

INTERVIEWEE: ANDREW YOUNG

INTERVIEWER: THOMAS H. BAKER

June 18, 1970

B: This is the interview with the Reverend Andy Young. Sir, if I may just briefly give a bit [of] background here. You are an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ. After a good deal of activity in youth work and such, you were assigned to supervise the citizenship and voter education project at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in the South which brought you to Georgia in the early '60's, right in the aftermath of the Freedom Rides, I believe. From there you became in 1964, I think, the Executive Director of S.C.L.C. and, in 1967, Executive Vice President, a position you held up until recently when you, I assume, resigned. You are now running for Congress.

Y: That's right.

B: It is now June of 1970, and you are facing a primary in September.

Y: That's right.

B: Now, sir, I might add your current age is 38?

Y: 38.

B: During these years when you were first active in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in the early '60's, when Lyndon Johnson was Vice President of the United States, did you have any direct contact with him?

Y: No, I really didn't. I was mostly involved in the leadership training end in SCLC and pretty much confined myself to the small town South.

B: It's fair enough in this type of thing, I think, to bring in subjective and heresay type evidence, as long as we identify it that way. Did you form in those years an opinion of Johnson?

Y: I think that my feelings about Lyndon Johnson were probably very good between '60 to almost '65-'66, that as a Southerner, we always had a feeling that maybe it would take a Southerner in power who really understood the situation here in the South to help us get it straightened out. We kind of always looked to Lyndon Johnson before--

B: Even while he was Vice President?

Y: Even while he was Vice President. I think just before he became Vice President he had done some fairly constructive things in his role in the Senate.

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B: Like the Civil Rights Act?

Y: Yes. I think we felt those were hopeful signs, that here was a guy that could get things done, who knew the legislative machinery of the government. Dr. King used to always say that if a Southerner ever really gets converted then there is no better ally.

B: When you say "we", was this opinion general within the leadership structure of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference?

Y: No, I would say that was probably the way Dr. King felt. We always had a kind of split attitude toward the federal government in SCLC. There were some that were basically hopeful about it, and there were some that were completely cynical about it. Of course, I'm not really sure that there were any strong opinions about Lyndon Johnson in the early days.

B: While he was Vice President?

Y: While he was Vice President.

B: I gather that neither you nor anyone else in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference was really having much to do with him directly. Was there ever any times in those years when, to your knowledge, he was involved directly or indirectly in any of the things you were going through here in the South?

Y: No, I don't think so. Not to my knowledge. Actually, largely our work was through President Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, Burke Marshall, John Doar and others.

B: Did you meet Ramsey Clark in that period?

Y: Yes, I did. I met him in the Justice Department but really didn't have much to do with Ramsey until later on.

B: I gather Selma was probably was his first serious involvement. This isn't directly related to [President] Johnson but were the contacts with the Kennedy Administration with the President and his brother, the Attorney General, did they work right?

Y: It depends. I think that Dr. King's contacts by and large were very helpful and, except in Albany, Georgia, in '62. I think that was one time when we thought the Kennedy Administration worked against us.

B: I've seen it said that in the Albany affair that the problem you ran into was with the local civil rights movement.

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Y: That's what everybody says, but we always had tensions in the local civil rights movements. What really put a stumbling block in the movement was the fact that the Kennedy Administration, I think, engineered a federal court injunction against us. We had at that time, and still [have], I think, the federal courts were something we felt we had to respect, that this was the one branch of government that always dealt fairly with us. But we really felt, or I felt--and I think Dr. King felt too--that the Kennedys used the courts unwisely then and that had they gone into a state court we would have violated the injunction. And they couldn't have gotten into a federal court without some Administration help.

There was also a pretty long argument between Dr. King and Burke Marshall and Robert Kennedy. It's probably one of the few times I heard Dr. King rather angry. But there was a feeling then that--Carl Sanders was running for Governor against Marvin Griffin--and it was their feeling that this kind of civil rights activity would stir up backlash vote and help Marvin Griffin get elected. It was our feeling that we shouldn't try to--you know, Marvin Griffin was probably not as good as Carl Sanders, but we figured that Carl Sanders wasn't going to be much good for us either. So we didn't see any wisdom in holding up on demonstrations.

We also felt that while the demonstrations may cause some stir of a backlash white vote, demonstrations have always been the best way of stirring up the Negro community. It turned out that Carl Sanders won that election by about 200,000 votes, which was just about what the Negro registered vote was at that time.

