ELLIS:
And was what was your impression of him? You knew about him as the leader. What was your impression when you met him as a human being, as a man. Was he more serious? Less serious? Jokey? How was he in those early days of the movement?

00:04:17:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:
Well, one of the things that we observed, as Martin Luther King was not just simply a leader as such. There was something very special about Martin Luther King and it remained until the very day that he died, and that was he was down to earth and even though he was very, you know, involved with all sorts of accolades and that kind of thing, etcetera, and he'd met with a lot of important people and he was a orator, you

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know, par none. And so- but you never find that Martin Luther King was acting, you know, pompous or anything like that. He was always down to earth. And when you were alone with him, he was very cordial and very accommodating. And he used to tell jokes, and in fact, when I worked for him- and I'm leaping forward now- he was the one that was assigned to sit in the front seat of the car when we had to drive late at night to different rural areas. And his job was to tell jokes and keep the driver awake, okay, so he was a very good joke teller. And he would mimic preachers and stuff like that. He could really whoop if he wanted to, you know, and almost did in some cases. I remember seeing him one time when he put his finger in his ear after the Selma March, we marched in Montgomery, you know, those steps, you know, he put his finger in his ear and he started to whoop a little bit. So, he was capable of doing that, but he reserved that quite a bit, only in, you know, private moments that he did.

00:06:34:00 But he was very special and he was- there were some other interesting things about Martin Luther King, that you never forgot for a moment that you were in the presence of somebody who was very special. And coming from the theological basis, I would say that, yeah, Martin Luther King had some qualities about him that would be tantamount to sainthood or something, but he didn't wear that on his shoulders at all. I remember once he walked into the office there on Auburn Avenue, when we were there, and as he walked towards his office, which was behind the boardroom, he accidentally kicked the leg of a chair and he said, "Excuse me." So, he didn't hesitate, in other words, if he thought he had, you know, made a mistake or something like that yeah. So- I would say that...there was something else about Martin Luther King that some people might question, but I would put it on the form of his passion. Like for example, when he walked down the streets from his house to the office, it was only a couple of blocks, and he would encounter a lot of the people on the streets who were street people and who didn't have a lot of, you know, resources to take care of themselves. Martin Luther King would pass out dollar bills to them. He would stop and talk to them. So he didn't distance himself from people who were impoverished and they felt comfortable with him and he was- treat them as any other human being, but he knew that they had needs, and that's what his life was committed to- trying to

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help them have a better life. That's all that Martin Luther King was interested in- helping others have a better life. So wasn't just concerned about poor people, now. He was concerned about people who had problems, you know, poor people are not the only ones who have problems. Their problems are different, okay, but Martin Luther King wanted people who had resources who had a problem sharing those resources- that could be a problem, not feeling comfortable sharing resources. So he was concerned about that as well. So when you think about Martin Luther King in a holistic way, alright, he was just as much with them as he was for the very impoverished.

00:09:46:00 TREY ELLIS:

Do you remember any of those jokes that he used to tell in the car?

BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

Um...

TREY ELLIS:

Or impressions or anything else that...

00:09:54:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

Well, Martin Luther King had a way of mimicking people. Not in a derogatory way, but just simply replicating some of their things. So, the sermons, for example, that a lot of the ministers preached when they were whooping and that sort of thing, etcetera, he would, you know, do that. And so, I remember one time he said to me when I was travelling to Boston a lot, he said- I was dating my wife at that time, before we got married, and Martin Luther King said, "I notice you go to Boston a lot on the weekends," he said, "I didn't know we had a movement in Boston." I said, "I'm getting ready to start one Doctor King." So- I don't even know, he suspected that I was, you know, had some particular interest or involvement, yes. So, that's the kind of thing that he would do.

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00:11:05:00 TREY ELLIS:
You said Doctor King did a great impersonation of a kind of more fiery Baptist preacher who would do the kind of whooping. Can you sort of back us into that- what his style of preaching normally was and how he'd do an impersonation and maybe even give us a little bit of what that kind of whooping- what that whoop might sound like.

BERNARD LAFAYETTE:
[WHOOPING SOUNDS]

TREY ELLIS:
That's great. How about Johnson, could he do an impersonation of President Johnson?

00:11:36:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:
Yes, he did. Yes, he would do impersonations of different kinds of people, etcetera. Now one of his favorite ministers he would love to preach was C.L. Franklin. This was Aretha Franklin's father. And I remember once- he would listen every night, Sunday night, because Aretha Franklin's father had a radio program that would do a repeat of his morning sermons, so all the other ministers could, you know, hear his sermons that night as well. So, I remember one time, Martin Luther King said- and this was a case where he was listening to the program, and it was Martin Luther King's sermon, and he was speaking at that- on the radio program and Martin Luther King said, "I don't remember doing that sermon at, you know, C.L. Franklin's Church." He said, "I don't remember it," but he was listening to it and it was, you know, on that program, and he was wondering whether it was recorded at some other place and it was played on that radio at night. But they gave every impression that that was the sermon that was given that morning.

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00:13:03:00 And what do you know, it was Bernard Lee, who had mimicked Martin Luther King's voice so well until Martin Luther King did not recognize that it was not his voice. And we didn't know what Bernard Lee's voice was like until about three months after Martin Luther King passed. He went back to his own voice, but he had listened to Martin Luther King, he was so close to Martin Luther King- the closest person to him in terms of travel and the many miles he went with him and every place. And I used to sometimes- I give Bernard Lee relief by having him come back to Atlanta with the suitcase and the clothing and send another person for another three days, because Martin Luther King just continued. Sometimes he didn't take round trip tickets- he just went from one place to another. But he would wear out the people who would travel with him because he had so much energy. Yes, I admit, I tried to catch Martin Luther King asleep one time. We were at a hotel up in New York and he was standing at the window fully dressed, looking out the window in New York. I was on the couch, asleep, trying to stay awake, and no. And then when I finally woke up the next morning, I jumped up real early because I wanted to catch Martin Luther King asleep- he was already dressed. He had already shaved. He was waiting. He had so much energy, we could not believe it that he would wear all of us out physically, and we were much younger.

00:14:54:00 TREY ELLIS:
Just going back for a second, if he ever did mimic Johnson, could you say about Johnson or the people that he might have impersonated, because I know that he, you know, they had this intense relationship, he and the president then.

00:15:11:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:
Martin Luther King used to mimic a lot of people and one was President Johnson, when he would talk to him and he would go into President Johnson's voice and he would actually repeat the words and that kind of thing, etcetera. So, he was really good at that and so he wasn't always aware that Martin Luther King was very intense. But you know, he had certain kind of skills that were a little different and

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unusual, as well. Martin Luther King could have been an actor, for that matter, okay, or a comedian. So, he had a lot of different talents there and they were very- he was very skillful at those things, yes.

00:15:58:00 TREY ELLIS:

Can you talk about his- his leadership style? How was he as a leader? You said he was down-to-earth. How did he get all of you to give so much of themselves for him and his cause?

00:16:12:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

When you encountered Martin Luther King, you realized you had, number one, someone who was sincere. He was not interested in being the leader. Actually, now, this is something very important. Martin Luther King was not interested in being the leader. He gave leadership as an example, but only as much as necessary. If you look at what he did, he was not always starting things; he was not always on the front line; he was not- but he was supportive. He did not get arrested on the Freedom Rides. But he supported the leadership and made it possible for us to survive, particularly in that church in Montgomery, Alabama. It was Martin Luther King that made it sure, okay, we got out safely. And that was the- we were trapped in this church in Montgomery, First Baptist Church, and surrounded by a mob, burning cars and breaking down windows and stuff like that, etcetera. Martin Luther King was trying to get the federal government to intervene, send in some federal marshals or federal troops. We were right there in Montgomery where there was a base. And Martin Luther King stood up in the pulpit and he said, "I want some, I got a very important task and I want a few people who are really committed to nonviolence and who are sure about their nonviolence, 'cause I got a very important, you know, task for you."

00:18:11:00

So, everybody didn't volunteer, not all the ministers, just a few people. And he had gotten word that some cab drivers who had- were mobilizing at a service station not too far from the church, and they had their guns. and they were coming in and they were going to start shooting the people in the mob to rescue those of us who were in

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the church, since, you know, there was no protection for us. And when Martin Luther King got this word, he then decided he was going to go and meet with them, but he wanted to take some other people with him. I was on the steps outside when the group marched. Now, none of us freedom riders went because our focus was on the freedom rides. We had to finish that job, you know. So, these are mainly, well, they were all men and they were dressed in suits and ties. Most of them were preachers, not all.

00:19:15:00 They walked through that mob and two-by-two lined up behind each other and they- I didn't think I would see them alive again, just thought that that would be it. I didn't know what they were doing' til they got back. But they went and they were able to reach those cab drivers. And when I say black cab drivers, there were a lot of black cab drivers because of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. There were about twenty-seven black cab companies in Montgomery, some of them only have, you know, a couple, three cabs, but companies. And he was able to dissuade them from coming with guns to rescue us. But then he walked back through that mob. That was my greatest surprise, that he was able to walk back through that mob. And he had the confidence and the courage and the audacity, okay, to keep those, you know, cab drivers from coming to rescue us. Some had family members in the church, you know, but Martin Luther King was always very confident in whatever he did and he was determined 'cause he never gave up and he had faith. And when he got back in he- well, he was able to make the announcement also that the government had declared martial law and that we would be, you know, protected. That was characteristic of Martin Luther king's personality, of giving- showing people, you know, leadership. And that's the main thing I want to emphasize, that he was a leader of leaders, so he was an example for leaders,

00:21:28:00 Another example would be the nineteen sixty-three March on Washington, that came out of the Birmingham Campaign, but it was a way of bringing together a large number of people to show our government that they were ready for change. It was not just the people in Birmingham. While we focused on Birmingham, we always, okay, had a larger vision. All of the movements had the name of the city where it was

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mounted, but it was not restricted to that particular community. It was global. It was local action, global focus. And when I say global, I do mean not just the country, you know, U.S., it was all over. So, Martin Luther King gave that example. At first, there was some hesitation, I would say mildly, about some of the leaders getting involved in- the leaders of other larger organizations- getting involved in the March on Washington, and Martin Luther King was convinced that that's what we needed to do. And even when they were opposed to it, or had some questions about it, and they had legitimate reasons why it was high risk for large numbers of people coming from everywhere, marching on Washington. It could have been totally undisciplined. Either there could have been some agent provocateurs. You took a high risk in doing that, but even those leaders, who initially did not support it, eventually did come in and support that and Martin Luther King did not reject them because they didn't support it in the beginning.

