

*Civil Rights History Project
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Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
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Interviewees: Worth W. Long

Interview Date: December 6, 2015

Location: Jackson, Mississippi

Interviewer: Emilye Crosby

Videographer: John Bishop

Length: 1 file; approximately 2 hours, 43 minutes

START OF RECORDING

Female 1: From the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

EMILYE CROSBY: Are we rolling? Good morning.

WORTH W. LONG: Good morning.

EC: It's December 6, 2015. I'm Emilye Crosby and we're in Jackson, Mississippi with Worth Long and John Bishop is filming, and we're here with the Civil Rights History Project, which is co-sponsored by the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. Thanks for joining us this morning.

WL: Yeah. Great to be here.

EC: Worth, could you tell us when and where you were born, and about your family and community?

WL: Right. I was born Worth Westinghouse Long, Jr. [Laughter] in Durham, North Carolina, born at Duke Hospital on January 15, 1936. My mother, Gertrude [Watson] Long, my father Reverend William Worth Long, were both North Carolinians. My father born over near Charlotte in Mecklenburg County, and my mother born in Chatham County, which is basically, from Durham, about thirty miles, and a center of where he as a presiding elder in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, had at least ten churches.

One of the things that he did was he was, as a circuit rider, was that he went from church to church. He had what he called “quarterly conferences” and at these conferences which he scheduled regularly, he would do the business of the church. The business of the church at that time [laughs] was broad. It included what they called “general claims,” the financial aspects, the mortgages, the membership, foreign--I almost said “foreign aid”--but missionary funding, especially for Africa at that time, and youth development, all of that within one church element. And my mother complemented his work, not as a secretary but as an administrator. [Laughter] As an administrator, she helped manage the financial aspects, not just of the home, but of his church, of this broad spectrum of network within the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, A.M.E. Zion Church.

I used to--. She would sometimes talk about her early upbringing, and as would he, but always in different settings. My father would talk about it when he took me out to work me to death on the farm. [Laughter] He would--if we were in doing work that was close work, where we could talk, like he had a row and I had a row, then we could talk across the row. But generally, he was behind the mule. We had a farm just five miles

from Durham that was--that supplied us with milk and all of our garden needs, garden food needs.

EC: Can I ask you a couple questions?

WL: Yeah. Uh-huh.

EC: So would you--. If it's providing you milk, do you have to go back and forth every day or are people helping with the work on the farm?

WL: No. My father, for five days a week, got up in the morning, got into his Jeep, and drove out to the farm, and stayed all day, and came back at night. He came back in time for dinner. We waited for him in many cases, and then we would eat our last meal. But we're only talking about five miles away. [5:00] On the weekends, one of the sons, in fact his only son, [laughter] Worth W. would get on his bicycle and pedal out with a can--with a milk can--and milk the cow and feed the hog, the two hogs, and feed the mule, and then pedal with, carefully, with the milk. In fact, I could almost churn the milk depending on the roads that I traveled. [Laughter]

EC: Come back with butter, not milk.

WL: Right. But the milk had a five-mile journey.

EC: Did you enjoy it when you and your father would work side-by-side and talk?

WL: I did indeed. I liked it when he would not be formal. My father as a preacher had a formal aspect, but he was a great storyteller and had a great sense of humor. But when he got formal, I think he thought formal. [Laughter] But his expressions were folk. He had folk expressions. He was what you know, was known as a country preacher. So he was what you call a "shoutin' preacher," a shouting, stomping

preacher. And folk used to say “in the African mode” and of course, my father was a-- had the lineage, the African lineage, in the sense that he married--. His first wife he married was from Nigeria. They were free Africans. As I look through Carter G. Woodson’s book on free Negroes, what I--free coloreds--he, her family, her entire family, according to the censuses, were free, but we cannot ascertain in Iredell County, North Carolina, when they were freed. My father was almost adopted by that family when his folk in Mecklenburg County passed. The family that had taken him in basically pledged their oldest daughter to him. Her name was Cora. But she died, so then he married the second daughter, the second most eldest daughter, Minnie. So Minnie Banger Long was her name.

In entering into that marriage, my father who then went to seminary in Salisbury, North Carolina, took his wife and her mother [laughter] as part of that merger and he went for a year, as I understand it, to Hood Theological Seminary in Salisbury, North Carolina. There’s a school there called Livingstone College, and in fact that was the school that I think he planned for me to go to, but that’s another story. In going to his first church in Chatham County, North Carolina, in Mitchell Chapel’s Church in Pittsboro, North Carolina, when they arrived from Salisbury, it’s my understanding that the church had provided a parsonage that had a dirt floor [laughter] and his wife shook her head, but her mother picked up a--made--a broom and started sweeping. [10:00] At that time, you could get straw grass and just wrap it--.

EC: And make your own broom.

WL: Right. Made a broom and started sweeping. That sealed the deal.

[Laughter] He was on that district for over thirty years. He pastored the church for just a

year or so, and then became a full-time presiding elder of the Durham district of the A.M.E. Zion Church.

EC: So both of your parents--. So I know--. So eventually, your father remarries.

WL: My father, after the death of Minnie, his first wife, he married Gertrude Watson who also--whose husband had died in a mining accident in Chatham County and who had three daughters. My father by that time had two daughters, and so in this marriage, [laughs] my mother--everybody called her "Aunt Gertrude"--my mother had gotten a settlement of, a nice settlement for that time, and was able to buy a house in Durham with a duplex. She rented out one side and they lived in the other. So, she was considered doing pretty good, especially since both of them had gone as far as they could in school out in the country and got I think six grades. I think that was the maximum that you could get at that time.

She had worked in Liggett & Myers factory after the death of her husband as a, cleaning up, but then she had worked for part of the Duke family as a cook and as a household domestic, and she was very good at that because she entertained for my father when the bishop came or when dignitaries came. When people from the NAACP came, and at a later time, Bishop Spottswood, I knew almost all of the officials within this African Church. Right. Her brother, her stepbrother, had been a bishop in that church and was assigned to Liberia. The new bishops went to the missions and when he came to my home in Durham, he had a palmetto. That's what we called a palmetto, but it was a palm, a gold palm tie clip that he had a box of, I mean a small box of. They were just gold-plated, of course, and I remember he gave me one and I couldn't believe it, and I

stuck it in one of my best ties. Of course, it ruined my tie [laughter] because that thing was handmade. The point of it was--. So I had this mixed feeling, not about Africa, or not about my uncle, but about the technology, [laughter] about the technology that--about this gift that cost me a tie. Right? I'll always remember that. Bishop E.B. Watson was his name.

Now, other people visited us. In fact, I've been asking my family whether Ella Baker came through with the NAACP. There's a man by the name of Barnes who was with the NAACP, and we'll get to that, of course, later. Alex Barnes, who headed the paper for the A.M.E. Zion churches called the--. I can't do that right now, but Barnes came by with more than one person from the NAACP to sit at Aunt Gertrude's table. [15:00] [Laughter] Right, Alex Barnes. I heard, many times, I heard them. The NAACP was in the living room. I could hear them talking about different things, and they were talking about the businesses of the church in some cases, but most days they were talking about the plight of Africans in the world, about people and the plight of the poor in the world so that a separate--. What I'm trying to do here is to let you understand that they had a world consciousness, but they had also an African consciousness. They had some, a root consciousness. That's what I'm talking about. This is not in some political--. This is a cultural religious aspect, I think. But it was deep down in.

EC: So both of your parents had country roots.

WL: Both came from rural backgrounds.

EC: Then both came into Durham?

WL: They came into Durham and the whole question of--. You know, there's a saying that you can take black folk from the country, but you can't take the country from black folk [laughter] and they said that proudly.

EC: Yeah.

WL: Right. They said it a little differently. [Laughter]

EC: Did they now? [Laughter]

WL: Right, but they said it.

EC: You're trying to act like you're not country and clean things up.

WL: Right.

EC: Yeah.

WL: So later, I would use that. I said, "You can take the African from Africa, but you cannot take the African--.

EC: The Africa out of the African?

WL: Right. [Laughter]

EC: Can you talk about the difference between the country and Durham and how that, the interconnections and the--.

WL: Yeah, and also as it relates to higher income, higher social status. We lived in a house that we inherited in a sense. We inherited the mortgage from my mother's sister who went--whose husband--worked in Long Island in an assembly plant and they had purchased this house in a place where they were going to build a college, North Carolina Central University. So it was--. People were building houses in that area, and it was on a place called Formosa Street. Well, within a few months, people who were going to be at the college and who envisioned a different kind of community came

in, and with architects, built their homes on what they renamed Formosa Avenue. [Laughs] They were on Formosa Avenue and my house in the center was made of lumber, but these houses were brick and stone. This is not the tale of the three little wolves, but on my left, Rector Harris, he owned an insurance company across the street, Mr. Henry McKinley Michaux, an insurance company. The vice president of the college, Dr. Elder, across the street from me. Next to him, a person who became president of North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance. The Chamberlain Studio, a music studio, a piano studio where all the kids in the community from whatever background came in and learned how to play the piano from Mrs. Sharon who was a daughter to C.C. Spaulding, who founded the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company. [20:00] And a construction person in the next house, Mr.--. It doesn't matter [laughs] but the, and the head of the bank in the next. This community, when I describe it for instance, people say, "Oh, you were in an integrated community." [Laughter] Immediately. Now, this was the kind of community that I had to grow up in.

EC: I was going to say, some people move into a high-class neighborhood, but in your case, the high-class neighborhood came up around your family--.