B: Something you said is intriguing. Was it just sort of an gentleman's agreement that you would not violate a federal court injunction?

Y: I think that that was one of Dr. King's convictions--that we had established the fact that Southern courts--state courts--were by and large unjust and were very much subject to the prejudices and influences of the area. So we deliberately and openly violated court orders from state courts because we knew that those were being used--we classified those as unjust laws and an unjust judicial system.

But the federal courts were different. I think it was some measure of our respect for law and justice that made us abide by that even though it was very much against us. I think in that specific instance, it was unfairly instituted.

B: You almost imply that they were taking advantage of you.

Y: They really were. At that point they really didn't know how to deal with the civil rights movement, and they always sought to quiet it down.

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- B: I was going to ask you, I've also heard it said that the intensity of the civil rights movement caught the Kennedy Administration by surprise, that when they came into office in '61 they had no idea how powerful the movement was. Did the Southern Christian Leadership Conference find yourself having to educate the Kennedys?
- Y: We did. And it was almost '63 before they--I think we educated them; I think George Wallace helped educate them; and I think probably the most credit ought to go to Ross Barnett at the University of Mississippi. I think that's where Robert Kennedy really began to understand the treachery that was present.
- B: In the white South--the leadership of the white South?
- Y: Yes. And when we would say things to him about how things were going, he really didn't understand. He was very naive about the South. I guess in their own way they had their Southern strategy.
- B: What do you think it was?
- Y: You know, some of the worst judicial appointments made were made by the Kennedys in the South. We basically got along on the old Eisenhower appointments.
- B: Does anybody in particular stand out in your mind?
- Y: Oh yes. Judge Cox from Mississippi and, let's see--I think Scarlett down in Savannah is a Kennedy appointment, I'm not sure. But I think he is.
- B: Did you pass this feeling on to the Justice Department?
- Y: Yes, but actually Cox was part of a trade for Thurgood Marshall it seems. The Kennedy strategy in those days was to try to please everybody, so he would appoint a Thurgood Marshall in New York but also appoint a Cox in Mississippi.
- B: We might make it clear, that would be now Justice Marshall's appointment to the lower courts in New York at that time.
- Y: That's right.
- B: You said in effect that the Kennedy Administration was first asking you to go slow. Was there ever a case where they got you to call off something that you planned or wanted to do?
- Y: No. What they didn't realize and what most people didn't realize is that we were not really in control in the sense that a movement is sort of like an ocean tide. You don't really stop

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it; you might direct it constructively. That's all we were able to do, was try to provide a kind of constructive direction of the movement of people. But for us to stand in the way and say "stop this", we would have been washed away.

B: You say "provide direction", in fact in those years, really Martin Luther King's presence and personality was direction, I guess. Were you having difficulty in the early years, in the early '60's, with what later became the more militant groups?

Y: Oh yes. There was always only a minority of people even in the South who were committed to non-violence. From the very beginning in 1960 the great debate was whether the movement would attempt to adopt non-violence as a tactic or non-violence as a way of life. And I think that was the continuous argument. Most of the people I think said, "Well, we will only adopt this as a tactic now," and there was no moral or philosophical commitment to non-violence beyond a handful of people.

I would say that there is more and deeper commitment to non-violence now than there was in the early '60's. I think even Dr. King was not really--well, was never a pacifist and continued to grow in his commitment to non-violence. It was not something that he came into the movement with full-grown in 1955.

B: You say only a handful were really dedicated and committed to philosophical non-violence in the early years. Who would they be?

Y: I think Dr. King and Jim [James M.] Lawson in Nashville, James Bevel, Bernard Lafayette, John Lewis, and the Nashville movement that came up under under Jim Lawson's influence. I had pretty much evolved out of a Quaker background and was, while not a pacifist, certainly committed to non-violence as an approach to life--totally.

B: Does Bayard Rustin occupy kind of mentor's position in this?

Y: In a way, a strange way. Bayard was one of the first people I heard talk about non-violence. But we never got much with Bayard. By the time we began to turn to him for advice, we were interested in a radical active non-violence. Bayard was already beginning to talk his coalition politics and was much more inclined toward going along with the Administration, so that Bayard consistently advised us against things. He was one of those who would have advised us not to push Albany after the Kennedys said so. He didn't want us to go to Birmingham; he advised against the March on Washington. The March on Washington first started among the students in Birmingham. They conceived of it, along with Jim Bevel, as a March on Washington likened to Gandhi's salt march to the sea. They were actually going to get out on the road and walk to Washington, mobilizing people as they went along. Bayard was the one that came down and helped talk Martin out of that. We kind of pulled the flanking action on them and started announcing it anyway.