TREY ELLIS:
Right.

00:23:34:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:
And he made sure they had places on the platform and participated in that- so that's the kind of leadership. Okay? He was aware- he had the ability to mobilize leadership, and that's why they selected him and they depended on him. And the other thing is, there were just no comparison between his ability to deliver a message, and what he was saying was not words, because a lot of people didn't understand his multi-syllable words. So that's the other thing that people got to understand about Martin Luther King, it was his intonation more than anything else. They remember some shared quotes from Martin Luther King, but the thing that moved people more than anything else is that Martin Luther King had the movement within him. And when he spoke, that's why he was able to move others and get them also to have the movement in them. And it was the intonation and his ability to, to get people in tune with the cause.

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00:24:55:00 TREY ELLIS:

Can we talk a little bit about the nonviolence and how nonviolence is misunderstood and how you've carried this banner of nonviolence and the workshops and how hard that message is for people to internalize?

00:25:14:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

Well, the whole issue of nonviolence is, is it varies, and that's important for people to understand, that there's non-violence with the hyphen, which is really an adjective: "non-violence," that is without violence, the absence of violence. Okay? And that is a way that people might interpret nonviolence. And the whole concept with Martin Luther King was advocating was the same as Mahatma Gandhi, and that was a noun, that nonviolence is a name of a philosophy or a system of thought and also a way of life. So, Martin Luther King embodied nonviolence in his approach to dealing with issues. And one of the things that he realized in his goal, was to bring about a peaceful reconciliation and not just resolution. Sometimes we talk about peaceful resolutions, or nonviolent resolution, which means that you separate the conflicted parties and then you don't have that conflict between the parties. But the conflict is not going away if it's still embedded in each of the parties; they're not just engaged with each other. So, reconciliation is the goal rather than just simply having resolution.

00:27:03:00

The concept that we advocate with Kingian nonviolence is one that Martin Luther King arrived from many different sources. Gandhi was one source, but Thoreau was another source, and even Hegel, and that's one of the things that Martin Luther King embraced as he searched for himself- the meaning of truth, what is truth. So from a theological point of view, Martin Luther King wanted to- for himself, continue to strive towards an ideal society and for Martin Luther King it was the Beloved Community. Every great philosopher has what we call a Utopia and Plato's, you know, Utopia was the Republic, for example, and others were the Kingdom of God. So, for Martin Luther King, it was the Beloved Community and that's he strived

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towards. And the thing that was important, which people don't realize, is that Martin Luther King drew from many different sources and one of the sources actually was the military training. Martin Luther King himself did not have military training, but he was open to look at what other people had learned. Without the use of violence, then it became very effective in using different approaches. One approach is this: that no revolution, and this is according to Napoleon, no revolution has ever been won without splitting the army of your opponent. In the Selma movement, when Martin Luther King marched across that bridge on that second time when the marchers were turned back, then there was a second march, Martin Luther King went and confronted the, the state troopers and also the county sheriff and all the rest of them. And this was when Jimmy Lee Jackson was killed, and that march took place, the state troopers killed him.

00:29:39:00 So, the whole march had to do with going to the state government, which was housed in the capitol there in Montgomery, Alabama, that's why the march went to Montgomery, Alabama, because of all the marches prior to that went to the county courthouse where people were registered to vote. So, when the federal government put an injunction on the march, Martin Luther King himself decided that he would not violate the injunction. See, the first march that went to across violated the injunction- that was the county, okay, and the state, but Martin Luther King decided not to violate Judge Johnson, Frank Johnson's injunction, and the reason why he didn't is because he was appealing to the federal government to give him the protection so the marchers could go to Montgomery. See as a goal, and as a penultimate goal, the goal was go to Montgomery, but the penultimate goal was to get the state government, all right, out of the way so they could march, and the only way you can do that was to get the federal government to bring in federal troops to protect you from the state troops. That is splitting the army. Because if you notice in the riots, when the county government, the city government couldn't handle the riots then they brought in the state, then they brought in federal troops, and then the riots were over. Okay, when Fort Bragg came in, it was over. So that way they reinforce, okay, the army. In Selma, the army was split because the Federal troops were brought

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in to protect us from the state troopers, not to reinforce them, and this is in Alabama, okay, so that was a military technique.

00:31:54:00 TREY ELLIS:

I also wanted to talk to you a little bit, or actually a lot about the works today. I know you've been talking, you know, how does nonviolence work today? What would King think about the Women's March in this post-Trump world? I know you've marched with the Occupy movement. This sort of how does this nonviolence that you learn with Doctor King translate to activism today?

00:32:21:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

The nonviolence is not confined to any historical period. So, nonviolence today is very effective as well. Some people say, "Well, it won't work," and my approach is that it won't work unless, you know, how to work it. So, age has nothing to do with effectiveness. It's a matter of being able to use those techniques and use those skills and you can accomplish the same goals, and that's what Martin Luther King laid down- that's why it was universal. It was not confined to any particular area of the country or any country, but it was- the effectiveness, it had to do with one single thing and that was no revolution could ever be won or basic changes unless you were able to win the majority. So, when you talk about today, okay, we have a majority in our House and Senate- we have one political party, but that party, is not united. You're able to win the majority of all of the people involved.

00:33:46:00 When we think of the action that Martin Luther King took back in the sixties and that sort of thing, you got to realize that you were able to win the majority of whites, okay? And that's in the Congress and that's how you were able to get the bills passed. You never had a majority of blacks on the Supreme Court or the Congress, okay, but they were able to get those bills passed to make some significant changes, and the same thing is true today. And so, when the Women's March took place and is taking place, that is the thing that's going to make the difference, when people come to recognize the fact that this nonviolent approach, okay, can be used to do that, but

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you've got to win the majority. And the same thing with the young people, and you don't win the majority by being violent. People are not going to risk their lives in those kind of situations, but if you're nonviolent- look at the number of people who gave their lives for the cause and they were many different colors and come from different, many cultures. In Selma, Alabama, more white people were killed in that movement than blacks- one black, four whites. Okay? So, my point is, Martin Luther King gave us a pattern and he gave us an example and he was able to set the pace, but also the formula as well, and the lack of training is the key thing, and we working on that. We work in Ferguson, and we have worked in other places. In Chicago right now, we got people who are being trained in nonviolence. We got people who are being trained in Baltimore, Maryland, and we got people who are being trained in many places up in the Northeast. We're getting ready to set up a center there in Seattle, Washington.

00:36:04:00 So, the important thing is that it's part of a system where you train. Like for example, we've trained five hundred police officers in Montgomery, Alabama, in how to manage, you know, their thing- So even the riots that took place, people say they were race riots- no, no. They were police and community, where they were- that's where the riot took place. People never went over to the, the white community and started a riot and burning down white folks' homes and turning their cars over and burning them, no. None of the people who have been described as racist have been targeted for assassination. So, therefore, it's more like how policemen handle incidents, like in Chicago. I was there. There was a black policeman who hit some boy on the head who had, who had turned on a fire hydrant after the police had told him not to- that's how the riots started in Chicago. I was there. It was a black policeman and black children. So, in terms of what Martin Luther King has offered, it's an ideal example that can be replicated and get the same results.

00:37:33:00 TREY ELLIS:
I guess we'll move right to Chicago and you were up in Chicago and you were one of the people that convinced King to come to Chicago, and the idea of this movement

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from the South turning into, as you said, this global movement, but first it went from the South to a Northern United States movement and King- you know, we've seen that footage of how, how, you know, the fair housing Cicero and the violence there that you confronted in the North. Talk about how that came about and why was Chicago sort of the next stage in the evolution of this nonviolent revolution?

00:38:16:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

The Chicago movement had its beginning a long time in the making because of the strength of the labor unions there and you had large numbers of civil rights organizations, like the Urban League and the NAACP, and they had formed a coalition. In fact, it was called CCCO, Coordinating Council of Community Organization and Al Raby, who was head of the teacher's union, was the coordinator, or chair for that group. And there was always a thought that the movement would move north in the urban communities, and they thought that would be a lot more challenging because of the, the attitude of many of the people who had moved north and they had moved north from the South. Like for example, when you mention Chicago, you had a large number of people from Mississippi in Chicago because after the war, people started migration north and they went due north. Like those on the East Coast went up to Philadelphia and New Jersey and, you know, New York and other places, and those in Alabama went straight up to Detroit, okay, and places like that. So, they had that- St. Louis and other places all the way up the line. And those from Mississippi, okay, went to Chicago, straight up the line, due north.

00:40:12:00 So, what was interesting is that many of the people in Chicago were familiar with the freedom songs and they were familiar with the...the attitudes that they had vacated in the North and that kind of thing. Now, I was working at that point with the American Friends Service Committee, Quakers, because they wanted to start an urban affairs program up north and they had not had one before so they were looking for nonviolence to be, you know, employed there in Chicago. So, they asked me to- if I would go and be the director of the first Urban Affairs Program. And I thought that would be great. I finished my work, laying the groundwork for Selma Movement and

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it was on the way. Some people don't know that some of the marshals on the Selma March from Selma to Montgomery, some of the marshals were Vice Lords from the Chicago gang on the West Side of Chicago because I trained them in nonviolence, getting them prepared for the Chicago movement. Okay? LaMama Coy [*phonetic*] was the one in the Selma March with the American flag and the beret backwards. He was the leader of the Vice Lords. What I didn't know when I first went to Chicago, that the Vice Lords are actually consider themselves assistants to the Lord- Vice Lords. So, it was a very interesting and curious kind of thing, 'cause they were very, you know, much of a violent gang. But when we trained them in nonviolence, it was our advantage to have groups that were already organized to be marshals so we wouldn't have to supervise the marshals, we only trained the leadership. That was our approach. And the Selma March was like the boot camp. Okay? So, they would get a real serious experience before they came north, so they'd gone south.