WL: Came to us, right. And we were not well heeded. We didn't have a lot of resources at that time, and we were, of course--. Everybody on that block sent their kids to not just private schools; they sent them to Palmer Memorial Institute.

EC: For high school or all the way up?

WL: At least for high school. Summers, when I was working out in the field, they sent them to Camp Atwater in Massachusetts. So they were a part of this--. They were in a different world.

EC: So Durham's considered one of the, like the financial center for black America at that time, right?

WL: At that time, right. The most important element in there in terms of education was not just the college, it was the business school, started by a woman who realized that in order to run a business, you had to have workers who were competent and who understood how to do accounting, and how to do typing, and correspondence. And my sisters went to North Carolina College, but most of the employees for North Carolina Mutual went to the Durham Business School. And of course, she was a member of my father's church, so. [Laughter]

EC: So your family doesn't have the same kind of income. You've got the farm and you've got the church, and you don't have the same kind of education, although [you] have a worldly awareness and [are] clearly skilled. So do you feel a part of this community? Do you feel a separation?

WL: I did at a certain point. I remember that my mother had a garden in the back, and she said she wanted me to come in and bring in a wagonload of manure from the farm. I was trying to figure out, "How could I do that? Should I do it late at night or early in the morning before the day?" Because that was going to be embarrassing to me, so I took off early in the morning. I used to throw papers at 5:30, get up at 5:30 and throw papers in the morning, but I rode my bicycle in the dark [laughs] out to the farm. The wagon was ready, hooked up the mule, drove speedily to the city (line) and on these paved streets, passed the college, into Formosa Avenue. Then, I'm galloping in, trying to get into my driveway, and the women come out. Mrs. Michaux and others come out on their porches and say, "Can we get some of that for our garden? [Laughter] Can we get

some of that for our garden?" It's like somebody had cellphone and told them what I was going to do. But then, once that happened, I was valued in the community. [Laughter]

EC: I'm not going to say what your value is. [Laughter]

WL: And we shared [enough?]. If we killed hogs, sometimes my father would come and put the hog on the back of a trailer behind his Jeep and pull it into the backyard. He would divide it up [25:00] and package it, and give it out in the community. He would share it in the community. I mean, the high on the hog. [Laughter] We're talking about tenderloin. I'm not--. He didn't give them the hooves, and the kidneys and the snout. So, I felt good in my community. I felt valued, but not just for that. People seemed to like my work ethic. I took papers from the time I could carry the bag, and I'd get up early in the morning and--.

EC: So even though it's kind of an elite class community in the black world, a good work ethic is very valued.

WL: Very valuable. At that time, I had to collect also on the weekends. So I had an interaction with people in a way I never would have, and they would counsel me every time. Every stop, a little lecture, a little piece of advice, and then your money. [Laughter] Not a--. [Laughter]

EC: They're supposed to be paying you, but they're making you pay.

WL: Right. It's like a commercial. I say it. Yeah. So, I listened to little tidbits of advice from people, but mostly good. In fact, I'd use some in papers in school. So people--some of it folk, little folk sayings and stuff, but most of it having to do with success, how if you work hard, the whole thing. If you put your nose to the grind and stone, if you can make it. That was the ethic. Very little interaction with anybody other

than the black community because I lived on the edge of Hayti, H-A-Y-T-I, Hayti, and this community was self-sustained. Two black-owned theaters, the Biltmore Drugstore, a hotel over the drugstore, the theaters, the Rialto and the Booker T., a service printing company, a printing company in that same area. The reason I can catalogue it in this way is that I took papers to everybody in that area, so it's just like--.

EC: So you knew the whole community.

WL: In my memory bank is that entire community.

EC: You can just go door to door.

WL: Right. I can do it even now, even though the doors are no longer there, [laughter] open or there.

EC: So you mentioned different people from the church and the NAACP coming and sitting at the table at your house, and your family's and church's connections to Africa, and the NAACP, and you said that the church, there was a lot of business of the church.

WL: Business of the church, yeah.

EC: So what are some of the things that your father and then your mother with him emphasized in terms of the church and the community? What were the things that they were trying to--. What was their vision?

WL: Well, we called it uplift, community uplift. Their saying, and they didn't just articulate it, they practiced it. So for instance, when young women who were required to live on campus, when the girls' --so-called girls' dormitory--got filled up, they had to live on campus or they had to live with a relative or someone certified. [Laughs]

EC: Considered trustworthy.

WL: Right. So I grew up during, I can't remember the years, with as many as eight young women in my house.

EC: So between your sisters--.

WL: Four--.

EC: The college students.

WL: The college students. [30:00]

EC: You must have been one spoiled young man.

WL: I was happy. [Laughter] I felt valued in my community and in my household. Of course, again the encouragement but also the commercial and the lecture. Everybody always had something to say, but at the same time, they had a--they pointed you in--a certain kind of direction. "Did you do your homework? What did you do? Can you--?" They'd try you out in mathematics. My next to my next-door neighbor was a German professor of languages, Dr. Holmes. He would come by and he would speak German, and I would--. I didn't know what the hell he's--. I said, "Why is he cussing me?" [Laughter] He would just contend with. Everybody, next day he'd come by, he'd say something in French. So finally, I said, "Well, look. I'm going to hide or I'm going to go up and ask this man, 'What are you trying to do?'" So it was about Christmas, and he came in. He started singing, "Oh Fir Tree" [laughter] in German and I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "Look, come on. Let's sing." He said, "I'm going on down to the house. Let's sing and then you can walk on back." I learned how to listen and pronounce--I learned some German on that occasion, but also I got a friend. Mr. Holmes was also in charge of the Lyceum program and so when Marian Anderson came to town, if there were enough seats, he would send me on up to the balcony and say, "Wait, there's

some seats in the balcony.” Paul Robeson, I mean some fantastic--Phillipa Schuyler, a pianist, African American pianist. These are things that I experienced myself.

EC: These are over at Central?

WL: Over at North Carolina Central at the Lyceum program. Yeah, but the reason I started doing it was that he had first let me into the basketball games [laughter] and the football games, and then this dude was pretty smart, and then he let me go to the Lyceum. He told my mother it'd be good if he comes to this program. So, I saw all of the major classical talent of the day there at North Carolina Central. It opened a whole new realm to me.

JB: ().

WL: Yeah.

EC: I'm going to mess with your microphone.

WL: OK, that's fine.

EC: Can I pull it off?

WL: Yeah.

EC: The crown is a little bit--.

WL: That's good.

EC: Or whatever you call that, the top.

WL: Yeah. I probably put it on backwards. That's good. Great, thank you.

EC: Are you good? Do you want a sip of water?

WL: No, I think not. I'd better be well enough tomorrow because I'm finally coming into where I can talk.

EC: John, is my mic OK?

JB: () say something. I'll make sure that it's good.

EC: OK, OK. OK. Just since I moved it, I wanted to--. All right, so.

WL: Let me say, one of the persons who came and sat at our table was Floyd McKissick, a young attorney. At that time, [35:00] I knew him because he practiced, taught, and taught me civics over at the school. He had applied to go to University of North Carolina and the University of North Carolina built a law school rather than accept him. [Laughter] They built a law school right, just in front of Formosa Avenue. I'm serious. The first year, they used the old science building, but then the next, by the next year, the State of North Carolina, rather than accept a black man in the law school, built an entire law program at North Carolina Central University.

EC: What did you think about that?

WL: Well, I thought that I probably would have more people apply for different kinds of diverse programs [laughter] and get more programs. The question of integration at that time was not one of my major concerns. My concern was having access to education to something that could prepare you for life, and so that was my attitude. But it was absurd. Everybody at my high school, Hillside High School in Durham, North Carolina, had a master's degree, and most of them had received it as a subsidy from the State of North Carolina. Rather than accept them at one of the white universities, they paid them to go to the University of Chicago, to go to Columbia University. I mean, they actually paid them. So, I would think about it in a different way today, but that was--. It shows you the absurdity, it seems to me, of the system, of just how you're conceived [it is?].

EC: Did you--. What are some of the other ways that you encountered, first encountered, race?

WL: Well, I tell the story about how I would drive with my father. My father was legally blind. [Laughs] One of his--he was driving with one eye, so he would on his weekend checkup meetings, he would take off from Durham, go through Chapel Hill to these different ten churches, and very often, if I was not playing ball or doing whatever it was, I would go with him. But as a younger man, as a young boy, when I went with him, he'd have to stop for gas, and he would--. I remember in the wartime, he got special ration stamps because he was a minister and because he was an evangelist minister, so that he had to go, go, go. He would stop and I remember he stopped at one place near Chapel Hill but almost to Chatham County, and a young boy came out, the owner's son of this filling station. He looked at my father, and my father had on this hat with a three-piece suit, all black, and a fairly decent looking car. He looked at him, and he didn't--I don't think he kind of figured what to call him. So then, what you would do in that case is you could say "preacher" and but you wouldn't say "sir." So, he got it right. He said, "Preacher? Should I fill it up, preacher?" My father said, "Yes, son" and then my father continued to talk to him and filled him up, and [40:00] so finally the kid washed his windshield. [Laughter] It's unheard of. The kid washed his windshield and waved! [Laughter] So, I learned maybe two things. This is someone who had not had the black experience [laughter] but he at least was able to build a human relationship at a peer level at that time, of that time, of a peer level at that time, at that level, at that time. I learned from that, but it taught me two things because I tensed up when he was having trouble trying to decide what to, how to address my father. But after a few times with different experiences at different stops, my father, people would sometimes say "sir." See, it's a little different because of his respect for them and of the respect that he--.