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I think that was the situation where two of us left Birmingham and went to Washington to a conference with the Legal Defense Fund on the Legal situation and civil disobedience. I remember them getting me out of the meeting--this must have been in about April of '63--and the guy asked me if we had plans to come to Washington, I said, "We really don't have plans but there had been some people talking about marching to Washington, because while Birmingham is where the the symptoms are, the core of the problem is right here in Washington." It was a Negro reporter and he wrote it up headlining "Talk Going On About a March To Washington." And that was the big headline across the top of the page and it just seemed to snowball. I think the press and the masses created the kind of situation where the leadership kind of had to go along.

B: Then your flanking attack wasn't really deliberate, it just kind of happened.

Y: It really wasn't. But I think after that we almost always did things--we would try to get--we would never try to take an idea to leaders and convince them, any of them, black or white. Leaders are very, very conservative any of them, including us. It's the people themselves. If an idea catches fire with them, then the leaders have to come in line and give some form and shape to it. So when we talked about this wherever we went, you know, it became something that people responded to, and you have a way of preaching the things that get the response. That's sort of the way we helped put that together.

B: Are you classifying Dr. King as a leader in that context?

Y: Yes. I think he was a leader, though, that realized the process and opened himself to it. He didn't resist that. He was very sensitive to the movement among the people and that was one of his strongest points of leadership--his intuition about what people were ready for, what sacrifices they would make, what sacrifices they wouldn't make. They had many, many good ideas about social change but the ones that--you know, how do you tell an idea whose time has come? I think that's the mark of real leadership and real greatness which Dr. King certainly possessed.

B: Then the real driving force in SCLC outside of Dr. King's enormous prestige would have been the group of younger men like yourself.

Y: I think we would have to be considered leaders of that type too.

B: Your being impressed by the still younger ones, the students and the Stokley Carmichaels?

Y: No, it was mostly being pressed, I guess what we used to call the grass roots folks, that for instance I was in the leadership training program. We were bringing in the neighborhood leadership from the eleven Southern states once a week into a workshop.

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B: This is the Dorchester Center?

Y: Yes. So after spending a solid week with farmers and students and workers and talking about problems, we'd get a sense of what they were really concerned about, what they were willing to do, and what they weren't willing to do. We were constantly passing on this kind of information to Dr. King. We were constantly being pulled into situations because, after having trained the people and sent them back home, it would almost always get them in trouble with the local authorities. Then we would have to go in to help rescue them, and that's the way most movements began.

B: That's interesting. You know it's a staple of traditional white Southern leadership that all the trouble is that "our happy darkies are being stirred up by their leaders." It's the other way around.

Y: It's exactly the other way around and I think probably always has been.

B: One more thing before we leave these years, everybody knows a good deal about the confrontations of places like Albany and Birmingham. What places did you consider for such confrontations and reject? Were there any other towns you thought might serve that kind of purpose?

Y: Danville, Virginia was one. There was a group that tried to get us into East Texas. We dabbled around with Mississippi and Clarksdale, and just decided not to. Natchez was the same way. We made a couple of forays into Atlanta, but that was about it.

B: What criteria did you use? Did you deliberately look for a Bull Connor or a Jim Clark?

Y: I don't think so. I think we did realize that you had to have a kind of readiness amongst the people. You had to have a certain kind of local leadership.

B: Among the black.

Y: Yes. For instance in both Albany and Birmingham, and Birmingham especially, the six largest churches in town had all changed ministers in the last three years. All of them were pastored by young men who had had some previous movement experience. One was Dr. King's brother; one was a young man that had been Dr. King's associate pastor in Montgomery; others had been in the student movement here in Atlanta. When you could see a team of six or eight ministers in one town pastoring some of the larger churches you had really a kind of community base to work with--especially when you didn't have strong opposition from the more established leadership. In Atlanta I think it was more established leadership that kept us out, just as it would have in Dallas or Houston. Whenever we talked about going to Texas, we always got calls advising us not to come.

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B: From whom?

Y: From local Negro leadership.

B: This would be the older, middle class, fairly wealthy Negro leadership?

Y: Yes. And without a strong enough base among the churches or among the grass roots element, it just didn't make sense to go because you couldn't fight the black community and the white community at the same time.