00:42:41:00

So, when Martin Luther King decided to come to Chicago, it was three basic reasons. The first reason was that Jim Bevel, who was Director of Direct Action for SCLC was there, and the second reason was that I was there. Okay? And the third was reason was because you had some black elected officials already in Chicago and there was a pattern that we could see, so some work had already been done, laid out in Chicago. All the communities were separated by ethnic groups and that we already had a movement going in the suburban community about open housing, so Martin Luther King, all he to do was the same thing he did like in Selma- stepped in and help with the leadership. He didn't become the leader, I mean, maybe the people around the country and the media thought that he was the leader, but he was like the coordinator of the leaders. He never tried to do it by himself, he always galvanized local leadership and inspired them and gave them the courage. He didn't necessarily go there and stay and become the day by day leader as such. So that was his pattern. So same thing happened in Chicago. He did get an apartment there and stayed, you know, for a while, but that was not a permanent, you know, residence as such, but he gave inspiration to Al Raby and the others. Bill Berry was over there at the Urban League, for example.

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TREY ELLIS:

Can you talk about that- his stay with his family in the Lawndale projects?

00:44:35:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

Uh, yes. It was just absolutely stunning to some of the people in the community that Martin Luther King had an apartment there in Lawndale and they got- they would just hang around waiting for him to, you know, come downstairs, you know, so he could see him, and that kind of thing. And he had his family there, as well. That was an important statement that was made for him to take up, you know, temporary residence there in the Lawndale area because he was identifying with the poor people. He was bringing the attention of the nation, in particularly the elected officials and others to the problems that existed in their community. So that identity helped them to focus on that particular problem. So, but the people themselves, they just really, so enamored of Martin Luther King to be able to see him- they didn't think he was the kind of person he could talk to. And I've talked to some of the gang members, of course, who are around and he would invite them in, sit down and talk to people, and really understand their problems and that kind of thing. So he wanted to get not just, you know, some information, he wanted to be able to get the feeling. What was it like to be in the situation? And he wanted to catch the spirit of the people and by his presence he inspired them. See, if Martin Luther King cares that much about us, then it made them feel, well honestly, that they were worthwhile as well. And so his presence meant a lot, and when he spoke, he spoke not from those people, but "we," because he came to identify with them.

TREY ELLIS:

Was it hard on his family to live in such conditions?

00:46:49:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

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I've talked to them about that and the answer is that they were very much, you know, in keeping with what Martin Luther King was about. Yes, they were proud to be with their father- with their father. When I say "with," I mean not just in terms of the flesh, you know, and presence, but being part of a cause and being with him in the cause. Many times, they couldn't be with their father and at many years and days, you know, when they had to talk to him on the phone, or sometimes they watched him on the television, but they didn't spend a lot of time with their father. Now, the quality of time they did spend, you know, at home, so he made it them at home with him in Lawndale. So, they were still at home and in the cause.

00:47:54:00 TREY ELLIS:

The kind of hate he saw in Chicago was like, he talked about it was worse, the white hatred and violence then, he described it as worse than anything he'd seen in the South. Can you talk about that?

00:48:10:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

Yes. When- the situation in Chicago was one where they called it "blockbusting" and that is that the neighborhoods changed, but only geographically one block at a time and the real estate agents controlled the movement of people, the buying and selling of homes and stuff like that. We're talking about homes now, rather than apartment buildings. That's another part of the slum that's different, but homes. And in Marquette Park, for example, where you had whites and they had blockbusting, it meant that each block would change. The concept then was that the neighborhood value of the homes, for example, would go down when blacks moved in, but in the process, it was a contrary. Yes, the whites who were selling their homes, if they didn't move fast enough, the real estate agents would devalue their homes and they wouldn't get as much if they didn't move when they wanted them to move. But when the blacks moved in, the price of the house went up, so they had a really interesting kind of up and down situation where the real estate agents made the money. And then

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you had to get other things like trucks to move. Home moving: that was another thing, etcetera.

00:49:50:00 And so that's why the whites were upset, because of the economic impact that it had on them with blacks moving in and that made it literally impossible because they had absolutely no control over their homes anymore. And many times, people had lived in their homes all their lives. Unfortunately, in some cases, there were white widows and, you know, they had- well, they are single and they didn't want to lose their home. The home was paid for, but they were like forced to move. And one block at a time meant that you saw the blacks in your neighborhood and so you had to make- and the longer you stayed, the less value your home had for sale. So, they were just absolutely mortified with-

00:50:52:00 So, when we had marches, our marches were to the real estate offices, because they're the ones that were involved in managing this discrimination. Like if a black wanted to move further into neighborhood, they would tell him there's no homes available. Only had one block at a time. And so those marches generated that kind of uproar on the part of blacks who marched, and there were whites who supported the marchers as well. But then there were the whites who lived in the neighborhood and it was a matter of time when their home was going to be, okay, in jeopardy, which effects your life. Your home effects your life. So they were out there and I know what Martin Luther King meant because I was there also. I was there when he was hit on the head with a brick, for example.

00:51:45:00 TREY ELLIS:
Can you tell us, can you walk us through what it felt like, that day of the marching in Cicero and the cars being burned and the tension in the air? Can you sort of paint that picture?

00:51:54:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:
Yes. In fact, it was a Sunday and people were dressed in their Sunday clothes, so to speak, and there were women who had children on their hips and they were outraged

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and it was just a mob scene that you have never had before, and even the Chicago policemen could not control that- the outrage that you saw that came in the faces of these people. And that's I think what Martin Luther King was talking about. He never saw such vicious, I mean, terror on their faces and that kind of thing. They just were out there- people had their- in high heel shoes, you know, and they were throwing things. Anything they could find, they would throw at people, and they'd try to slap people with their purse even, swinging pocket books. And that's one of the things they were- they had fire crackers that they were throwing at us and we didn't know whether they were gunshots or whatever, so we always tried to duck when we heard that noise. And then they threw bricks- and it was hard to find bricks- they found some. And so, I remember coming on those marches and at many times prepared for anything- you had to be ready. We had our marshals, so we were organized and that kind of thing, etcetera. And our marshals were gang members, yes. And so, we were just amazed that that happened. We had not expected that, I have to tell you. That was not our expectation. We all were prepared for it, whatever would come down, but it was well beyond what we anticipated.

00:54:07:00 TREY ELLIS:
What was his mood after seeing such hatred and how difficult it would be to integrate Chicago.

00:54:16:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:
Well, I have to first say that on a personal level, Martin Luther King used to chuckle about being hit on the head with that brick. And of all the people, he is the one that got hit, you know, they weren't- I don't know who they were throwing at- but that sort of thing. But, Martin Luther King was certainly not happy or pleased with the kind of outburst of violence that occurred, but he realized that we had to face that in spite of the situation, because we had many marches where Martin Luther King was not on the march. He couldn't be there every time we marched, but on occasion when he was there, there's no question that people blamed him for, you know, the

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challenges that they had to face, you know. But... you had a situation where at once- now, Martin Luther King was not fanatical. For example, there was one area there that's next to Marquette and those places called Cicero, and I remember a discussion that was going on among some of the other members of the Coordinating Council or Community Organizations such as Al Raby and... there was... Bill Berry of the Urban League, and there was some from the labor movement as well. And they were talking to Martin Luther King. He was sitting down and they was standing around him and they were trying to persuade him not to march in Cicero, and I remember distinctly, Martin Luther King turned around and looked up at him, he said, "Now, you don't have to go through all of this because I'm not that anxious to march in Cicero."

00:56:23:00 And during the time when we were having these campaigns, you know, in Gage Park, there was a black man who was young fellow who was looking for a job. He was just walking the streets of Cicero and they killed him- complete stranger, you know, just walking through the neighborhood. So, there was much more- there was much more potential for violence in Cicero than some of the other communities, so- but Martin Luther King did not court violence, that was not his motive- to stir people up and cause them to be violent. He wanted to send a message through and that's why we simply focused on that particular community in Chicago, but there were other areas- people who did march, but Martin Luther King didn't.

00:57:18:00 TREY ELLIS:
I was wondering about the, I've seen interviews with the media backlash. Everybody in the country said, 'those poor people in the South should be able to vote and, you know, segregation in the South is terrible, but once the movement moves to the North, that there's pushback from the media and probably some from more northern whites that thought they didn't believe they had a racial problem.

00:57:43:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:
Yes, there was some people who felt that way. That is that there was not the kind of problems in the North that you found in the South. And so there were those people

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who felt that Martin Luther King should spend this time in the South where you had more racist kind of conditions. What they didn't realize is that what you experienced in the North was systemic racism. And when we talk about racism, I talk about it in a much broader sense because the general characteristic of racism and the larger picture of it is more like what I called, "child-ism." And that is people being treated as children. They feel that they are human beings, but they are lesser in terms of their responsibility and their judgement and therefore they need to be taken care of. So therefore, they treat them like children; they would not allow them to have too many resources, like children, you don't give a five-year-old a twenty-dollar bill 'cause what are they going to do with that? You question their judgement.