EC: Had for himself?

WL: Had for himself, right.

EC: He carried himself in a way that they had a hard time ignoring it.

WL: He had that carriage. Right, he had that carriage. Yeah. So it taught me something about self-image, about how you see yourself, how others see you, and how then you can see them in good light, but not through--but only through--engagement, only through engagement. We try to do things that are theoretical. We try to have conversations. You say, "Let's have a conversation," but the change, I think, comes from engagement. [Laughter] I think Floyd McKissick was our family lawyer, later our family lawyer, because he's a local hero to me. He would get in class and he would--. Also, had nationalist ideas.

EC: At a young age.

WL: At a young age when he was a practice teacher. Right, and he was not just a, he was, they were--. Our families were close and we were in the same congregation also.

EC: So he was a real--.

WL: He and his sister.

EC: So then he's an important influence?

WL: On me, yeah. I think McKissick was very, very, very important.

EC: He eventually becomes chair of CORE or what's the title?

WL: He became the chairman of CORE, yeah.

EC: What was--what do you remember about the NAACP or how did you, or your father's relationship with the NAACP and your mother's?

WL: My father said that we were going to have a chapter in every church unless there is--unless there are two churches in a town, and then--. But we must have at least one chapter in each of our churches within my district, and his, the Durham district was the largest district within the African American, within the A.M.E. Zion Church. It's a major district. It's mostly because of its numbers, but also because of its--. [phone rings] I can't believe it.

JB: Is that your phone?

WL: Yes, it is.

JB: Yes.

[Camera turns off and back on]

EC: So you were talking about your father and his churches in the NAACP.

WL: Right, and how the church was not removed from the community. It was a center. This was not just true of my father's church, and the networking [45:00] within the African American community in North Carolina. Those who have studied Ella Baker, they know the relationship between the church and the community, between the educational institutions and the community, between the business aspects and the community. But in a real sense, in some churches, people combined those elements and my father believed in that, that you sponsor education, that you sponsor economic development and self-sufficiency. He would go to the courthouse and buy land that had been mortgaged and resell it, or he would put up his own land as collateral for someone else to get land.

EC: That's a real commitment to people.

WL: Right. But I have, for instance, he bought a hundred and thirty acres of land during the Depression and went down to the Federal Land Bank in Columbia, South Carolina to--. Now, they let him have this land at Judge Eubanks place on a hill in Chatham County, North Carolina, only because of the fact that people said, "Well, he'll never pay for it and tobacco is not really going good right now." My father farmed cotton [laughter] for two years or three years and he had the help of his congregation, which is more important, to harvest. So, we're talking about a collective endeavor within a community, and people at that time, in the country especially, believed in that.

You know, hog killing time is a good example. What we did in the city when we killed our hogs, that wasn't a gesture. It was almost a cultural--. It was not ceremonial. That's what I need to say instead. It was important to--. It was an important element of the way people felt about each other and about community. So, your identity was not just in yourself as an individual. Your identity was in and of the community. People would ask you, when they asked you, "Where you from?" [Laughs] They're asking you what village, what tribe. This is in America, now. And say, "Well, where you from?" The next thing they do is, "And who are your parents?" [Laughter] "What's your family line? Who your parents be?"

So, I experienced a lot of that and part of my early introduction to folklore, for instance, was from having gone out in the country and slept on a straw mattress. I was sleeping on this mattress and my father would always stay with a different family every time he went to a place, and he kept record of it, and they kept record of it. [Laughter] They'd say, "Oh, you stayed with Miss so-and-so last time" or "You stayed with the Cox family." ().

EC: "You're going to stay with us this time."

WL: "You've got to stay with us this time." The woman that we stayed with, he said he really wanted to stay with her. She was a little bit ill, so he wanted to stay to counsel her, too. But she made for breakfast, she had some grits on the table. Now, I'm getting up and I'm still scratching because the straw from--I had never slept on a straw mattress, and [50:00] the end of the straw, if it doesn't have a sheet, kind of pricks you. I was young at that time, but she had chicken feet and gravy, chicken feet and gravy, grits and gravy. That's what we had for breakfast: chicken feet, grits, and gravy, and I guess we didn't have any eggs because the chicken--. [Laughter]

EC: Because the egg, the chickens--.

WL: Because of the demise of the chicken. [Laughter]

EC: You took () and it isn't giving you no eggs.

WL: Right. Yeah, chicken feet and gravy, and it was delicious! I was so surprised. Her conversation, and how she valued the visit, and how she valued me, I can almost feel it now. That was one of the--. I can tell you how I feel that straw mattress. [Laughter]

EC: You don't want to go back to that.

WL: Right. So the whole idea of collective endeavor is kind of what they called it, was a root element. When I became an organizer in later years, I used some of those, some of the techniques that I saw my father using as he went out to different places at different times, and face either the same problem at each place, or a different--or a variation of that problem, of that same problem. What was his solution? It's the same solution, a variation of that same solution. [Laughter] So, yeah. I learned something

about human relations from my mother and father. Because when my mother came, she would not--. She was different from my father. My father would listen and let people participate, and talk, and talk it out, and work it out. They would sing and pray and all this. My mother would spell it out. [Laughs]

EC: She'd cut to the chase? [Laughter]

WL: My mother would spell it out. She would define the problem as they had told it to her, and then she would define the solution. Then she said, "Now, do you want to move toward that solution or do you want to move to a variation of that solution? Do you want to do something else?" So, two different styles. Two different styles. My mother's style got the job done quicker, quickly. My father's style took a little longer and sometimes looked manipulative to me [laughs] but it was democratic in the sense that people were participating. So, the whole, when SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] at a later time when I'm trying to deal with the whole concept of participatory democracy and participation at the community level, then it was almost second nature to me because I'm willing to listen and learn. I'd already seen somebody do that, and I had done it do. My father said, "You can talk if you want to." I never did [laughter] but you see what I'm saying?

EC: Yeah.

WL: He would even include--.

EC: Include the young--.

WL: Children. Right. "What's your idea on this, boy, young man?"

[Laughter]

EC: Think twice.

JB: We're back.

EC: You mentioned folklore and folk sayings and your int-- So, what are some of the other things that you remember about how you became interested in culture the way you are and folk groups?

WL: Yeah. I went out and-- Well, number one, I liked it. When I went to the [55:00] country, I wanted to eat. The food in the country compared to the food in the city, the same food cooked in the country tastes better. For some reason, the country food was just better, and then people out in the country would spread a table and they would put the food that they brought in for this checkup meeting on the table, and folk from all around would--and that was what my father called a "widow's mite." Sometimes it was a piece of bread and a banana, a banana sandwich, but the banana sandwich became a classic for me, based on that. You cut it at the right time; it was a delicacy to me.

But I'm saying, I started hearing music. My father was an evangelist singer. I did not say that. He was a W. W. Long, a songbird of the South. There were thousands of these songbirds of the South, but he put out a bill, actually a little pamphlet that said, "W. W. Long, Songbird of the South, singing the song"--and he mentions a woman from Chicago who put it out--"I am on the battlefield for my Lord." [Laughs] I saw it and saw his picture, but before he was a boy preacher. During the time he was a boy preacher, he was also a singer, an evangelist singer. And if he couldn't get you with the sermon--and I also learned how he structured the sermon--he would get you with the music. So, he had a relationship at all times, an engagement with the congregation.

I heard him do the same sermon maybe ten times, but never the same, always the same Scripture. For instance, I heard him do “The Eagle Stirreth Her Nest.” He used the Book of Isaiah, and he started out by saying that Isaiah was known as the “eagle-eye prophet.” He could see the past, the present, and the future. Then, he would build it up, and then he would go on and talk about the old--. He would do the old classic sermon, which describes an eagle building a nest for the young bird and bringing food to the bird, and pampering the bird. But at a certain point, beginning to bring less food, to put brambles in the nest, to spread the nest. Right? Because the eagle is getting ready for the bird to what? To fly. [Laughs] So at that point, it’s almost like a notable point, at that particular point where the bird is ready to fly, the bird has no nest. It has no feather nest. There is no longer a feather nest. [Laughs] It’s just a nest.

EC: With some brambles and some straw poking up out the mattress.

WL: Right. The bird flies. The bird soars. So, my father would preach that sermon and the men and the women would shout in the church. Then, there’s an anthropologist filmmaker named John Bishop. He describes how the women, how the amen corner in the amen corner in the church, [stomping on ground] how the women pace the sermon on a wood floor. They pace the sermon. They pace it with their feet [1:00:00] [stomping on ground] and with their voices, with the call, the calls of their voices. My father doing that for me, I didn’t know it was a folk sermon. All I knew was that there was electricity. There was energy and electricity in that, and I loved it, and I loved it when other ministers could do it. Some better, some could do it--. But they were all doing the, “Oh, oh” sermons and you knew because of the language they used. It was like using the language of the early African in America. They changed that formality that

they had, and then they got down to that language. Beautiful thing, right. Beautiful thing.

Finally, I went to Chatham County and one of the--. A singer in one of the quartets had ordered a recording machine, and this was before the war, I'm sure, because it scraped out. It was a peeler. What do you call, a peeler? It would scrape out the recording, and he would bring people into his little cabin and they would sing, sometimes quartets. You could get up to four or five people in the cabin, and because of the acoustics in the cabin, we did some fantastic recordings and I would help out with the microphone or whatever it was. But I guess I was less than fifteen years old back then. We recorded a bluesman who had an old national guitar from that community, and my father was on the board of the Chatham County Fair. See, at that time, a time of segregation, you had what you called a "black fair" and a "white fair" or at a public facility, they had the fair and then they had a weekend or a week when you could go. [Laughs] So, black folk in Chatham County, under my daddy's leadership, bought some land and started their own fair [laughter] and what they called the Chatham County Fair. The agricultural people who were, who helped to organize it, you had both a black home economics person, and you had a white one, generally a man and a woman because of the gender of the way that things worked at that time.