B: To move on in time, when President Kennedy was assassinated, was there any immediate apprehension that now a Southerner is President, now things are going to be different. Or did the attitude that you mentioned earlier still hold.

Y: No, I think we were very optimistic, though I must confess there were probably some people who felt--it was common talk that Lyndon Johnson had something to do with the assassination. This wasn't so much in the high levels of SCLC but there was a lot of distrust that the assassination happened in Texas and--I guess I'd call it the educated paranoia of the black community. They'd been so persecuted so long that whenever something like this happens they're sure it's no accident. But I think that Dr. King, for one, was always very optimistic about President Johnson.

B: Did President Johnson do anything immediately to reassure the leadership and the black community generally?

Y: I don't remember exactly the time schedule. There were several meetings, though, in '63. I think one of the pictures of Dr. King and Lyndon Johnson was taken in '63--well, early '64.

Now we campaigned very heavily not only for President Johnson but against Goldwater. I've always thought that the anti-Goldwater tide was something that Dr. King helped to create, because we went around to every major city mobilizing the black community against Goldwaterism. We really weren't looking too hard at President Johnson. We were just scared to death of Goldwater.

B: Was that something of a departure for Dr. King to take an active part in partisan politics?

Y: Yes.

B: What prompted him, the fear--

Y: Fear.

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B: of Goldwaterism?

Y: Yes.

B: You used the phrase "Goldwaterism" I gather you mean the national white backlash, rather than Senator Goldwater.

Y: This was the period of the backlash. I think there was some report that the John Birch Society-related foundations had spent some 70 million dollars in propaganda, on the program "Life Line", all kinds of tracts and movies and everything else were being produced there. We saw that as a direct attempt to turn back the progress that had been made in the past years.

B: Did Dr. King ever regret getting that actively involved in politics?

Y: No, I don't think so. In fact I think he was beginning to realize that he had to become more and more involved in politics and did so.

B: How did Dr. King and President Johnson get along together personally?

Y: I think there was a great deal of mutual respect. I don't think they had much of a relationship. Dr. King used to say that when you go to talk with President Kennedy that he made you do all the talking. But when you went to talk to President Johnson, he did all the talking. Of course Dr. King was a talker himself, so that no personal relationship ever developed, as I think did with President Kennedy, there was a give and take kind of relationship. It was all one way, that when you were invited to the White House, it was for something specific and that's what President Johnson pursued and that's all you probably got a chance to deal with.

B: I have wondered if the two men ever really understood each other, they seemed to be such different types.

Y: Yes.

B: Did you ever meet President Johnson personally?

Y: Yes, a couple of times.

B: How did you get along with him?

Y: I tend to be a listener anyway, and I was just anxious to try to figure him out by what he was saying.

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B: Did you?

Y: No. You know, you get impressions and--well, I don't know. I kind of figured him as a big, well-meaning, do-gooder Texan, who had plenty of problems but who really was sincere--and was very effective politically. So I respected him. But you couldn't hardly like him. That was certainly true up to Viet Nam, and that's when it began to drift apart.

B: Dr. King's stand against the war?

Y: Yes. We began to see very early that Viet Nam was what it's now come to be. We saw that as the kind of war that nobody could win, that was not really in the best interest of the United States, and that was seriously damaging the domestic progress we were making that was so necessary. It was about the time of the Watts riots that we began to see that the crisis in the cities was demanding funds that were now being diverted to Viet Nam, and that that was the domestic crisis that was being created by this international crisis. I think we always felt that the domestic crisis was more dangerous and therefore more important for the country.

B: Did you have any hesitation at all about putting Dr. King and the organization so openly in the anti-Viet Nam movement?

Y: Yes, we never had any problems about making our position clear. I think from on, as far back as '64 and '65 in speeches there were references to the war of Viet Nam, opposing it. I think we tended to try to keep the two movements apart because for one thing the peace movement was predominantly white. In that stage it had also around New York its kookie elements.

By and large we were pretty conservative in our statements. We always followed a policy of very precise criticisms, very deliberate analysis of what was going on. We didn't get caught up in a whole lot of inflammatory rhetoric, and that was more or less the style of the peace movement. The peace movement had a kind of old left and new left tinge to it, too--not that this really disturbed us. The people themselves didn't disturb us, but in terms of our life in the South and our politics in the South, it just didn't make sense to be linked up with all those fellows.

B: Did President Johnson, or anyone in his Administration, try to talk you out of the Viet Nam stand?

Y: Yes. There was a briefing with Mr. Goldberg, who was then Ambassador to the United Nations. That was arranged by President Johnson.