00:59:16:00 So, the whole groups of people, ethnic groups particularly, alright, they just don't respect or recognize them to have the kind of ownership, for example. So, they do live in slums, areas in the North and piled up on top of each other and they don't get the kind of city services, you know, or repair on their buildings or that kind of thing, etcetera. The childism means that they would not be able to function without the oversight of, you know, of whites. So, the blacks in the South- they said, "We have no problem because if they cooperate with us," the whites, "then they're in good shape, or much better shape," okay? So that kind of racism has to be challenged and they look at them as if they are not responsible.

01:00:25:00 It's unfortunate to say that Martin Luther King himself was not accepted by many of the ministers who pastored churches in Chicago. 'Cause they felt they didn't have a problem. So, they didn't want to encourage Martin Luther King to come there. 'Cause they were part of the patronage system and this was- Mayor Daley's patronage system was one where people were living in very specific ethnic communities and then they had people who were ward committeemen and they were part of the political system and their jobs were handed out based on the number of votes that you could produce in a particular area. So, it was Republicans as well as Democrats, who were- and independents. They called it the "Daley Machine."

01:01:20:00 So that's one of the reasons- I'm sorry, another reason why Chicago was chosen, because it was institutionalized racism and it was very clear in terms of the

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governmental structure, not just private industry, for example, but the government itself was structured on that basis. So it was obvious, in other words, invisible. It wasn't hidden in any kind of way. You could see the conditions that existed based on color and race. So, there were those who in the North themselves who felt comfortable because they, themselves were part of a structure there. And in terms of the leadership and they didn't necessarily think about the masses of people who were not in those positions and who were suffering on the, you know, extreme situations in terms of poverty. So yes, that was the question about that, not only on the part of whites, but also on the part of the black elite.

01:02:36:00 TREY ELLIS:

I wonder if you see any connection or parallels between the white backlash against the fair housing and the marches in Chicago and later on the more contemporary backlash first against affirmative action and now with the election of Donald Trump has been called a sort of revenge of the white working class. Could you talk about that?

01:03:00:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

Yes. My knowledge of this is that we are at the end of the second Reconstruction period. And we need to be aware of the potential and the actions that have taken now to reinterpret our Constitution and laws that exist. One of the things that we must become aware of is that the laws that we got changed during the sixties were temporary. That's why they have to be voted on periodically. They were acts; they were not actually constitutional changes. They were simply remedies for a particular problem that existed during that period, but the assumption is that when that problem was solved, those acts or laws that were passed would no longer be necessary, and so therefore, they could simply be removed or ignored. So what change did we make when you realize that? So, when we were at the end of Reconstruction period, or rather- you saw that happen, okay, before, and now we're faced with that situation again under the new administration. We have those promises that have been made

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that can be setbacks for us and they talk about the greatness of the past and how we've got to bring the past back to us. Okay? Make America Great Again. Alright? So that was the greatness some people experienced in those days that was not so great for others.

01:05:01:00 And so we have to be aware of that and we have to teach our young people. That is my urgent concern, is that young people have an appreciation and knowledge of the past and the different stages that we went through and the different phases and how we were affected by those phases and stages. And how now, what should we be doing now in order to preserve what we have gained, 'cause it's not what you have gained, it's what you can maintain. And if even if you maintain those things, they still have to be sustained. And we have to prepare our young people to be able to appreciate those gains and the things that have to be maintained and how they can be maintained and they- it's because it's going to affect them.

01:05:55:00 What has happened in the past has been our lives, as older people, we've gone through those different periods and we have suffered those periods and we have also made some progress and gains to those periods, but this is what our lives were about. The question is, the next generation, which would be, you know, like, it's all about grandchildren. We've got to make sure that they understand, but not just our children- all the children. And that's why it's important to be inclusive and not to separate, okay, but as often as possible to get people to collaborate and get people to understand. What's important right now is for young people to go on tours together- black and white- our young people. And they go to the South and they see things and they can appreciate these things. They go to the North together, and they can be eyewitnesses to history. And I think that- I have faith and confidence.

01:07:09:00 Now, how do we deal with the circumstances that we're in? The nonviolent approach is radical, radical enough to believe that under the worst conditions, there's hope. It's radical enough to believe that the behavior of some of the- the terrible behavior of people, people who display some of the most insensitive, okay, and divisive kind of attitudes can be changed. You know that the governor of Alabama welcomed Martin Luther King into his office and met with him after the Selma March, the one who

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also stood in the door to stop blacks from getting into the University of Alabama. Nonviolence means that you are radical enough to believe that even people who would consider themselves your staunch opponents also had the potential to change. So today, some people would think it's ludicrous, I believe that there's possible to get the present administration to change. Well, we've already seen it- they change from one day to another, okay? So, change is not only possible, we've witnessed that change. Now the question and the challenge is how do we get the right change? One thing we don't do, okay, is ignore, or distance ourselves. We've got to find ways of moving ahead and reaching in spite of.

01:09:29:00 Now in the meantime, we've got to get our young people involved in the process. If they don't even know who's being nominated or if they don't even know who's being discriminated against, or the economic effect of certain decisions that are being made and how they are personally affected by that, then they are just simply like a choo choo- like a country cow looking at a choo choo train: don't know what's going on. And my point is, it's our responsibility. We've got to educate them. We've got to train them. We've got to give them everything that we have and every tool and every strategy to fight with. So the burden is on us, who have gone through this experience and we can't blame our young people. Now, what I do like is what I see among our young people is the inclusiveness, like the women's movement. Okay? And like some people- let's get down to it- Black Lives Matter, 'cause some people say, 'Well, that's a black movement,' mmmm, no. What they are saying is that we already assume that white lives matter, so we should be saying "black lives matter, also." So that's what it really says. The presumption is that white lives matter. So that's why it's necessary to say, Black Lives Matter. If we didn't believe the white lives matter, then we wouldn't make sense.

01:11:17:00 TREY ELLIS:
Your idea of inclusiveness was really tested with the rise of the Black Power Movement and then SNCC broke off and changed the name from nonviolence and turned away from nonviolence. Tell me just personally about the- when your peers

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turned away from nonviolence, but you chose Doctor King's route and lived that route. Can you take us back to those moments, those decisions and your discussions with people like Stokely Carmichael, sharing a cell with him, you know, how was that?

01:11:54:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

Well, first of all, I think that it's important to understand the transition with SNCC: the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. When Stokely became the chairman of SNCC, we'd had two chairmans already, or three, yes- Marion Barry, okay, Jr. was the first chairman, Chuck McDew was the second, and John Lewis was the third. Stokely was the fourth. And Rap Brown was the, okay, fifth. So, what we're talking about here, when Stokely became chairman of SNCC, he had a different approach. He'd not been trained in nonviolence and he believed in self-defense and he was somewhat influenced by, you know, Malcom X, okay, who talked about that, and also Adam Clayton Powell. Adam Clayton Powell talked about Black Power even before Stokely and others, so what they were basically saying is that black people needed to appreciate themselves as individuals and also as groups of people having some power. Now, when I was growing up to call a person of color, like myself, or others, "black" was considered derogatory. That's just a fact. You know, when you call somebody black, those were fighting words. So, we had to appreciate black and it wasn't a color, it was a culture. And I think that's the thing that made the difference. It was- that culture, was certainly recognized by whites 'cause that's why they say, "you people," 'cause they made a big difference out of the difference, okay, and then they became the situation of a white power. Okay? And there was a term that was used as well during that period, "white power." So, there was Black Power, but there was also people who said, "White Power."

01:14:33:00 And so, therefore in SNCC itself, Stokely stayed beyond his term because it was a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, but when they didn't change leadership, it became non-student, okay, it was no longer nonviolent, and they didn't coordinate things, okay, and there was no committee that I remember anybody being

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on, okay? It was a different kind of leadership. So, the organization changed. Where did the change first occur? Here in Atlanta, we had a SNCC meeting and some of our staff people who worked in the rural areas of Alabama- see, when SNCC first started, it was not in rural areas, it was in college towns, okay, 'cause it was the college students who would demonstrate at lunch counters. You don't have lunch counters in the country, in the rural areas. Okay? So, therefore, what do you have? Well, we do have voter registration, we had an office there and the office was in the neighborhood and the local people, farmers mainly, you know, and they all had the same characteristics as whites, they went hunting, okay, and they went fishing and they grew, you know, vegetables and that kind of thing to eat, and food for their animals. So, they had the same pattern.

01:16:08:00 So, when the SNCC office was formed there in the neighborhood, they had to protect not only the SNCC office, but their neighborhood, their homes, because if you bomb the office that meant that your home would get bombed. So, they were out there at night and they- farmers rotated who would be there different nights and they had their weapons. But this was a deterrent. In other words, they weren't out there looking for some whites to shoot. They thought their presence with their weapons would deter whites and discourage them from taking off any kind of action. And so, I remember the discussion. The farmer looked at the SNCC worker and said, "Well, what are you doing out here?" Okay. Said, "You better get you a gun like we got 'cause you won't be any use if they start shooting and you stand out here with no weapon."

01:17:03:00 So, the young, you know, twenty-something year old black men, for the most part, decided to let the people decide, and that was another theme that ran through at that particular time in history: let the people decide. So, we were organizers, but we were not leaders. So, the people decided that the SNCC workers should have guns and they didn't refuse, okay, they got weapons. So, when they came back to our meeting, they came back, you know, supporting the idea of having guns and being with the farmers, with the people. There was a big discussion, a big debate. And of course, those who of course promoted nonviolence and that kind of thing, they did back in

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their own communities, but they didn't have any control over those who went in the rural areas where they did have weapons and guns.

01:17:56:00 So, that's when the whole idea of the Black Panthers, that's when Stokely no longer became, you know- but we were in jail together on the Freedom Rides and we used to stay up all night debating and arguing about nonviolence. Now, here's the concept: It's an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. And they felt that as citizens, we were justified in protecting ourselves, First Amendment rights, okay? Also, what, first law of preservation, self-preservation. But somehow, you had the right and authority to protect your life and your family, and your loved ones, and your friends. Now, there were some problem if you were aggressive and go and attack somebody else, but to defend yourself, that was an order, in law. Equal justice, okay? In other words, someone did something to you, you were justified in doing the same thing to them. Eye for an eye. The problem with that is that, the previous policy was that if someone knocked your eye out, you were justified in going and wiping their eyes out, teeth and everything and the family, tribe and everybody else cause you couldn't replace your eye.