EC: So like the county agent and the home demonstration agent?

WL: You had a home demonstration agent, right, and you had one in the black community and one in the white community, but the ones that were--. It didn't matter. Someone was doing something good. That was a hell of a program, but people felt

offended that they had to be segregated by days at the county fair, so they started their own fair.

EC: So because whites wouldn't come to it, it's still segregated, but it's on their terms.

WL: Oh, whites could come.

EC: Right, but I'm saying--.

WL: To the black--.

EC: They could, but did they?

WL: Oh, yeah.

EC: Oh, they did come.

WL: It's music. [Laughter]

EC: All right.

WL: Right. blacks couldn't go to the white fair, except still--.

EC: On a certain day.

WL: On a certain day. But you wonder, you see me doing all these festivals all over the country, organizing festivals, Delta blues festival--.

EC: Is that the first one?

WL: The first festival model that I saw was the Chatham County Fair, but they had canning, and quilting, and not, it didn't have buildings.

EC: Did they have--.

WL: They had tents and stalls, what they called "stalls." [1:05:00] It's like a brush arbor. It started in a brush arbor manner.

EC: Can you explain what that is for people who don't know?

WL: Brush arbor, you put up some poles, and you put the tree limbs with leaves across the top, and during the Old Revival periods--and there are more than one in the United States--the people preached under those brush arbors. My father preached at brush arbor meetings. Some of them, even in the 1930s, were integrated in North Carolina.

EC: The revivals?

WL: Yeah, but you sat in different places. [Laughter] But the singer could come up front. The singer could sing, and think about this. Sometimes, the minister, the preacher, the person delivering the preaching, was black, but the seating was separate even at the brush arbor meeting.

EC: So even in the segregated context, you're seeing some integration in a cultural place around culture.

WL: I'm seeing desegregation.

EC: Yeah, desegregation.

WL: Right. [Laughs]

EC: Whites coming to a black preacher.

WL: But I'm saying it coming from the black community to the larger community, not from the white community to us. Well, except for the fact that of the model of the Wesleys and others, who during the early revivals would have African Americans, enslaved Africans, allowed to be present--.

EC: At the worship--.

WL: At the worship, yeah.

EC: What did you do when you graduated from high school in Durham?

WL: There was a tradition at Hillside High School that you, after graduation, and in many cases, if it was on the weekend, the next Monday, that you'd go down to the army recruiting office and volunteer to be a paratrooper at Fort Bragg, or you'd go into the service. I went to the Air Force Recruiting Service after convincing my mother--I was only seventeen when I graduated--that she should sign to let me go into the Air Force before the Korean War ended. The Korean War was at its end, and my argument was that I could get benefits that would send me to college. I could get the GI Bill, and she had a daughter in school, and we still were living in the Durham community that I described, but we didn't have resources to send two kids to school and for them to have the comfort that I wanted them to have.

So, she agreed to do that. I applied, took the test, did well on the test, but they didn't call me because there was a quota on people going in. Now, I'm not saying that there was a quota on a racial quota, but there was just a quota on who from what state could go in. It's what they explained. They said that he had already reached his quota for that month. So I went to my father's school, Livingstone College, and was to be enrolled in summer school, but I called the office from there to let him know that I was probably going to enroll in school, because he got a commission for every person that he signed up. So he said, "Well, look. Can you be down here tomorrow? [Laughter] In Raleigh? Can you be in Raleigh tomorrow at such-and-such time?" [1:10:00] I said, "Well I, if my daddy will take me, then I'll be there."

And as a result of that, my father took me down to the recruiting station, and I flew out of Raleigh to Lackland Air Force base in Texas, San Antonio, Texas. And getting on the plane, everybody just got on the plane. [Laughs] So, this was a new

experience for me, totally. There was no--. That was a--. At that time, to be able to feel like I could just, that I was just somebody else.

EC: And you could sit anywhere on the plane.

WL: Yeah, at that time.

EC: And it didn't matter.

WL: Yeah. And of course, when we got into training, then I started seeing certain elements of racism develop, and especially outside the gates in San Antonio. I became a leader [laughs] inside my group and also--.

EC: And is your group integrated from the time you get in it?

WL: The group that I was in was fairly integrated, but I think there were only three non-whites in the entire group: myself; someone from Cuba who had been training as a pilot but who then washed out and was becoming an airman, training, was training as an airman; and then one other airman.

EC: So your group is mostly white.

WL: Mostly white, right.

EC: And you, before I interrupted, you were saying you were becoming a leader?

WL: Yeah, I was becoming a leader because I was in good shape. I was, you know, it's after track season. So, I ran. Depending on what the year was, I went and ran. I played football in the winter. I couldn't make the basketball team, but I ran track or played tennis. So, I was ready for war. Basic, what they call basic, I mean that was like throwing papers in the morning. I mean, it was very easy for me to do. They had, early on, they had a contest, a track meet, in which you had to wear your brogans so that

everybody would be equal, and because I guess they couldn't buy track shoes for people just for a track meet. Everybody, and you couldn't wear your dress shoes. You had to wear your boots, your combat boots, and you'd run a hundred-yard dash, and a two-hundred-yard dash, and a four-hundred-yard dash. Well, I won the hundred-yard dash, and I breezed through the two-hundred-yard dash, and I made it through [laughter] the four-hundred-yard dash.

EC: Was it four hundred yards? Was that a dash? [Laughter]

WL: But the four hundred in those brogans was a little much, but so anyway. People are talking about that and what that does, it brings honor to the squadron. [Laughs] So I was automatically in in that squadron because it appeased the sergeant who was the leader and made his superiors look at him as if he had run, [laughter] he had run those three things. Yeah. But I remember getting a weekend pass with that group and going out in San Antonio and going to--guys said they wanted to ride, go horseback riding. I said, "Yeah, cool" because you know, I rode my daddy's mule. [Laughs] I said, "This is going to be a whiz." So anyway, once they were assigning [1:15:00] the different horses, I noticed that no one asked me what I wanted to ride or to select a horse. Then so finally, they said I couldn't ride. I said, "I rode my daddy's mule. [Laughs] What you mean?" I said, "I can ride without a saddle." [laughter] Then, [snaps fingers] then I realized what they were saying, and I said, "You guys go on. I really don't think I feel like doing this riding thing. I'll be here when you get back" and they refused to go, and they lectured the guy, and they said that they would tell others on the base that, not to come here in what they called an American--to bring their squadrons in an integrated

group. That's what they said to him, and then they gave the--. They brought the horses back.

EC: So what were you thinking at that time?

WL: Again, you ask about some things being absurd, or at least I talked about it as in relation to paying you to go to another school rather than have you go to a school where you paid taxes to attend, built with your taxes. I'm sorry. That's how I want to say that, a school built with your taxes. You were not taxed after that. You were taxed, and you were not taxed equally either. Some of the people who were taxed were not taxed according to their income. But I felt, I didn't feel it as a personal affront because by that time, I was solid and I have to thank my early upbringing for that, all the way through, especially in relationship to I feel like my community is all around me whenever something happens that shouldn't happen. I feel like there's a--. Folks, some people, get an aura or whatever they call it, but I feel like I'm backed. I feel like all these people, boy, going way back in time, are right there around me. And it's a feeling that you can basic--. You don't doubt yourself. You feel like you can do anything. You just try to figure out how to right the wrong. So, that was my philosophic outlook in terms of, "This is not aimed at me personally. It's absurd, but here is my, here is my posse from Nigeria, [laughter] from Benin, from the Caribbean, from the southern region, from wherever it is." They're all with me. Yeah, so I carry that.

Then later, I felt like it was everybody who was excluded in the world, not just looked down on, but who were exploited and oppressed, that they--. I had my posse with me. And of course, then you can have a consciousness that when you see something is happening around the world, and you try to take yourself to that place too, and say, "I'm

part of your experience.” Now, I talked about engagement versus a theoretical discussion. [1:20:00] When there’s a problem, I would basically go to the problem area and try to commit myself to whatever was the local solution, and then to add to that local solution ideas from other solutions that I--.

EC: And when you--.

WL: Had encountered.

EC: And when you’re talking about doing that, is that specifically in the context of the civil rights movement? Is that before? Where do you see that--?

WL: It’s in context of the civil rights movement, our world struggle, in either context. I would feel compelled during certain historical periods, when I’m--during the periods that I was able, for instance--but I was involved in the civil rights movement for a long time, from North Carolina up through and past, to the (19)90’s, and then there’s the transfer to the cultural area, but I see them as being part of the same element.

EC: You want to talk about that now or do you want to talk about that later?

WL: No, I better talk about that now because I’m--.

EC: Go ahead. Yeah.

WL: See, because a cultural solution is a political solution in many cases. Sometimes the political solution is not a solution, is not culturally viable. [Laughs] But a cultural solution is, it’s very important, especially if you’re thinking in terms of short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals. Then, I had worked in the civil rights movement as a field secretary and trained as a field secretary. I worked in Arkansas in an information bearing capacity at first. As I went through Atlanta, Georgia on the way to visit my wife at North Carolina when I went back during the, in the early sixties, I would stop and get

information and spread it to the other college campuses. Even in Mississippi, I'd drop off leaflets and stuff because they were on the way.