B: That's when you, Bayard Rustin and Dr. King I believe--

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Y: I believe Walt Fauntroy went on that, too. There were about six or seven of us. But it was very, you know, we weren't sure that Goldberg even believed what he was saying. And that was when the holocaust started because in the context of a press conference Dr. King said something about opposing the war in Viet Nam, but also in answer to a question, I think, said he thought it was ridiculous that we didn't recognize the largest nation in the world as a nation. So that in a sense threw us into the peace movement. So in a strange way it was President Johnson himself that, by attempting to keep us out, in a way forced Dr. King into the peace movement, because he was not the kind of guy to retreat.

B: Did President Johnson continue to try to apply pressure on that stand or did he abandon it?

Y: There was a little pressure. There was pressure from others in the civil rights movement, Roy Wilkins, Whitney Young, and Bayard--and the labor wing, especially. The Democratic party even started organizing meetings against us in the black community. They had a conference of preachers in Detroit. They pulled together all the Negro newspaper editors. And the purpose of this was to organize, was to tell them, you know, was to get them to support the Administration's stand.

It was very interesting, especially with these--we had to do then something to counteract that. So the Johnson Administration was pulling the preachers together one week, and we pulled them together a month later and would explain our side because when Dr. King was convinced about something and got to preaching on it it was kind of hard not to go along.

B: You are escalating on each other then.

Y: Yes. So from '65 through '66 there was a long struggle almost--I guess up to about April of '67. Then I guess about January--by '67 the break was almost complete though.

Then one night, it was one of these accidents, I guess. That must have been along about Thanksgiving time of '66. We were sitting around talking about Viet Nam and Dr. King was really worked up about it. So some of us jumped on him and said, "Well look, there's no need in preaching like this to us, you ought to tell that to the President."

So he said, "I don't mind telling that to the President, but he doesn't ask me for advice."

We said, "Yes, but you have a chance. He really needs to hear that." And we got onto him about the Prophets and the Kings--and it was really mostly a joking mood--and asked him if he's really a prophet and now he ought to prophesy to the king, not to the people.

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Just by accident one of the guys said, "Well, why don't you talk to him tomorrow. He'll talk to you on the phone, and just explain where you are." Because this was when he was organizing against us.

Bernard Lee picked up the phone and called the White House trying to set up an appointment for Dr. King to talk with President Johnson the next day. And for some reason--we don't understand how--they put him right through.

So they had about an hour conversation where Dr. King probably did as much talking as the President did. I think President Johnson was saying that, you know, he was under pressure from the generals on one side to go ahead and really escalate the war and try to win it in a hurry. You got the impression of him trying to balance the military forces over and against well, really, the State Department. You kind of sensed him being caught in a State Department-Pentagon tension. Dr. King, basically, was preaching about the immorality of the situation more than tactics. But I think that was probably the last time they talked.

B: Oh really! That early?

Y: Yes.

B: It's kind of a shame in a way.

Y: Well there wasn't much--Dr. King, I think, was invited to go--he felt as though whenever he went to the White House with Roy Wilkins and Whitney Young and Bayard, that they were using his presence. There was one situation when they went in--I think this was around the Watts riots--where there was a statement that was drawn up that more or less condemned the riots rather than analyze them. While Dr. King was perfectly willing to condemn the riots, he didn't want it to come out. You know, he felt that a simple condemnation was superficial. He at first refused to sign the statement and suggested the changes. Then they changed it and he agreed to sign it. But after he had agreed to sign it--finally by the time it was printed it was more like the original one that was printed. I think he felt that in associating with the other civil rights leaders with President Johnson, he was probably being used. So he just kind of declined after that.

B: The implication there is that the other civil rights leaders are being used, too--Rustin, Wilkins--

Y: I think they were, very definitely.

B: Presumably with their own acquiescence.

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Y: Yes. Well, they agreed. You see, I think the Urban League and the NAACP were always basically totally domestic movements and--

[tape interruption]

B: You were talking about the older civil rights organizations as being totally domestic movements.

Y: And one way of saying it, they were movements of Negroes to try to be middle class, and there was never any judgment on the middle class white American culture. We saw our role as different. We saw white American middle class culture as overwhelmingly racist, materialistic, and militaristic. While we were integrationists in the sense that we saw ourselves involved in the society with them, we were never trying to be like them. We thought that our presence in the society would provide a kind of confrontation with racism and that our associations with the rest of the world had to challenge American militarism. So really we were just from different perspectives altogether.