01:19:26:00 So it was Hammurabi, the lawgiver, who said, "No, we have to have equal justice: one eye for one eye, one tooth for one tooth," okay. So, that was a concept that was adopted. The only problem with that is if someone knocks your eye out and you knock their eye out, then they knock your other eye out, you can't see how to knock their teeth out, 'cause you end up with a blind, snaggletooth society. So, it sounds, you know, equal justice, whatever, sounds nice and everything, but equal justice is not ever equal. Okay? So, my point is nonviolence says, let's stop knocking eyes out. Let's find a way to save our teeth. Let's see if we can find another way of relating to each other rather than knocking out eyes and teeth. Alright? And then some people not going to knock your eye out. They going to shoot you. So, what you going to do to defend yourself? And everybody knows that the strongest defense is a strong offense.

01:20:41:00 TREY ELLIS:

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Right. I was going to pivot to Vietnam and Martin's decision, you know, the Riverside Church Speech and him coming out at the war was another big pivotal moment in the movement where he lost so much support and you stayed, again, stayed with him. Can you talk about how you felt when you heard the speech and the rally after that, you know, in the park, like how did that lay with you and did you talk with Martin about those decisions?

01:21:17:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

Yes. Martin Luther King had wrestled with the whole issue of coming out publicly, taking a stand against the war in Vietnam. And of course, Mrs. King was involved in the anti-war movement long before Martin Luther King when she was in college even. Okay? And so, she had a lot of influence on Martin Luther King making that-coming to that conclusion. And of course, with his embracing nonviolence, he would certainly not have any problem with standing up against violence because he talked about the triple evils, you know, and that sort of thing. Now, when Martin Luther King decided to take a stand, there were several factors that he had to deal with. Number one, he was president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. His board, okay, the board of the Southern Christian Leader- was made up of ministers and a lot of them were former Vietnam vets, or World War Two vets, and so they supported the war, or they didn't take a stand against the war, because they felt that when your country is at war, you're supposed to be, you know, supportive, etcetera.

01:22:58:00 Now the other factor is that these were ministers who did funerals of Vietnam vets and you had to deal with their family members and you had to deal with the fact that they were fighting for your country and if you take a stand against Vietnam, that means that you are not supporting what they died for. So that puts you in a real quandary and some people were in conflict with themselves over these kind of issues and some people were feeling very genuine that they were not opposed to the war because they supported the veterans and they supported those who were in battle. So, they did not vote for Martin Luther King to take a stand against the war in Vietnam as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

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01:23:59:00 So, it was Daddy King who moved in and said that, well, Martin Luther King is a Nobel Peace Prize winner. Okay? He is a co-pastor, but he also is a minister in and of himself. Okay? So, he's beyond being just simply president of SCLC. So, Daddy King convinced them to allow Martin Luther King to take a stand against the war, but the board did not, you know, support that. And he was not taking the stand against the war as president of SCLC, but as pastor of Ebenezer and as a minister. Okay, so, that being the case, you also had some other civil rights groups that opposed Martin Luther King taking a stand against the war. And frankly they felt that if Martin Luther King took that stand, many of the peace groups, and these were mainly whites, would not support the civil rights movement as well as they had in the past, but they would support the peace movement. So, they would lose financial support from some of the major liberal groups and individuals. So, they were opposed to Martin Luther King taking a stand. But in spite of all of that, Martin Luther King decided that his church would be a haven, you know, for people that were resistant to war and that he would take that stand, and he did, at Riverside. Okay?

01:25:50:00 It's one thing to take a stand against the war, but then what do you do next besides just take a stand? Well, it's not well known, but earlier in that same year, Jim Bevel had decided that he was going to go to New York and he was going to recruit people to go on a ship to go to Hanoi. Okay? They would leave out of New York and he was trying to give people the chance to make up their minds and he wanted to get there-someone to donate a ship. And I got a call from SCLC office, from Martin Luther King, okay, and I was asked to go to New York to get Bevel and bring him back to Atlanta. They thought if anyone could do that I would, and I thought I could do. So I left Chicago and went to New York and Bevel was trying to get the ship and he was so glad I was with him because we'd been together in so many campaigns and we were road buddies, so to speak. And I just sat and listened to him and then one of the local artists who supported him had painted a picture of President Johnson eating a Vietnamese baby with blood dripping down his shirt, and he was using that as- going to advertise and recruit people. So, I just asked questions and that was my approach.

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But when I finished asking questions- like one of the questions I asked was, "Okay, suppose somebody gives you a ship? Yeah, you put all the people on there and the peaceniks," we call them in those days, "and all of the sudden you get in the middle of the ocean, the ship starts to sink. How would you test this to make sure it was seaworthy before you got in the middle of the sea?"

01:27:56:00 So, he began to think about it 'cause he was from the Navy, Jim Bevel, and in fact he was a gunner on Navy ship. Okay? And he began to think about the logic of this. I said, "There might be somebody who'd be glad to give you a ship. Yeah, that would be...would you be questionable about that?" Yeah. So anyway, the upshot of it is that there was an organization called the Fifth Avenue Parade Committee that used to have marches in New York every year against the war, and they decided that this particular year of nineteen sixty-seven that they would have a spring mobilization to end the war in Vietnam. They made me the national coordinator of that and that's why we were able to get Martin Luther King to come to New York, okay, and he spoke at the UN, and... We were able to mobilize about a hundred and twenty different organizations to participate in that march. In fact, the march was over at the UN before they all got out of the park, where we started. So, Martin Luther King took a great stand there on a national, a global- a national level at Riverside, but it was a global level at the UN because he was calling on the rest of the nations of the world, okay, to withdraw their support from that war.

01:29:35:00 TREY ELLIS:
And you went to Saigon after, was that after his assassination that you went to Saigon yourself or was that before? When you marched on-

BERNARD LAFAYETTE:
Yeah, it was after, it was after his assassination. 'Cause I was in- at Harvard at the time, yes. And that's an interesting story. Do you want me to tell you about that?

TREY ELLIS:

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Yeah you can tell us-

01:29:58:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

Well, um, it was the International FOR, the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, that mobilized this group to go to Vietnam to do some research on the repression against the people and the South Vietnamese- those who were opposed to the war. And there was, you know, repression against the Buddhist monks, for example, and the students, for the most part, and they made up the larger number of people who were opposed. So we were studying the repression against them. And a team of us went over and it was head of the Student Government Association, head of the Veterans against the War in Vietnam- and there's Bishop Paul Moore out of New York and others. And we went over and Dorothy Cotton went over with us and we were with the people and studying and going and looking at different situations- the tiger cages came to our attention as well while we were over there, and we saw places where they had the tiger cages and stuff like that.

01:31:16:00 So, our last day we were getting ready to leave, the students came up with this great idea that we should have a march at the U.S. Embassy. Frankly, and, you know, I don't mind saying that I was not in favor of that because we were not there for direct action; we say we were going do research against repression. And I believe that people should stick to what, you know, they- the mission. And besides, I hadn't planned and when I do direct action I believe in- I was trained to study the situation, know exactly what you want to accomplish and being able to see whether that's the best strategy, what are the resources you need to make that happen and to stick with it until you accomplish your goal. Well, we didn't have a goal except, you know, to go and march at the U.S. Embassy and protest. And so that didn't really, you know, go over too well with me, but I was persuaded by the rest of the people that we should join the Vietnamese people in showing our support for them, and that was the basis on which we marched with them, and they were very excited about it and we did have the march. And I had already said that I thought we would be attacked

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because they were not going to allow us to march, you know, to the US Embassy in Saigon.

01:32:50:00 And so, as it were, we did have a march and they did attack us with tear gas and billy clubs and everything else. I learned something: one thing I learned is that if you going to march where they going to start throwing tear gas, you need to use some sliver of lime so you can put on your eyebrows and that would keep your eyes from burning from the tear gas. The Vietnamese people had- it was already prepared and they passed out the limes for us. Well, we ended up being backed up there was a wall and we got across this wall and we helped the Vietnamese climb that wall because it was pretty high. We got to the other side and then there were Coca Cola crates full of Molotov Cocktails and they had been throwing these Molotov cocktails at the troops and this was Saigon University of- and they- were burning buildings. Well, by this time the armed guards were coming 'round and they were, you know, pointing their weapons at us because they knew about the Molotov Cocktails and I told the Vietnamese students, I said, "No, we're not going to throw no Molotov Cocktails at those troops cause, you know, we, you know, bullets, you know, we'd get wiped out."

01:34:12:00 So, they said, this leader said, "When we're in Vietnam, Vietnamese decide," and my response was that when I'm in Vietnam with the Vietnamese, we will decide, and everybody joined hands. I took over- and I do that sometimes, okay, especially in extreme environments and situations, I don't mind taking over, you know, otherwise, I look for other leadership. But I did and I made everybody join hands and stretch out. So, you didn't join hands close together, you stretched out so that the troops who were advancing with the weapons could see that we had nothing in our hands but our hands. And then I said, take three steps forward, so that way what you're doing is confronting them and letting them know that you're not afraid, 'cause you're supposed to be afraid when people draw weapons on you. So, you had to psychologically disarm them and that's one of the nonviolent techniques we use- you confront your opponent, okay, and you try to look at your opponent in the eye so that your opponent will not see you as a target, but as a human being. So, you are forcing your humanity on them.