EC: So is this like early sixties after SNCC is formed?

WL: After SNCC is formed, see. So, it's interesting that--. Let me do this because it's probably never been done. Being from Durham, people do not realize I have an insight, and I was working at Duke University in 1959 at Bale Research Lab. So, there were a lot of contradictions inside that lab. It was a research survey, but after [19]60, just before the Raleigh conference at Shaw University, there was a meeting at St. Joseph's Church by [Martin Luther] King where he talked with at least twenty students from at least four colleges, people--. I don't think that's--. I haven't followed up on that, but it's a very important element. McKissick was there. What he was trying to do, I think, was to get a chapter of SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference], get them to become involved at a chapter. This is pre-conference. My conclusion was that he wanted them to be an affiliate, or to participate in the actions of SCLC. [1:25:00] It was a--. My analysis is that that was an attempt at the consolidation of the city and movement, even though SCLC had paid the fees to SNCC to found the Charlotte con--the Shaw conference.

EC: So he had to host this conference and--.

WL: To host the conference.

EC: The city leaders--.

WL: Right.

EC: Which it becomes the aborning place of SNCC.

WL: Yeah. What turns out is that Durham's bigwig leaders, though, came [laughter] and overruled the students so that they got very little time with the students.

EC: So that foiled the plan?

WL: I think the hidden agenda at that meeting, which was pre--.

EC: Pre-Raleigh, pre-SNCC?

WL: Pre-Raleigh, pre-SNCC, right. And Ramona's mother, my wife would have attended that, but I went to part of it after coming from work at the research--at Duke University Bale Research Laboratory, and I was not particularly impressed by the, by SCLC, but I was impressed at the political understanding of the Durham people. They weren't talking about "what's in it for me" kind of stuff, or they weren't talking about--. They were basically asking, "How can we help?" But at the same time, they were cognoscente of the student movement and its strength. I'm going to spend a little time on this because John Wheeler, who was head of the--my neighbor, the banker right there on Formosa Avenue--had allowed my wife and I, since we didn't have money for a honeymoon, to go to a place in Cappahosic, Virginia that was built by the labor of Tuskegee students. It was Moton during the time of President Moton of Tuskegee. Then what he talked about was that what they did, what he said was that the people who were in part a part of Southern Regional Council, and he was one of those people, Tom Dent's father, for instance, that they had endorsed the sit-ins before anything, right away. Right away so that the--because see, he saw that a class element was going to come forward that would oppose it, that might oppose it. So they did it right away and they called for a meeting at Cappahosic of the college presidents from, at that time, the Negro schools and colleges. And it's at the place where I'm going for this--. [Laughs]

EC: Honeymoon?

WL: Honeymoon. So that's what brings it up, and he says that they had conversations about what to do. Especially, the state colleges had conversations about what to do. They were most vulnerable. The private colleges were vulnerable in terms of fundraising from private sources, but the state colleges were vulnerable from the standpoint of losing state funding.

EC: And jobs.

WL: And jobs. Well, yeah. State funding. So one of the people who went was President Davis of Arkansas A&M, and there's probably a list of those people, but that was a secret and private meeting. [1:30:00]

EC: How do you spell the place?

WL: Cappahosic?

EC: Yeah.

WL: It's an Indian word [laughs] and--.

EC: C-A-P--.

WL: My language skills are not great.

EC: All right.

WL: But I can--.

EC: I can find it. I can figure it out.

WL: But it's important to say that because Durham's, some of those men were there, and it's important to say it, too, because some of those men were in fraternal organizations. Durham is very important. They have like a Pan-Hellenic consciousness. So Durham works. Its political aspects work, not because it's organized. They have an

organization like COFO [Council of Federal Organizations] but that's not the main aspect. They have ministerial alliances, but that's not the main aspect. One of the main aspects is the Shriners and the Masons.

EC: So that those connections are the ones that are most significant in--.

WL: They were there. They were there. And, yeah.

[Camera turns off and on again]

WL: Yeah, that's--. So, when my wife and I went up to Cappahosic, Virginia, and went crabbing, and we're late for dinner and lunch, and then lunch and breakfast, lunch, and dinner. [Laughs]

EC: When did you get married?

WL: In 1959. My wife, Martha Cowser, who was a captain of the basketball team and whom I was teaching tennis [laughs] and who's one of my best friends at that time, graduated in the summer school because she had not been able to pay her tuition for graduation for the other period. I had gone back in service, and was stationed at Gunner Field in Montgomery, South Carolina, and I agreed to do that on the basis of the fact I really wanted to see that movement, but more importantly, I needed to be--to have--a job during that time. I had been helping finance the movement. [Laughs] My own involvement in the movement, and in some cases financing the movement because my car and my gas, and so forth, and having people come by the hotel where I was working at one time, and eating.

EC: Where were you living them?

WL: I was in Little Rock.

EC: And you said that the airfield is in--.

WL: Montgomery. Montgomery, Ala--

EC: South Carolina?

WL: Montgomery, Alabama.

EC: OK. Montgomery, Alabama. All right. So you were in--so when you were in Little Rock, that's when you're in school at Philander.

WL: Right. But I'm in my senior year of--. This, she's in her senior year and should have graduated in May, but then she ends up graduating in June after summer school.

EC: And you're attending Philander and then you're working at the hotel, and a few other little things?

WL: Right. But I'm out and involved in the movement full-time. [Laughs] Right.

EC: This in the immediate wake of the confrontation in Little Rock, but the schools, things are still--.

WL: Right. And now, this is [19]59.

EC: This is [19]59.

WL: [19]57 is the school--.

EC: Right. But it's not over in one year.

WL: It's not. No, it's not over. So, I'm involved in a transition from the, what they called "the Little Rock incident," to what is going to be--to the Montgomery boycott. You see, Ozell Sutton, who was with the Southern Regional Council or the Arkansas Council on Human Relations. [1:35:00] I'm on the executive board of the Arkansas Council on Human Relations, by the way, at that time, and Ozell Sutton is either the

director or the assistant director, and we're trying to see about Montgomery, Alabama; see how it works, and see what doesn't work, not on the buses, because you know, we didn't have a problem with the buses, but we wanted to see what is the aftermath of a so-called "victory" in a civil rights setting. A very important thing. In fact, people should have called conferences of people of like and different situations as it related to civil rights, needed to call a conference to kind of talk about, "What is the significance of this time and this period?" But what is the significance in struggle? Right, in struggle. Because, remember I talked about a timeline? I had talked--. I had been recently looking at a timeline. What is happening in Africa at that time in [19]58? We're talking about decolon--.

EC: When does Ghana become a--.

WL: Nineteen fifty-eight. Ghana becomes independent in [19]58. Sekou Toure and Guinea, they become independent within two years based on the trade union organizing of Sekou Toure. So, it's Nkrumah attends Lincoln University where Julian Bond's father, during the time that Julian Bond's father is the president. So, there are all these things going on. Julian Bond's father is a, not an African nationalist per se, but is tied to a very important international movement for freedom of all Africans everywhere.

EC: And are you aware of--I mean, you learned that after you meet Julian or do you already know this?

WL: No, I learned it after I meet Julian.

EC: But it's an example of the kinds of things that were going on.

WL: Right. Right, because I meet his father, but his father, I wasn't--I didn't have anything to interview him with, and didn't know to do it, but I had conversation. They were not--they were living over near ITC at that time.

EC: In Atlanta.

WL: Where the Institute of the Black World is. So they weren't living where they're living now.

EC: That was in Atlanta.

WL: Right.

EC: They were living--. Can you stop for a sec, John?

WL: Right.

[Camera turns off and on again]EC: So what are some of the things in addition to sort of looking at what happens in the aftermath of a movement, a so-called success. What are some of the other movement activities you're involved in at that time in Little Rock?

WL: Right. Then we'll go somewhere else. I'm involved with the students at Philander Smith College. Now, Philander Smith College is a small Methodist school in Little Rock, Arkansas, but it has an international student body. Students from Kenya, from Ghana, from Panama, from--. In fact, the track team that I tried out for and didn't make, but had only one African American runner, and that was Elijah Pitts, [laughter] who later went to the Green Bay Packers. Everybody else was from either Jamaica, or from somewhere else. Needless to say, we had a winning track team. [Laughter]

EC: I'm guessing, yeah.

WL: Right. My closest friend my freshman year was a person, and his name, the name was Kwena?.

EC: Thomas? [1:40:00]

WL: Thomas Adol Kwena from Ghana, and I met him. We were in a special program. There was a, if you qualified, you could--. It's not a gifted program, but we were--.

EC: Like honors?

WL: An honors program. We were in an honors program. We could actually develop our, in part, our own curriculum, and I was pre-med. [Laughs] He was political science, but they didn't have a political science, so he was history and government. And after my struggles in the Civil Rights Movement and trying to do the chemistry and other things, and pre-med, I was history and government. [Laughter] But Kwena also was my teacher to get me through German. I took scientific German, and Kwena taught German. What was the--. In Ghana. So, he helped his teacher teach German. So, our teacher was Dr. Heute, was from Germany [laughter] and you didn't speak anything but German when you came into the classroom, even though I'm taking scientific German, you see. So, I needed quite--. [Laughter] We became best buddies, but more importantly, the political ideas that we expressed and shared happened. This is in the middle of my involvement in the Little Rock Movement, but at the beginning of that, of course, it's as early as 19--. See, I came back from Japan from the service. I spent two years in Japan, [19]55 to [19]57. So, we're talking about [19]57 basically.