SCLC in 1957 adopted the motto "To Redeem the Soul of America." Well if you're going to redeem the soul of America there's something wrong with the soul of America. I think that we always saw racism as the phrase Dr. King used to use, "as a cancer in the body-politic," which had to be cut out before the society could move along in a healthy fashion.

So in a way, we saw Viet Nam as an extension of American militarism and racism.

B: The Kerner Commission Report said something similar to what you've just said. I gather you could not have therefore been pleased with President Johnson's reaction or lack of it.

Y: No. By that time, I think, we had lost faith in President Johnson altogether.

B: Altogether?

Y: Yes, altogether. I think that most of us were looking around for other candidates by that time. When we thought he was going to be the President, we had no--I started working with Senator McCarthy. Others were working with Robert Kennedy, and we just kind of gave up on that Administration.

B: Did you kind of question his sincerity about equal rights?

Y: No, I didn't. I thought he was sincere, but I thought he had just gotten himself trapped and was basically blind to what was going on around him.

B: May I ask why you chose to work for Senator McCarthy rather than Robert Kennedy?

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Y: Because I thought that Robert Kennedy--I was always both attracted to the Kennedys and afraid of them. They had such a powerful appeal to the black community, that I was afraid that both of them had a tendency to take the black vote for granted. I thought it was important to get somebody--that the other candidates would have a good chance at the Negro voter. I probably would have switched, you know, had Robert Kennedy lived. Especially after Dr. King's funeral I began to--well, I was very much impressed with him when he came here.

B: Robert Kennedy, when he came here to Atlanta for the funeral?

Y: Robert Kennedy. We talked with him for a couple of hours one evening. I think the fact that impressed me was that he refused to talk politics.

B: What did you talk about?

Y: I don't know, it was just a much more relaxed and social conversation. People were very angry. Some people were very bitter about Dr. King's assassination, and he handled that very well. You know, I just had the impression that here was a solid guy, and I guess I wasn't really always sure of that. Well, I guess I was sure of it, but I resisted it.

B: Back to the Johnson Administration. Who did you consider to be your best friend in the Administration--say starting with the White House staff? Did you have direct contacts with Cliff Alexander, Harry McPherson?

Y: I think we worked mostly through the Justice Department and Ramsey Clark. I always did have a great deal of respect for Ramsey. Well, that was just where we kind of plugged in most easily.

B: Did you ever have the impression that maybe Ramsey Clark wasn't very closely plugged into the White House?

Y: I got that impression during the Poor People's Campaign, but I felt before that that he probably was. I don't know who was plugged in by '68. I always thought that as a Texan, and both because President Johnson had been close to both the father and the son, that Ramsey probably had as good an entree as anybody. But I guess along about '68, while he had entree, I don't know how much influence he had.

B: Is it fair to say--

Y: Oh, we also talked a lot with Vice President Humphrey.

B: With any results? Did you get the impression that he could do things?

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Y: Yes, some things.

B: Like what?

Y: I don't know what it was specifically. You know, we had a notion that nobody could do anything until we made them do it. We never thought of non-violence as simply an appeal to the conscience of the Administration. It was an appeal to the conscience of the Administration, but they could never respond until the power alignments in the society had been shifted. So we saw our work as a job of trying to shift the power and influence lines in the society.

B: Did you have that feeling with Roger Wilkins?

Y: Yes. We were always very close to the Community Relations Division. It was one of the sections of government that I thought was very effective, especially under Governor Collins.

B: Especially under Governor Collins?

Y: Yes. I still think it takes a Southerner to deal with the South.

B: Back again to once you've made the converts they're the most dedicated?

Y: Yes. And I thought Governor Collins was probably the most effective. As much as I like Roger, and as talented as he is, I thought that that division was weakened by placing it under the Justice Department and by putting it under Roger's charge. Now it was weakened for the South; I think it was strengthened for the North.

B: Was that because the blacks in the South distrusted the Justice Department or connected it with law enforcement?

Y: No. It was because the whites in the South did. I don't think it made any difference to blacks. In fact, it was probably good for blacks. Blacks had always had a lot of confidence in the Justice Departments, and especially Roger Wilkins.

B: Were you ever offered an administrative post?

Y: I was offered a job with "The White House Conference to Fulfill These Rights" as one of the--I don't know whether they had co-directors, or something. But I never felt that that was my--well, I thought that consistent with our notions of having to change the power alignments before change could come about, I didn't see change in the power line from within the Administration, especially in a Conference.