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01:35:35:00 Three small steps, so we took three small steps forward. In the meantime, what you're doing is allowing the tear gas to clear the air, so you don't rush it. Timing is everything in strategy. So, three more steps, and they looked at us and they stopped advancing towards us as we advanced toward them. So, what happened is that they started talking among themselves and they- by this time we had backed away, we had gone forward, away from the Molotov Cocktails, that was the other point of moving forward, so it has multiple meanings. Okay? But this is all through training we learned that, alright, and that's what I teach, you know, how to confront in an extreme situation. And as we continued to move, they started talking among themselves and they started backing off. As we moved forward, they backed off, and we knew that we had succeeded in winning them over, okay, rather than them seeing us as the enemy. And that's the key in nonviolence- the ultimate goal is to win your opponents over as allies.

01:36:52:00 TREY ELLIS:
Can you tell us about the Poor People's Campaign? We interviewed Marian Wright Edelman, but from your point of view, did, you know, why did Martin- at his point we're describing this sort of part of this story really concentrated in between sixty-five and sixty-eight is "Martin in the Wilderness." He's not as popular, the money's not there, and now he's doing this Poor People's Campaign that he thought this might be his last campaign. Can you talk about his state of mind and sort of paint a picture of that?

01:37:28:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:
Well, this was actually in sixty-seven when Martin Luther King decided that he was going to go forward with this Poor People's Campaign, and he decided what he was going to do is to reorganize his organization. So what did was- an example was to add on to the staff and structure of his organization because it was already very small- SCLC was one of the smallest national groups. Okay? And... so he decided to get an executive director who would be called "Executive Secretary" and then the

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next position was Executive Vice President of the organization. These are all staff positions. So, Andrew Young was appointed the Vice President, okay, Executive Administrative Vice President, or Executive Vice President, I think it was, Executive Vice President. And then he decided to get a first Vice President and then a second Vice President of the organization, and these Vice Presidents were not staff positions so much as they were board positions. They had the Vice Chairman, okay, and then another, third vice chair, whatever- they appointed Reverend Abernathy- Ralph Abernathy. He was the treasurer already of the organization and a board member, but he made Abernathy Vice President at Large- already had three Vice Presidents, so he made him "at Large." And that was some indication that Martin Luther King was trying to identify his, you know, successor, in that case. So, it was kind of not stated, but it was implied and people, you know, assumed that. Then, as he went forward, he told, he sent word to me, well, he talked to me about it at- I think we were at- in New York at... I think that was Coble Hall. Yeah, there's a picture of us walking together and Coble Hall up- is that in- where is that? Which one is in Boston? I'm sorry.

TREY ELLIS:

I'm not sure. That might be Boston.

01:40:46:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

Alright, so what happened is the he was telling me that he wanted me to come to, to Atlanta because he was trying to reorganize the organization and he wanted me to have a staff position. So, I listened to him and then he followed up with a phone call when I was in Chicago 'cause I had not responded and I said, "Well, Doctor King, can you send me a job description?" He said, "A job description?" He said, "You come on down here and you write your own job description." So, I said, "Now, Doctor King, if you need any support from me for anything not only will I be able to, you know, give you support, but I can bring other staff people from the American Friend Service Committee who could, you know, also help." So, he called me about three months later and said that, "I thought you were coming down here." And I said,

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“Well, yes, I was waiting to hear from you, you know, a letter or something, just, you know, what you want me to do.” He said, “Andy, did you send that letter?” And Andy said, “I’m working on it.”

01:42:17:00 So anyway, he said to me, very directly, words he said before, he said, "Now, Bernard, I need you to come on down here now because this may be my last campaign and we're going for broke." And I said, “Well, maybe you should have explained that to me Doctor King, you know, Poor People’s Campaign and then we’re going for broke. Okay? That's the way you recruit people? Tell them you're going for broke. Okay.” So, I said, “Okay, Doctor King,” so I scrambled around and, you know, ‘cause I didn't want to disappoint him because one of the reasons I was in the movement was because I admired his, you know, leadership and what he was doing and I wanted to play my part and give everything that I could. But at that time, I had dropped out of school and, you know, given my whole life to these kinds of efforts and campaigns. So, I did arrive without knowing what. So, Martin Luther King appointed me as Program Administrator, which meant that I was in charge of supervising all of the staff people who were directors of specific programs, such as, you know, Operation Bread Basket, which Fred Bennett was head of that then. And Director of Affiliates and then you had, you know, Jesse Jackson, you had Jim Bevel, you had...

TREY ELLIS:

And was everybody working towards the Poor People’s Campaign? Was it all hands-on deck?

01:44:15:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

No. In fact, since we’re talking the experiences with Martin Luther King. Martin Luther King did not have the support of his executive staff, and in fact, he went on a fast to unify the staff and to bring them together, ‘cause they each had their own programs and they had their budgets and they wanted to, you know, get on about their work. And they didn't see this Poor People’s Campaign as, you know, related to

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what they wanted to do. And Hosea, for example, had voter registration and he already had a plan, he had a staff and he had, you know, the area was going to work, that kind of thing. Same thing with each of them. Jesse was still in Chicago. He'd not moved, 'cause he'd organized business people and the Operation Bread Basket then was one where you got merchants and folks had products and Jesse had organized a full page ad so all of them were, you know, buying spots on the ad- the full page. And it was very, you know, creative, I thought. So this Poor People's Campaign was not something that Martin Luther King-

01:45:45:00 But Marian Wright Edelman had come up with the idea and Martin Luther King had embraced it and he wanted to move ahead with it. It was slow starting, actually, and it was postponed more than once. And so, as the administrator over all of the others, we took a certain part of the budget and said that this is going to be devoted to the Poor People's Campaign. So, I told each staff person that we need to find out how they plan to spend this money for the Poor People's Campaign that was in the budget for them, and so therefore, they began therefore they began to give some thought to how they could relate what they were doing to the Poor People's Campaign. But Martin Luther King made Hosea Williams the National Field Coordinator. So he would deal with the bringing all the people on the- you might say the... "mule trains," and that sort of thing- mobilizing folks in the field to come on the campaign. They finally started coming aboard, one by one, and I had this conversation with Martin Luther King in the office after the staff meeting was over, and we were calling it the "Poor People's Campaign" and usually our campaigns were related to racism and overcoming segregation, and those kind of things, discrimination and that kind of thing. So, we were talking about, you know, black people for the most part.

01:47:27:00 So I said to him, Martin Luther King- after the meeting was over, just the two of us- I said, "Martin Luther King, we're calling this the Poor People's Campaign." He said, "Yes." I said, "Well, you know, there are," and we said in those days- "There were Chicanos who are poor, you want them to be in?" He said, "Yes, we want them to be involved." I said, "Okay, as I said what about the Native Americans?" He said, "Well, yeah, Native Americans." So, by this time he turned around and looked up at me

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‘cause he’d anticipated the next question. I said, “Well, Doctor King, what about the poor whites?” And he said to me, a little disgusted, he said, “Are they poor?” I said, “Well, yes.” “Well, we want them involved.” “Okay, alright, the poor whites. And who's the leader of the poor whites, okay?” I said to myself.

01:48:35:00 So, I began to mobilize them and I got Tom Houck and Mrs. King came to me and said, “You know, he's our driver and anything etcetera, but he's just so anxious to get involved in this, you know, actions and campaigns and everything, could you take him?” I said, “Yes, I’ll take him.” Young fellow, enthusiastic, just full of energy, you know. So I gave him an impossible task. I said, “Alright, Tom, we want you to go and find the leaders of the Native Americans, the different groups, and the Hispanics, okay, Chicanos, and the poor whites.” So be- at my surprise, Tom Houck got going out there somehow and found different leaders of these different groups, all the way from Washington. But I did know some of them already because of the campaign we had to end of the war in Vietnam in New York the year before, in sixty-seven. Okay? We had mobilized some of these Native Americans and also the Chicanos, like Cesar Chavez and all of them, etcetera, so we just simply followed through and located them for this campaign.

01:50:00:00 And we had a meeting at the Paschal’s and that's when Martin Luther King was introduced to Cesar Chavez, and Corky Gonzales out of Denver, and all the other people- and the Labor Union played a very important part in identifying these different ethnic groups because they knew them and they were very much a part of the movement. So, we were very excited about Rose Crow Flies High from Seattle, Tilly Walker from North Dakota and Mad Bear Anderson from the Iroquois reservation, and just a number of them. And also, Dennis Banks, you know, from AIM, you know, group, stuff like that. And so it was really on the move when we got this Poor People’s Campaign going.

01:50:55:00 TREY ELLIS:

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Can you talk- sort of walk us through the discussions? What was it like to be in this room when sort of- I imagine some heated debate and then Doctor King deciding that he had to take this fast and how long was the fast?

01:51:08:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

Yes, when Martin Luther King came up with the idea of the Poor People's Campaign, it was after all of our staff people had received their budget for their particular projects, such as voter registration, direct action, the affiliates, okay, and citizenship education, you know, down the line. Those are programs that were sponsored by Southern Christian Leadership Conference and they had directors of those programs. And when Martin Luther King came up with the idea of the Poor People's Campaign, people felt already committed to what they were working on at that time- most of the people- but then there were, you know, some few others who supported the campaign, but those who did not at that time felt very committed to the staff that they had to supervise and all the plans they made and places where they scheduled to be and that kind of thing. But after Martin Luther King went on a fast, that was an opportunity to reunite people and get them to think collectively how they could participate. And plus, I separated their budget so that a certain amount of the budget was devoted to the Poor People's Campaign and I just simply asked them how do they want to use it. So, I didn't argue with anybody, you know. There was some debate and that kind of thing, but I don't participate in, you know, unnecessary, you know, debates. Okay? My approach basically is to get people to continue to think and come to their own conclusion, but I think the questions that you ask them will be really the tool that's used to be helpful to them. So what you try to do is help people continue to think things through and sometimes they come to a different conclusion.

01:53:19:00 TREY ELLIS:

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We were talking about the Poor People's Campaign. Did, you know, then or was there some hint about the FBI's, disinformation campaign, were there things- did you have any hints that the FBI was trying to sabotage it?