EC: Which is when there's the big confrontation--.

WL: Nineteen fifty-six. [19]'56, [19]'57, I got back. Yeah, which is the Little Rock High School--.

EC: Crisis.

WL: Crisis, right. I had enrolled in Philander Smith student--as a night student, or I could, at the air base, I could work on the flight line as a--and they'd let me sleep, and all I had to do was--. I was specially trained as a combat medic. As I would get in the ambulance and follow a plane that was stricken, and I was supposed to do the--. I was the first, I was the person who would respond, in terms of medicine.

EC: Can we--.

WL: I could sleep. I'd get one day on, two days off. So, I could work. I could go to Philander Smith, and I could be involved in the community helping out with the kids who were getting prepared to go to Little Rock Central, and also with the protection of the people who were being harassed at that time. Houses [shattered into?], people threatened, and they would take any volunteer. [Laughs]

EC: So you'd stay up at night?

WL: I would try to do a day a week, a night a week.

EC: And you'd be stationed at somebody's house?

WL: Well, in some cases, at Daisy Bates' house because they have a car going this way and a car going that way. So you have two cars, so if someone came by, you had a chase. You could chase. What I'm talking about is that L.C. Bates, Daisy Bates' husband, was not non-violent. So he had a, basically, a network of protection around his house at that time, and Daisy had, was a proponent of self-defense. [1:45:00] She

defended Robert Williams when she was on the NAACP board at a later time. She defended his stance on self-defense over in Monroe, North Carolina.

EC: And Daisy Bates and her husband, L.C. Bates, were among the leaders in the Arkansas NAACP and helped with the Little Rock Nine.

WL: Yeah. She was, Daisy, was state president and Daisy Bates was state president, and is a Spingarn Medalist, along with the kids at Little Rock.

[Camera turns off and on again]

WL: Now, first of all, you have to realize that Lomax had worked on what was called the Ham and Egg Festival down at Fort Valley State College with, in the 1940s, with Willis James, Dr. Willis James, who was Bernice Johnson Reagon's mentor in singing, and an instructor. He was actually at Morehouse College, but Dr. Willis James had been one of the pe-- So that was a model. There was a mod--the early model of the Georgia Sea Islands Festival was the Ham and Egg Festival at Fort Valley State College in Georgia. Okay? And at that time, they would have people come in and the president also at that time was Julian Bond's father, Dr. Horace Mann Bond, who had come from Lincoln University, but then was at that time, for about a few years, president there. So, he had that kind of consciousness that that would be important. Lomax, when I talk with him, and I had a-- He served as a mentor for me for over a six-month period when I was learning his cantometric system, and I had a Ford Foundation grant. But he would talk about that festival every--I guess it was because I was living in Atlanta--but he would bring that up time and time again, but not just to reminisce, but to use it as a model for other involvements and engagements in a community that went beyond just

entertainment, as he put it, went beyond entertainment. So people organized their own festival in the Sea Islands as a result of that innovation.

JB: That's great.

WL: They got funding.

[Camera turns off and back on]

EC: So can you tell us about your involvement in the civil rights movement, give us an overview of that?

WL: Yeah. Inspiration came from seeing what happened in Durham, North Carolina. Then of course, with the sit-ins in 1960, and my being right there during that time in Durham, I was able to spread information as, when I moved to Little Rock, SNCC information. I was a Johnny Appleseed [laughter] spreading information as I visited my home, but tried to get back in college and work in Little Rock, and that wasn't enough for people, so I ended up in leadership in Little Rock, and leading the second wave of that movement, which was towards the desegregation of downtown Little Rock. Bill Hansen was centered as a full-time organizer at our request. I requested myself, and Ozell Sutton from the Arkansas Council on Human Relations, which was a very important element. We needed a bad guy, but we more importantly needed a full-time organizer. [1:50:00] We were able to settle in 1963. We integrated. We actually did the settlement in [19]62 and then integrated in [19]63.

EC: Can you tell me about the sit-in, the actual sit-in?

WL: Yes, some of it. What we decided to do was to involve at least three colleges in that area, and then we actually got some support from one or two students in the University of Arkansas, but we had Shorter College, Baptist College, and Philander

Smith College, all-black colleges. Shorter was in north Little Rock, Arkansas, which was just across the river, but closer actually to downtown Little Rock than--as close at least--as the other colleges. So from that, we could probably--and I had, I knew people at each college--we could probably mobilize as many as six hundred people fairly easily on over a short-term basis so that my input into that strategy was to try to do an assault on downtown Little Rock starting at the dime stores, and to move to the Walgreens, and then move to the private restaurants. So we were going to start in the middle of downtown and then circle out, kind of.

We had already desegregated the bus station, myself and Thomas Kwena.

[Laughter] Went down, bought tickets to Memphis. That's after the Freedom Ride.

Bought tickets to Memphis, and to our surprise, they let us eat. I didn't have any money

[laughter] because I had bought the ticket, and we bought one ticket because we needed a

round trip. So instead of buying two tickets, we bought one ticket. [Laughs] So we

called Mr. Sutton at the Arkansas Council on Human Relations, and he ran down. And

actually, I think he gave us money to-- [Laughter]

EC: Pay the bill?

WL: Pay for the meal.

EC: You were counting on being refused?

WL: Now, we had not told him that we were going to sit in. But that had been integrated, so the rest of downtown Little Rock, there was not one other person in bar that was, it was critical. Attorney John Walker had been also with the Arkansas Council on Human Relations, but he was at one time a president at Arkansas A&M College, and was at Yale University in school at that time. He added some of the strategy. He added to the

strategy. In fact, he got us out of trouble more than once. Then of course, there was a group of people, and I'm going to go quickly now, but I did want to mention the fact that Dr.--there was an optometrist--Dr. Townsend who got Bill Hansen and myself out of jail once we were arrested at Walgreens. We didn't want to get out of jail, but Dr. Townsend felt that we should do it. What is interesting is that Dr. Townsend was born in Mississippi, and that Mrs. Hamer is Fannie Lou Townsend, and that they are related. He was chairmen of the COFO type organization, the Council on--not the coun-- I don't know what they finally called it.

EC: But basically a group in Arkansas--.

WL: In Arkansas.

EC: That brought together the different groups so that there would be one group, local entity? The coalition--. [1:55:00]

WL: Right. NAACP and all the people working together. OK, and that became a model for me. OK, after Little Rock--.

EC: Can I just--. Now, am I remembering right? Were you on a sit-in where they put the bug spray, the pesticide?

WL: Yeah, it was more than that. It was--. They say it was mustard oil.

EC: Can you tell us about that?

WL: Well, yeah. OK. We had been sitting in a crevice and strategically, I had football team members, the tackle arm in on each end. Of course, we were nonviolent, but that's a tactical adjustment, and I thought it would serve as a deterrent. So within each group, we tried to have someone. We called it "muscle." We called it "muscle." We had muscle. Now, Little Rock movement was a little different from some other

[laughs] movements, I need to say. And we had support from, especially from L.C. and Daisy Bates. So, a little different. In this particular case, we had been sitting for maybe thirty minutes, and people had close the counter and some folk in the background came through and either sprayed or spilled something on the floor that made you cough and sneeze, and your eyes to water. I had people, everybody, stand up and turn toward the back door. I didn't know if the back door was open. It didn't matter. And slowly, yes, I said, "We're going to go out and head back to campus." So then, that's--. People did it like it was a fire drill. It's a good feeling when that kind of stuff is happening, and they went on out, and then I went out, of course, too, but then once they were at the corner, I saw them turn the corner going back to school. Then, I went back because the people inside didn't leave. If they are using mustard gas, which will tie you up, then they're not that much of a fool. So, I got my handkerchief and went in and sat down in the middle of the counter. OK, now I was sitting there, and then I thought it over, and I said, "You fools!" [Laughter]

EC: You said it.

WL: I said, no I hadn't planned it as a, in that particular way. So I sat there and people were talking in the background. They weren't threatening and stuff. In fact, [laughs] it was very quiet, almost too quiet in there. I sat there I guess for fifteen, twenty minutes. Then finally, one of the students, a woman, Veronica came back. And she married a Nesbitt, so I know her as Veronica Nesbitt. And she said, "What are you doing?" [laughs] I said, "I'm sitting here." [Laughs] So she sat down beside me, and we sat there until the time for the counter to close, the two of us. Then finally, I think at least one person came back unscheduled. Somebody later, something like that, but it--. I think

the word of our determination got out in that community, and I had a sense that there was some respect for us as a result, not so much of the sitting at the counter, as of the [2:00:00] fire drill, the discipline. I said, "We're dealing with something serious here." And so when we went to the negotiating table, then I was able to, along with others, to actually talk about something. We could have a discussion from a position of--.

EC: Strength.

WL: Equality. Of strength, and power. Yeah.

EC: Sorry. You were going to go on, and but I wanted you to tell that story.

So, thank you.

WL: Yeah. Well, that was basically a blunder. That was not a heroic action.

No. Bill Hansen and I went back to a place over at Walgreens where they put a sign, and went under the sign and sat in, but that was different. That was more confrontational. I was not being--. I was just--. [stamps foot] But at the same time, I felt resolute. I felt like if they can stay in here, I can sit at that counter and continue to struggle. You understand that? So, I'm a medic. If that was mustard gas, they would be--even at that distance--they would be on the ground.

EC: So since the whites, you're talking about the white folks.

WL: Right. They didn't leave.

EC: Since they didn't leave, it couldn't have been. They knew what it was.