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B: One of the things that ran through the whole Johnson Administration, and I guess even back starting with the Kennedy Administration, was a whole series of ideas involving premises such as "the FBI doesn't like the civil rights movement"; "J. Edgar Hoover and Martin Luther King have a vendetta on"; "The FBI bugs the Southern Christian Leadership Conference meeting rooms", etc. What is the story?

Y: It's probably all true! I think we always knew that we were tapped and bugged. It didn't bother us too much because we figured--well for instance, it started out as not the FBI. It started out as the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. We knew it and we knew we were even being bugged by the Ku Klux Klan. In fact, there was a Ku Klux Klan photographer that used to come in our meetings and take pictures and we knew who he was.

But we had a philosophy of working completely open, and we had nothing to hide. I think one of the classic stories in that was down in Jackson, Mississippi. James Bevel and Dianne were being followed around by Mississippi Secret Police. It was a very hot day and they [the police] were sitting out in the car. There used to be some mechanism where they would bug the room and listen out in the car. It was so hot out there that Bevel went out and got them and invited them into the meeting!

That was part of the Gandhian influence, that you could be completely open because you were doing what was right. It was always my job, anyway, to tell people what we were going to do in advance. For instance, when we were going into Birmingham for a demonstration, we would call the FBI, call the Justice Department, and even when we went to town to talk to the local police. That was always one of my jobs, just to make sure that everybody understood exactly what we were there for. We knew they would have to oppose us, but we wanted them to know what we were trying to do. Because their fears were always worse than the reality. So in that context, being bugged by the FBI didn't seem like any big thing.

B: There's also a story related to that, that there was in existence, presumably from an FBI bug, a tape recording in which Dr. King and perhaps others in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference had been taped in private, personal, alleged sexual escapades, etc.

Y: We heard that.

B: Excuse me, you'd better make this clear. You heard the rumor?

Y: We heard the rumor, yes, and we heard it always from the press. I remember Walter Fauntroy and I went to meet with the New York Times about this, their Washington bureau, because the stories were particularly rampant around Washington. None of their reporters, while they would all say they had heard the rumors and they would admit they had heard them from FBI agents, none of them would admit to having actually heard a

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tape or seen any pictures or anything. None of them would even tell us the FBI agents that they heard the rumors from. So there was never anything we could do about that very much.

B: Did you ever ask directly at the FBI or the Attorney General's office?

Y: We asked that the FBI--because I think about the time Dr. King won the Nobel Prize, Hoover said he was the most notorious liar. We went to see Hoover about that. We expected it to be a big fuss and show-down but he was very cordial and ended up talking most of the time about the guys in Mississippi. That was right between the time that [James] Chaney, [Andrew] Goodman and [Michael] Schwerner had been killed and nobody had been arrested yet. I think it was out of Dr. King's criticism on that that Hoover blew his top, for one thing. We also found out later that Hoover had been trying to get himself nominated for a Nobel Prize!

B: I had not heard that.

Y: On one or two occasions had been nominated, but never really won it.

B: It had been discussed with the nominating group?

Y: Yes, that's right. His name was submitted. We kind of thought that there may have been something rather personal in that vendetta.

B: Did J. Edgar Hoover directly deny that existence of the tape such as was rumored?

Y: We didn't ask him. When we went in we got the same treatment we got from Lyndon Johnson. We introduced ourselves. He said he was glad that we had come and he launched a 50-minute monologue. We finally cut him off after 50 minutes and said something about law enforcement in the South and protection of rights. He and I got to talking--well, DeLoach was in there with him and DeLoach and I got to talking about protection afforded Dr. King, and I agreed to keep in touch with DeLoach when we were moving anywhere to let him know where we were going. But that's about all that happened.

The rumors, though, continued. They kind of slowed down, but I think--I'm not exactly sure why, but it may have been because we didn't talk about it, about that at all. Walter Fauntroy and Ralph Abernathy and I asked for another appointment to come without Dr. King, and Mr. Hoover was not available. But we did meet with DeLoach and some of the other staff of his.

We talked then about the rumors, which DeLoach denied. They were basically three. One, that Dr. King was communist, or influenced by communists; that he was

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stealing money, had money in Swiss banks and stuff like this; and that there was some kind of wild sexual activity going on around Dr. King personally. We couldn't get anything from them except to realize that they were probably fairly narrow and almost a kind of fascist mentality. It really kind of scared me that everything you asked you got a police answer for, almost right out of the rule book. There really wasn't any honest conversation. When I said, "Well, if there are communists then I'd like to know who they are and where they are and what possible influence they have." He told us to go to the House UnAmerican Activities Committee or the American Legion.