01:53:37:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

Oh, well, I don't know specifically what the FBI, you know, did during that period. One of the things that I could tell you that was discussed was that the people from, say, for example, a home for the psychologically disabled, we had noticed that a large number of people showed up who did have some kind of disturbance and there was a rumor out that they had sent those people into the Resurrection City- there on the mall, that's what we called it, Resurrection City. And their behavior purportedly was somewhat disruptive and I remember encountering some situations. For example, let me give you a little background. All the people who were coming to Washington, D.C. for the Poor People's Campaign were coming from different places. All of them didn't come through the mule train, for example. Some came from the North and some came from the Rural South. And we had converged on the Resurrection City and we put up tents and that kind of thing for people to have housing. But the main purpose of them coming was to meet with different congressional committees so we could testify and people could put a face on poverty. That was the whole idea. Martin Luther King said, you want to put a face on poverty.

01:55:22:00 So that rather than statistics and Marian Wright Edelman, for example, was the one that listened to a lot of the testimony and was able to put that in legal language, so it could be incorporate into the bills that were fo- you know, there in congress. So, she was able to be extremely helpful to us in doing that- listening to the testimony and then translating it into the, you know, the proper language so that those issues would relevant to bills that were, you know, on the floor. A situation we ran into, for example, in the Poor People's Campaign was one where a fellow came to us and- in the office, our business office, we had a business office set up there, you know, and Stoney Cooks was the person who was in charge of our finances. And this fellow came in and said he needed some money to buy a ticket to go home 'cause someone

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in his family had died or something and so Stoney was trying to get some evidence and he called to find out that the person, you know, parent had not died, and so therefore that was not the case. And this person drew a gun. And I remember distinctly Stoney looking at the person and slapping the gun and the barrel, you know, went out of the gun and hit the floor. Okay? So, we were able to dispel that situation, but those were the kind of things that we encountered from this onslaught of people who did not all of their, you know, mental faculties, etcetera.

01:57:28:00 There was also a rumor that the seeds- the clouds were seeded and that's why it rained particularly in that so we were dealing with mud and we were dealing with slush and all that kind of thing, etcetera. Yeah, but there was no specific, you know, evidence of who was responsible for this kind of thing, or that the seeds were clouded, but these were things that we, you know, expected. And- by the way, all through the movement, we just assumed that we were wiretapped, yeah. We could hear on the telephone in those days, you know, you could hear some kind of buzz. Alright? And in fact, Abernathy had a name for the wiretapping. He called it "doohickey," okay, etcetera. So, we just assumed that that kind of thing was happening.

01:58:27:00 TREY ELLIS:
Can you talk me a little- we're going to lead up to Memphis and the assassination and the aftermath, but can you talk about King's mood here at the time? You were talking about how he never used to slow down in the earlier parts, in sixty, sixty-five. People talk about how sort of weary- did you notice a difference in him in sixty-six, sixty-seven?

01:58:52:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:
Uh, yes. In fact, the Poor People's Campaign was spun out of Martin Luther King's frustration, when he saw the little children in Marks, Mississippi just, you know, with swollen bellies and stuff like that. And I remember his talking about it was like, you know, being in a third world country. That's what we called it in those days- "third

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world.” And he thought that more progress would have been made by that time and he was disappointed that there was not more progress being made, and so his solution was rather than go around making speeches about the conditions of poor people, he would put the poor people in front of the people who make those decisions and that's why we called it “putting the face on poverty.” He wanted their faces to be in the faces of these people who were making decisions about their lives. And for example, the food stamps, in that day if you going to have a federal food stamp- rather federal food program, you had to have the local government request that and propose that, but also they had to be responsible for the storage and distribution, without any compensation from the government. And that was one of the conditions for having it. So, the local cities and the local governments decided in many cases, like Marks, Mississippi and other places in the rural areas, that they wouldn't give them free federal food because in that case, they said that they couldn't get people to work. If they going to get free food, they could eat. And that's all they were able to do during that period. So therefore, while the food program was available they didn't have access to it and there were a lot of kind of issues and procedures and things that affected poor people that Martin Luther King thought, you know, should be changed. And so his attitude was that, yes, he's done as much as he could to raise these issues and now the people themselves would have to step forward.

02:01:41:00 TREY ELLIS:

So, I'm wondering about his mood after- he lost some support after Chicago, some white support. He lost a lot of black and white support after Riverside Church and now he's in this period with this Poor People's Campaign and he's calling this maybe his last campaign. Can you talk about just personally, did you ever have any personal discussions with him where you saw him down? What was his mood like in this period of his life?

02:02:12:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

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Well, he wanted to do all that he could do and from the kind of discussions we had with him, in general, he felt disappointed that more, you know, was not done and that he was sort of frustrated because he wondered whether or not he could do any more than he'd done. Like I say, the Poor People's Campaign had been postponed at least twice, the date that we had set, you know, to go to Washington and it wasn't ready to go, 'cause we checked and we- I sent staff people out to different cities, two by two. Like, for example, I sent Jimmy Collier, you know, and another musician, okay, to New York because I knew if they played guitars and music they could survive. Alright? I sent others to Chicago; I sent them to Detroit. I sent them to different places, you know. And it was a situation where we could not even support our staff people. We only had transpiration money for them and they had to work with the local people to get accommodations and support. And we used to check to see, well, how many people do you think you could bring and they couldn't give us a number, so Martin Luther King says we have to postpone that date.

02:03:57:00

We were a staff meeting in Atlanta and Martin Luther King got this call from Memphis. And when you think about the sanitation workers, they were what we call the "working poor." So, all the poor was not like unemployed. Some people working very hard, two jobs even, and they still were below the poverty line because of the wage was so low. So, these sanitation workers were not only striking- on strike because of the wage, but it was a safety situation where one had been, you know, seriously injured and they trying to get, you know, some support and protection. So, the unionized situations, sometimes made situations better, so they were trying to get a union recognition. So, you can't just decide to form a union, you got to get a recognition from your employer. So, when Martin Luther King got the call, that- it's like when your friends call you, you know, you have to go sometimes. So, he said, "You guys stay here and go ahead and continue working on the meeting and the strategy for the Poor People's Campaign, and what your particular, you know, division in the organization- what are you going to do, you know, as Director, in your particular program." And so, we stayed there. Okay?

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02:05:29:00 And Martin Luther King, for example, one of the characteristics of Martin Luther King- speaking of the meetings, before we go to Memphis, he would not chair the meetings. Martin Luther king sat on the side and either Andy or Abernathy chaired the meetings 'cause Martin Luther King wanted to listen to the different arguments and what people had to say. And as a result of listening to them there, he would synthesize and bring together some common understanding and common goals and common strategy. He was very good at that. Another person who was good at that was Diane Nash. And that's why we had her as our spokesperson in Nashville and the Freedom Rides and that sort of thing. That was a common characteristic, that they were good listeners on either side and then were able to articulate it, you know, that particular idea or thought, blending things together.

02:06:29:00 So, we were there and Martin Luther King would just sit and listen. When he had this phone call, he said he had to go. But he wanted us to stay there and he said, "I'll be right back." So, he and Bernard Lee, who travelled with him, were going to go and do their thing and support the sanitation workers and then return to Atlanta. But when the march broke out in violence, that's when we all went to Memphis, for two reasons: to support the sanitation workers' march, so we'd be nonviolent, but also to continue our discussion of the Poor People's Campaign, be right there. So, when we arrived, we had to get ourselves mobilized so we could do that and there was a mass meeting, okay, at Mason Temple Church. And Martin Luther King was scheduled to go and speak, but it was pouring down raining. In fact, it was raining as we used to call in those days, "cats and dogs." I never knew what the cats and dogs were about, but, anyway. The... the other staff people and Abernathy went to the church and so happened to be having a national meeting and so it was really crowded and folks were outside in the rain. When they arrived, the... the crowd just went wild 'cause they were so excited to see, you know, thinking that Martin Luther King was with his people, staff people and Abernathy, and their feathers fell when he was not there. So, I'm in the room now with Martin Luther King and the hotel, three-oh-six, and... what was interesting was something I learned much later was that originally Martin Luther

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King was in the same room- registered in two-oh-six, where I was, downstairs. I still have my key.

02:08:55:00 So, we're in three-oh-six and Martin Luther King is already in his pajamas in bed and we were working on a press statement for Washington, D.C. 'cause I was scheduled to go and do the press conference, opening up the headquarters for the Poor People's Campaign. Martin Luther King was scheduled, but he couldn't go, he had to do the march over again, so he was sending me, so we could stay on schedule. He didn't want to get this Poor People's Campaign off schedule anymore 'cause we had already decided that we were going to move on it. And so I was working on the press statement that night and when he got the phone call from the church, Mason Temple Church of God in Christ, and so I could only hear one side of the phone call, but I heard Martin Luther King said, "Now are you telling me," he's talking to Ralph, "that you want me to get out of my bed and take off my pajamas and get dressed and come out in the pouring down rain, okay, to speak at this meeting?" So obviously, the answer on the other side said, "Yes." So, Martin Luther King said, "Okay, well, you continue to work on this press statement and I'm going to go," and they sent somebody to pick Martin Luther King up and Martin Luther King wanted me to stay there and work on that statement and I did.

02:10:32:00 When he got back from the meeting, he was so euphoric, oh, he was just really up and so different from what his attitude was when he had to go. But Abernathy told him and said this is your crowd, you know, we could say something, speak, but the people, they want to hear you. And so, he just was- as I say, you know, out of it. So, there was no time to do any more press statement because he was, you know, in a whole different atmosphere. Okay? So, what happened was the next day, that morning, we got up early and we were working on the statement, again. And when we finished tweaking the press statement, Martin Luther King said to me, "Now, Bernard, the next project we going to work on is to institutionalize and internationalize nonviolence," comma, "to be discussed." Had nothing to do with the press conference, non-sequitur. I said, "Okay." So, I went and got ready and went to the airport later on and when I arrived at the airport, Fauntroy, Walter Fauntroy, was

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not there to pick me up. I called the office and find out that there was a riot in the streets in Washington, D.C., because he said that Martin Luther King had been shot. Well, I have to say, you know, frankly, I didn't think he would die, because he had been stabbed before in New York and he survived.