WL: Right. Said it's a mustard oil. It would just get you a little bit. It'd get you. It could burn you if it was thrown on you. They used it at the Capitol cafeteria some years later. Capitol cafeteria was the last place to integrate.

EC: They used mustard gas?

WL: They used a mustard oil.

EC: Mustard oil.

WL: Yeah, but they threw it on Howard Himmelbaum, who was one of the summer volunteers at that time who became full-time staff.

EC: In Arkansas.

WL: In Arkansas, yeah.

[Camera turns off and on again]

WL: Yeah. So I had talked about starting to record in North Carolina way back when, and that, and doing folklore, but I didn't see it as folklore. I saw it as community culture. I would probably have called it "recording our culture" [laughs] back then, the music, recording our music back then. OK. But the next element of that is displaying it, showcasing it in performance, and some of the things that I wanted to do is like taking the music from folk and bringing it back to folk. How can you do that in such a way it buttresses your organizing, but it really fulfills the whole idea that people can see themselves in their culture as beautiful and can buy into it in spite of the fact that the televisions, and radios, and other commercial elements are saying, "This is what you have to buy" and can know that it's something that you can grow with, and that it's good for you and your children? Well, in the civil rights movement, we in 1963, they--we--organized a festival up in Greenwood, Mississippi, and it's actually going onto [19]64 because was is happening--. In fact, there's a film that has been done on it because what we did, we invited Bob Dylan, Pete Seeger, and Theodore Bikel to this festival in Miss McGee's cow pasture [laughs] just outside Greenwood, Mississippi.

And my job, James Forman put me in charge of security, to pick up Theodore Bikel, take him to--. What's the city [2:05:00] where Aaron Henry was?

EC: Clarksdale.

WL: Clarksdale. "Take him to Clarksdale" because there was a curfew and he knew I would--could--knew how to break it and get him to the church, and then get him back safely for the festival the next day. So I did that. Phew, OK. Next thing Forman asks, he said, "We need to do some security" because the people had put up signs saying, "No parking" in front of Mrs. McGee's land. And so, we took down the signs, first of all, and then we got a security team, and he allowed me to select somebody, or to ask somebody. I asked Casey Hayden because she's southern, she's smart, and she's gutsy. I said, "Well, that would be good." So then, we were the people directing traffic and part of the security team [laughter] and there was no contradiction to me in that, until the cars with the rifles in the back started passing and almost running in off the highway.

[Laughter] I said, "Oh, God. It's Casey, oh." [Laughter]

EC: Can you--. Would you--.

WL: Casey is a--.

EC: Mind spelling that out for our--.

WL: Casey's blue-eyed, blond-haired. [Laughter] But being an equal employment opportunity [laughter] organizer, I, I'm just thinking, "Who would be good for this?" And she knew something about festivals and big events and stuff, and a good choice, and she was available and willing to do it. Oh, Lord. OK, so. [Laughter] We did that. The thing that happened now is that of the cars that went by, one car that comes by, comes by is a rear convertible, and the back of the convertible are three young students

blowing on their trumpets the song, “Dixie” [laughter] as they passed the festival grounds and when they get by, they say, “Damn, that’s Bob Dylan!” They pull the car over the side, back up. They don’t come in, but in their convertible, they listen to the set out on the highway. [Laughter] I mean, it’s against the law. They are not on the road where they say “No parking.” They’re on the highway! And after it’s over, they just drive off. [Laughter] They seemed happy, I’m told. I was not-- [Laughter]

EC: You had abandoned your post.

WL: I had abandoned my post. But that day, Bob Dylan sang. It’s been filmed. Pete sang, and Theodore Bikel actually played the guitar and sang.

EC: Were the Freedom Singers there, too?

WL: The Freedom Singers were there. I had suggested when they were talking about organizing that, that they use some local blues players. So in terms of organizing, this was like a USO [United Service Organization] show kind of format, in the sense that you’re bringing people in to entertain the troops, but also to support the morale, to lift the morale of the troops, because what they did through that intervention and performance was they, first of all, had one of the first integrated festivals [laughs] in Mississippi history. But secondly, what they did was that they showed what was possible. It was not just conversation. It was engagement. Not just conversation, it was engagement. But, think about it. I would have had Ms. Hamer and Reverend Leon Pinson, who was a blind player on the streets [2:10:00] of Cleveland, Mississippi. That would have been my choice, not to open, [laughs] but before, and Amzie Moore. They later became a troupe that went around from churches in the area that you have just filmed, singing, but they

had a freedom song repertoire, and they had a church repertoire, a spiritual, what they call a “spiritual repertoire.” They were both basically the same.

EC: What do you mean when you say that?

WL: I’m saying that songs of struggle are not limited just to words of struggle or themes of struggle. They are songs that can teach you the lessons of that time that are many times the lessons of any time and all time. So that’s what I’m saying. They can teach you about the particularity of culture, but they can also teach you about its great elements. Yeah, its unlimitless elements.

EC: You need to save, John?

JB: No, we’re good.

EC: Can you talk about how you took-- Well, so as you moved on from the height of the, what people consider the Civil Rights Movement, the mass movement, how did you carry this work forward?

WL: Yeah. Well, I’m basically saying that the cultural elements of the civil rights movement, once it’s from the people, once you give it and reflect it back to the people, that it’s--people can accept it as theirs. They can acknowledge it, first of all, and then accept it as being theirs. They know it. They know it. A good example is we have said today is that, and the land where the blues began, a document by Alan Lomax, John Bishop, Worth Long, woman jumps up and she does a spiritual. What is a spiritual? I’m [going to] do what the spirits say do. It’s a freedom song, someone said. No, it’s the spiritual. [Laughs] But what you should know is that regardless, it’s a song of struggle. It is a song of struggle.

Now, what I tried to do was to see how we could have some of these, how we could--. It's not a formal formalizing. It's more of a structuralizing of some of these elements. So, if I go out and preach on the street, that's informal, but if I get on the stage and present to you the same elements, the same song, in the same way almost, then it has become another element. So that we, since people are so used to that other element, they have accepted that other element so much, then what we thought we might do is to present some of the back-porch music on the stage, but not have a barrier between the stage. Don't have a fence that you had to look through, or bars. I call it "bars." Not having bars that you had to look--that you could surround the stage, that you could be up on the stage almost, but what you were getting was the same expression, cultural expression, the same feeling being expressed, [2:15:00] even though it's at a distance and it's being presented to you in a--.

EC: Formal.

WL: More formal way. Right.

EC: And you were doing this with Smithsonian Folklife Festival, the Blues Festival?

WL: Well, I saw Ralph Rinzler at the Smithsonian Folk Festival do it, do some of the same elements at what was called Newport Folk Festival in [19]63, [19]64, and [19]65. I was up there each time, and then they had of these little small side conversations and engagements where you could interact with the performer, sing along, open mic. Some of those things were beginning to happen. In fact, Newport became a happening. When Ralph came and founded the Festival of American Folklife, it became more formal, more systematic. I guess I should say it that way. But still you c--. The

feeling of it, its essence, the essence was not lost. So, I tried to use some of that in organizing or reorganizing the festivals in the southern region in the area where I did a circuit. [Laughs]

EC: Like your father's.

WL: Like my father, yeah.

EC: The A.M.E. Zion Church circuit.

WL: Yeah. Delta Blues Festival, Louisiana Zydeco Festival, the, in South Carolina, the Penn Center Heritage Festival in Florida, the Zora Neale Hurston Festival which was already organized but which I tried to contribute to, and then the Sea Islands Festival on the St. Simons Island. So, these were festival revivals, so we were trying to revive elements of things that had already begun, but also to add new elements to it, which meant that you had to do the research or you had to have people who are local to locate folk and to bring them to your attention so that they could be presented. At all of the festivals that I've mentioned, there's always somebody on the side in the back, on the side of the festival playing music and surrounded by other people. It's not--. Folks say, "You're not a part of this festival. You can't do that." It's a part of that element. It should be. It's a natural part of that element. Newport works so well because some people who were just in earshot of the music were participants and felt like they were participants in the process.

EC: And no sense of, "There's only way to--." That it's not just the stage and the audience. It's a different kind of--.

WL: Right. And it's not just a big stage, the central stage that, the televised stage. There are these other stages, the interpretive stages, some stages where you don't

do singing at all, but where you do interpretation, or where when I was doing presenting, where I would ask people to come from the audience and, “Is there anybody who can do what I was just talking about?” Or call and response, “Can you do it?” We were in Selma one time [laughs] and I asked. I didn’t know the group was there, but I didn’t know who they were, but I asked them to come up. They came up and they felt good about themselves, and everybody loved it.

EC: I was with you then and this is, we’re talking about the Selma fiftieth anniversary to Selma march, in a room waiting for the official program to start. And you just ask, “Who in the--who could sing?” in this marvelous group of Durham organizers.

WL: Yeah. But what was in performance before that was individuals singing. So I asked, my “who” had to do with what groups can sing. I said, “Is there any group that can sing?” [laughs] [2:20:00] And what, we got three who came forward.

EC: I wanted to ask you. I remember when I was younger, when I was growing up and you talking to me about this quote from Willie Dixon. Was the quote from Willie Dixon or am I confusing two things? But, “You do not own what you cannot control,” was that your quote?

WL: Yeah, that was--yeah, but that’s a--. That’s political, kind of political conception.

EC: I guess part of what I’m wondering about is the sort of cultural equity elements of your work, or your understanding of it.