B: Or the American Legion?

Y: Yes. He said their files were very good and open to the public. So we said, "These are the very racists we've been fighting, and I wouldn't respect anything that they've got to say." He didn't seem to understand that. He was so far to the right from where we were, and I figured we were about dead-center then.

B: I might add for the record that that's Deke DeLoach who at that time was head man--whatever his title was. Did you ever talk to Ramsey Clark about the FBI and this kind of problem?

Y: I talked to Ramsey--not much. I talked to Burke Marshall about it a lot. I didn't get much from Burke either, except that there wasn't anything that they could do about it. This was when Robert Kennedy was still Attorney General. He said that "there isn't anything that we can do about this. We send requests out. We ask something and we get back thirty page memorandum, all very official" so there was no communication with them either.

B: We're about to run out of time here. One more question. You've been talking about doing something in the civil rights movement after about '64 or '65 or so. Did you know what to do?

Y: Yes. I think we still say that you're not going to have any progress in this nation until you have political reform in the South. That was another thing that I didn't like, that I really held against Lyndon Johnson, more than Viet Nam. That was with all of the enthusiasm around Selma, of some 900 counties that qualified for voting rights supervision under the Voting Rights Act of 1965, by the time he went out of office fewer than a hundred--in fact it was just about 104, I think, by the time he left--had any kind of federal presence in them. I then was in my paranoid phase, too, and I really felt that one of the ways he got it passed and one of the deals that was made to get that Bill passed with Richard Russell and [James O.] Eastland that they didn't have to worry that he was going to see how it was enforced, because Sunflower County, Eastland's County, was one of those counties with the most blatant denial of voting rights. It was way, way late before we could force them to have any kind of federal referee or voting supervision in Sunflower County because that was Eastland's County in Mississippi.

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The same thing was true here in Georgia. We didn't have any federal referees in Georgia, and I always thought that was Richard Russell's influence. We could get them in Alabama because Alabama was under Wallace and out with the Administration. We could also get them--like in Alabama even, if there are nine counties in a congressional district, you might get a dozen federal referees in a dozen counties in Alabama, but you would only have three in the black belt counties. So they'd let you get the registration up to about a third and then you'd find it difficult to get federal referees after that. There'd always be some excuse. We felt like they were playing games with us, that they really did not want the reform of the South.

B: Now the "they" here, this must be--

Y: Lyndon Johnson and the Administration.

B: Not the Justice Department specifically?

Y: No, I always felt that the Justice Department was under wraps. I don't know how I got that impression.

B: You're clearly testimony to this, you're running for Congress. You see a political solution to this race problem.

Y: Yes. And not only the race problem, you see it's a solution to the peace problem too--that I'm convinced that our foreign policy is racist. And that's not by intention, that's by accident. The decision to go into the Dominican Republic was made by a Texan, who'd grown up all his life thinking of Spanish speaking colored people as wetbacks, and a Georgian, who is scared to death of colored people trying to run their own affairs.

B: The Texan would be Lyndon Johnson?

Y: No. A guy by the name Tapley--

B: Oh, W. Tapley Bennett.

Y: Yes. Tapley Bennett from Georgia. And who was it from Texas, who was in charge of the OAS thing?

B: John Bartlow Martin?

Y: No.

B: Who is in charge of the what?

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Y: Organization of American States? Ambassador to the Organization of American States?

B: Yes, I know who you're talking about.

Y: He's from down around Corpus Christi, somewhere.

B: I know who you mean. [Thomas C. Mann]

Y: I just think that those people with that kind of background would not react comfortably to a mass movement amongst colored people. So their tendency is to send for the Marines whenever there's trouble. I think we could have negotiated a very successful transfer of power in that situation without any violence. I think that the struggle in a place like Jamaica and Trinidad, for instance, is not a Marxist struggle. It's a struggle against poverty. You know, Communists don't have to come to tell them they're hungry, and unless there is built in the kind of pattern--unless we are sensitive to the needs of reform in those countries in the world, we're going to find ourselves relating to them in a military fashion because we wait too late to do anything political and socially and economically.

B: It's 11:30. Is there anything else you want to add in this?

Y: No. Is there anything else that you wanted to wrap up with?

B: Thank you.

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