02:12:34:00 So being shot, okay, that certainly would-, you know, we don't know what extent that would have in terms of his, you know, physical health condition, but I did not in my mind, it was just not one of the things that, you know, and I- so I picked up the battery, the phones around the airport and there was a, you know, a circle with phones on it you could pick up. So, I dialed two numbers, one was AP, Associated Press, and the other was United Press International. Had both phones and I explained who I was and they were reading from Memphis the ticker tape that was coming through and I heard the reporter from UPI break down in tears. He was snorting and that kind of thing. That's how I found out that Martin Luther King was killed. He didn't tell me Martin Luther King was killed, but when he went into this, you know, thing, I knew and so I let him loose and hung up and told him bye, the others.

02:13:58:00 I managed to get to the office down in Fourteenth and U and as I was going through the streets were crowded with people rioting and that sort of thing. And there was Walt Frauntroy and Stokely Carmichael in the streets trying to quiet down the crowds of people. People were absolutely hysteric and wild. One fellow ran to us and begged us to call the fire department, you know, because what he had done was thrown a Molotov Cocktail in one of the windows of the buildings downstairs, you know, stores and his grandmother lived upstairs. It hadn't occurred to him that the flames were going to go up and he was just frantic, I mean, just wild, crazy and we had to calm him down. So, people were going absolutely berserk out there at that time. I haven't had time to grieve. We had to do a funeral, we had to do a garbage strike, workers, okay, campaign and get union recognition and then we had to go and the Poor People's Campaign and then I had to figure out how was I going to prepare myself to do, you know, institutionalized nonviolence and internationalize it.

02:15:27:00 So, I realized I had to go back to school because I dropped out as a sophomore. So I managed to get all my courses together and transfer them to one college, okay,

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American Baptist College, and get an undergraduate degree and then I had to go to law school to try to understand how to think like a lawyer because that was very important in terms of strategy and movement and then you had- now, I went to Boston University for a year and the Cambodian Crisis broke out, that's another whole story. But then I ended up going to Harvard University. Two weeks after I applied to Harvard University, I was hired there as the assistant to the dean of admissions. So, I had to go and start recruiting people to get ready for, you know, graduate school. So, I finished graduate school, was a teaching fellow and that kind of thing. Finished the doctorate early, so I only went three and a half years to Harvard, well, two and a half years for the doctorate and then another year for the masters, of course.

02:16:43:00 But I have been absolutely amazed at how people have received Martin Luther King's ideas and that sort of thing all over the world. There's a group called the Alternatives to Violence Program, AVP. I started training people in prison in nineteen seventy-five, Green Haven Prison in New York. That program is now in sixty countries around the world. They're teaching, okay, nonviolence, alright? And they're in thirty states in the U.S., mostly in prisons. And that's what we do. That accounts for the lack of prison riots like they used to have. Okay? And then going to Colombia and training people. We went to Haiti, for example, and stopped- and the Native American reservation, Wounded Knee. We were involved there and helping to quell that situation. And I just had been amazed at- in Nigeria, we trained another sixty-thousand people, Nigerians who were fighting the government, and we got them to agree to go through nonviolence training and the government offered an amnesty program. And these people in twenty-four countries now, the ones who were fighting the government- twenty-four countries around the world, being trained and being paid for by their country to get their training. They're in Florida, for example, underwater welding in Houston, okay, electronics. They're in Johannesburg, South Africa, learning how to be airline pilots. They're learning Kingian nonviolence. Okay? And now what they've done, this past year in Nigeria is these people have formed a new airline called Air Peace, so it's a way of showing how Martin Luther

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King's philosophy and how they embraced what, you know, he advocated and taught us.

02:19:02:00 Martin Luther King taught me, he went to the black board then Frogmore, South Carolina and taught us nonviolence in addition to what Jim Lawson had taught us in Highlander Folk School. So, these people are learning this, okay, now all over the world. And I went back to, what, Colombia- and I was kidnapped there- and they waited- they wanted to show me the results of Martin Luther King's teachings. So, the last day, that Friday, they saved this day to show me this place and it was in the Community and it was a center where they were training gang members. And who do you think was doing the training- former police officers were doing the training of gang members. Well, they also happened to have been former inmates in prison and that's where they learned the nonviolence, in the prison, because we have a prison called Bellavista in Colombia, near Medellin, you know, in the state of Antioquia, where it's now become a center for nonviolence training, the prison itself. And so, we focused on the lifers- people who had life sentences- because we wanted a tenured faculty. So, as they came through the prison system, these policemen got trained in nonviolence and now that's what they doing out in the community.

02:20:48:00 TREY ELLIS:
Wow, that's just incredible. I want to go back a little bit to the, after the assassination when you returned to Atlanta, can you talk about the scene when you arrived back here in the office and then the planning for the funeral.

02:21:04:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:
Yes, it was a little difficult, but not, you know, extraneous in terms of problems. There were some of our staff and, you know, associates with the Southern Cristian Leadership Conference that wanted Martin Luther King's funeral to be more... U.K., like they wanted a carriage, but they wanted Martin, you know, King's body to be drawn by a carriage of horses. They wanted the staff to wear spit tailcoats and high top hats and that sort of thing. And we finally negotiated and we got the mule train,

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mule train carriage, you know, to carry Martin Luther King's body and that sort of thing. So, it was a carriage, but it was more symbolic of poor people rather than the rich and the wealthy and the elite. Okay? And they wore overalls and that sort of thing as you can see from my photos. They didn't have any top hats and split tail coats.

02:22:24:00 So, the other issue is that I was on my way to the funeral coming down Auburn Avenue and I had to pass the office and the office door was open- our SCLC office- and people were bringing things out of there. I was, you know, Program Administrator, so I was one of the top administrators, so I knew the office wasn't supposed to be open. So, I went across the street over there and, sure enough, it was a test of our nonviolence. These people were taking things off the wall and off the desk and everything else. And I had to calm them down 'cause they were frantic and they were wailing and moaning and groaning. So, they're not like thieves, they were people who had felt they had lost Martin Luther King and they were just trying to find something they could hold onto that Martin Luther King perhaps had touched. And would you know, that it's sort of a country thing, but sometimes even executives who grew up in the country when they got to their desk, all day, you know, sitting at their desk, they would take off their shoes. So, there's somebody who think that they have Martin Luther King's shoes, 'cause they were under his desk, but they're Abernathy's shoes. Okay? And I managed to get most of them to put the things back and come on out of the office and I made sure it was locked, but I missed the funeral because I was working in the office trying to preserve, okay, these things, so that's just another side thing that happened, but I got there in time to see Robert Kennedy and some others come out of the church, and- but the wagon had, okay, gone off.

02:24:35:00 TREY ELLIS:
Marian Wright Edelman talked about how King's legacy has been sort of sanitized and co-opted by all different sorts of people today. How would you like... how do you want him to be remembered now? I mean, do you think that we've- how do you-

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what do you think the misconceptions are about how he's portrayed as a historical figure?

02:25:04:00 BERNARD LAFAYETTE:

Well, I would say that different people have different interpretations and different views and that's the case in many situations when you have people as well-known as Martin Luther King. For example, in Cuba they have a Martin Luther King Center next to Ebenezer Baptist Church. I helped to dedicate that and they got Reverend, you know, Suarez, you know, Raul Suarez, and he has embraced Martin Luther King, has brought the churches together. He was the one that got Castro to come to and speak at a Catholic church there at Havana. And he is now working on they call the fraternity of Baptist churches and making an ecumenical community and bringing in the Afro-American center and that kind of thing, etcetera. So, Martin Luther King's birthday is recognized by over a hundred countries throughout the world and the places where Martin Luther King has never been, but they really admire him and his birthday is celebrated in more countries than any person except, you know, Jesus Christ. So, I am very curious myself as the interpretation of how they see Martin Luther King. In their day and time, Martin Luther King represents what they were looking for in terms of the future of their countries and that sort of thing. They got the inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, but even in Durban, South Africa, where Mahatma Gandhi's granddaughter lives, they are interested in wanting to learn more about the teachings of Martin Luther King.

02:26:57:00 And so, I would say that because he lived during our period, and our time, that people were able to glean a great deal from him and his writings. And because they were, you know, in English they are probably more distributable throughout the globe. There are some people, you know- and he wrote, got a chance to write books. And in that short period of time, you're talking about twelve years, Martin Luther King, you can see why he was busy, okay, and during the winters he used take off and go to the islands, and he'd be writing everything he could find. He just constantly wrote. I was talking to Mrs. King and she found sermons that he had written and she

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had just found them, you know, at a recent period, you know, etcetera. That- so he was prolific and I think that's the thing that makes the difference, and he's quotable. So, my point is, what he left for us in terms of a legacy is more than we can comprehend in our lifetime.

02:28:10:00 I am still learning about Martin Luther King. Just recently, like this past week, okay, I learned that the people in Colombia and the people in Cuba were working together and that was one of the reasons why they came to a settlement. And that was basically because Suarez had been very much involved with them in Cuba and even the FARC and there are people who had been trained in Kingian nonviolence in both places and they were able to influence the people there in helping their government rather than having continuous wars and that kind of thing to come to some conclusions. So, Martin Luther King and his teachings are still having effect. It's multiplying. So, it's not a thing of the past. That's the thing that is so amazing. It's not only not a thing of the past, it's what will help preserve our future. And my prediction is that in the present crisis that we have facing now, in this country and in the world, those who would rely upon the teachings of Martin Luther King will inevitably find a way to make peace with each other.

02:29:44:00 END OF INTERVIEW