WL: Phew. Everybody’s voice is important. Most every culture says that. They don’t do that, but they say it. They say that everybody’s voice is important. Well, people who watch television, they say, “Well, why isn’t my voice heard?” Until the

internet, and then some people who can't afford one, a smartphone or a phone, there was no way to be electronically communicated to [laughs] a larger world, except to be on the evening news for having done something dastardly.

EC: And you're talking about African Americans.

WL: I'm talking about our poor people.

EC: Oh, poor people.

WL: Are more important. The silent folk. I'm not talking about the majority.

EC: People that don't have access.

WL: People who do not have access because basically, that's what the Civil Rights Movement was for me. It was the included and the excluded. It was about inclusion and exclusion. People who are in, [laughs] and people who were out. I went to school with a guy, Al Isabel, and he became Al Bill of recording things, CEO of a recording company. But one of the things he said was he said, "Well, people keep talking about these 'isms.'" He said, "The only thing I'm concerned about is, 'Is I'm in or is I'm out?'" [Laughter]

[Camera turns off and on again]

WL: Yeah, and then other people have probably spoken to it. I happened to know he was there.

EC: Let me introduce. So one of the places you come up in civil rights history is people mention your role in the 19--was it [19]66--meeting at Kingston Springs?

WL: Right.

EC: SNCC staff meeting when John Lewis, who had been chair for a couple of years, lost an election to Stokely Carmichael.

WL: Right.

EC: And you played a role in that.

WL: On the second ballot.

EC: On the second. So can you explain?

WL: Right. Now, I had come to that meeting. I was out in the field doing some research and collecting with, in this case, with Julia Celeste, and I came into that meeting that night, and people were talking about the, having an election without having talked about--having people talk about-- their platform. I came into it, and I voted for, along with everybody else, by acclamation, John Lewis, for chairman. And everybody felt good because they had been in discussion and some people had gone home to go to sleep because they had been in the SNCC-like discussion which [laughs] is a lifetime.

[Laughter] So after the election, [2:25:00] I thought that there was a contradiction that existed. One of the contradictions was that people had not talked about what they, what was their platform, what they were going to do. There was an election but there was no discussion about what they were going to do, and even the people who were elected, they were not asked to tell, to commit to doing what people had discussed to do. So basically, I did what the Ms. Hamer and Guyot and people in the Freedom Democratic Party would probably hope that I would do. I said, "I rise as the local people" [laughs] because I was not on paid staff at that time. I was not on paid staff. I thought I had a voice based on my history, and I said, "I rise as the local people" and then I said that I was probably, want to challenge the election and that, but that I wanted to be democratic and I would follow the same procedure as the Freedom Democratic Party by having a preemptory, filing a preemptory motion first, and then a follow-up motion. And people voted to do it,

to have a discussion of the issues, and in discussing the issues, both Stokely who was a candidate who had not won, and Lewis, who had won by acclimation, had a discussion. They kind of looked at their discussion, people looked at their discussion as it related to the issues that they faced. The solutions that people proposed, they voted for on the next round based on not who they thought would solve the solution, but what ideas and proposals they thought, within the platforms, would help solve the situation.

EC: That election takes place right after the Lowndes County Freedom Party nomination convention.

WL: It does, and just before what? And just before what? So it's important to deal with those two frames because we're talking about an outburst, spontaneous outburst, but then we're talking about even a spontaneous outburst has to have fuel, and air, and cause. We're talking about an attitude that was developing within the nation, and but especially in black communities, some of it in reaction to the civil rights movement and its limited aims, and its limited aims. I think that's the way to end.

EC: OK. John?

JB: We're on.

EC: So I know that when SNCC and people in SNCC had ambivalent ideas about the Selma to Montgomery march, and where were you in the context of the Selma to Montgomery march? You had previously worked in Selma as SNCC staff and in [19]63, in [19]64? Early [19]64?

WL: Yeah.

EC: Then the Selma to Montgomery march takes place in March of [19]65.

WL: Right.

EC: Where are you in this period?

WL: But I had come back to help in Selma, and especially to help SCLC people so that they wouldn't have to go through what we went through, to introduce them to people, and also to help them understand the dynamics of Dallas County and the surrounding counties in the black Belt of Alabama.

EC: So SCLC comes in like early [19]65.

WL: James Orange, most of all. Bevel was there, and then later [2:30:00] some of the other SCLC people came in.

EC: Was Prathia Hall in there at that time with SNCC?

WL: No.

EC: She had left by then?

WL: No. She was there for a very short time.

EC: Very short time.

WL: Yeah. Yeah.

EC: All right. So you're back in Selma helping SCLC when they begin organizing?

WL: No--.

EC: Well, helping them understand, introducing them to people in the community?

WL: Helping organizers who are working with us at Dallas County Voters League, and the local students of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, helping them to prepare for what I knew was coming because people were planning. They said a massive campaign in Selma. Well, we'd already done that in [19]63 with the

Freedom Days and with a whole, a concerted concert, a concerted effort in voter registration. So if someone did not give a detailed accounting of that, then the people alive would make the same mistakes that we made. So I was already involved, so I got involved both in Selma and in Montgomery because SNCC moved to Montgomery to set up a beachhead, a beachhead for that movement, and for that march and that movement. So, I had come into Selma for the bridge crossing. I don't know if you understood that.

EC: I didn't.

WL: I did.

EC: I didn't.

WL: Right. I came in with two--. I came in with Stokely. I came in with--.

That's another story. We'll talk about that. We can talk off camera. We can talk about that at another time.

EC: When you were in Montgomery--.

WL: When I was in Montgomery and people had attempted to go downtown, they had recruited students from Alabama A&M College and the students from Tuskegee had come with a petition for Governor Wallace demanding the right to vote, and had other demands with it. Then I joined that movement to try to add my experience because my experience as staff coordinator meant that I had been in almost every state, but I knew Montgomery. I knew Tuskegee, and I knew Selma. I knew the Alabama Black Belt. So I knew the logistics and everything. So, I volunteered to--. I was going to volunteer to help at the office and Jim Forman said, "Look. We've got to send some people down on this march, and are you willing to lead this particular group, to head up this particular group?" [Laughs] I said I would do it. So, we marched with students from Smith, from

Amherst, from the University of Pennsylvania, from students from Tuskegee, from Alabama State, one student from Selma, Alabama, and would--some local brothers [laughs] who joined the march.

We marched on down to the Capitol and we stood there and facing the governor's, the Capitol, we tried to present the petition. The governor would not come out. He would not accept the petition. We were surrounded by policemen. After we had been there for about two hours, [2:35:00] if you left the encirclement, you could not come back in. They would not let you in, so if you needed food or a right to pee, then you were on the outside looking in. So then what people decided, Jimmy Garrett, I think, from California, was one of the persons who suggested this, and the--of the people who were there, it included some teachers from Tuskegee. We decided that we would ask the group what we should do, and they agreed that we should have what is now known as a "pee-in," P-E-E, dash, I-N; hyphen I-N. OK.

So the men held hands and the women inside that circle, with like a horseshoe, went first and contributed a stream that was on Dexter Avenue from the governor's, from the Capitol, going down the street toward the business district. OK, and the men went next. And what is recorded only in about two or three sentences in anybody's history was probably the first pee-in in America! [Laughter] In the United States, right. Only one person was arrested, and I forget who that was. It was a male and he was too close to the policeman. The policemen didn't know what to do! They couldn't believe it, especially with our "Act One," [laughs] when people, when the women made their contribution to this, to the solution of this problem.

So we circled the wagons, and it finally rained, and we dispersed, but the very next day, people were not put in paddy wagons. They were thrown bodily in paddy wagons because we had up at the--. The police response had become much more brutal. I was sent as a result of that, sent to Kilby Prison. I knew where it was, or at least where the old prison was. The Scottsboro Boys, who were arrested on charges during the 1930s, had been in the old Kilby Prison, and they sent me to Kilby Prison. They put the blacks on one side, and the whites on the other, and they gave us blankets. I think they gave us about five blankets for three hundred people. So then, I asked the people in my cell who were about half, over half of that number, to fold up the blankets and to put them back outside the cell because we needed blankets for everybody. I made a little talk in the meantime, and then to our surprise, everybody had blankets by that night. I just wanted to be sure that everybody on both sides had blankets. You see, and I had already been in a prison camp in camp Camden. I knew Alabama. I knew they had blankets. They knew they had blankets, but they wanted to see us act like caged animals, like they wanted to have control. It was a control thing.

Next day, they said you could sign up and go to chapel. You can go to chapel, and so I signed up and went to chapel, and then we, I said, we sang, [2:40:00] and we prayed, and we shouted, "Hallelujah!" They said, "Well, you've got to leave now." I said, "We ain't through yet. We still feel the Spirit. Nothing like this has happened to us in Alabama. [Laughs] This must be a sacred place, a sacred moment place. We just going to sit here until freedom come!" [Laughs] And of course, they took me out, and took me thinking I was the leader, and put me in solitary, and I was in solitary for the rest of that week over at the county jail. They separated me from the whole [laughs] caboodle

and but when I got out, Soloman Seay, the young lawyer, came by. I could--. It was at the end of the march, and I had gotten a--. They treated me pretty good in solitary. I got at least a meal a day, and I got a vitamin, one vitamin a day, and a doctor's visit, and a vitamin every day. When I got out, I could hear people singing, "We Shall Overcome." It was like a film script. I just felt--. Hard to describe. We had made it from Selma to Montgomery, but more importantly, we had walked the road to freedom.

EC: Thanks, Worth.

WL: Yeah.

Female 1: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

END OF INTERVIEW

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