GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: Reverend A. Knighton Stanley

INTERVIEWER: Eugene E. Pfaff

DATE: January 26, 1982

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

EUGENE PFAFF: --Eugene Pfaff at the Greensboro Public Library.

A. KNIGHTON STANLEY: Right. Can you hold a half second?

EP: Certainly.

AS: I'll be right back with you.

EP: That's quite all right.

[recorder paused]

EP: I was wondering if we could begin our interview by asking you to give me some brief biographical information about yourself.

AS: Sure. I was born in the state of North Carolina, the eastern part of the state, moved to Greensboro at age six and went to public schools in the city of Greensboro from first through twelfth grade, graduated from Dudley High School. I went to Talledaga College in Alabama to do my undergraduate work. I majored in psychology, minor in religion. And upon completion of graduation from Talledaga in 1959, I went to Yale University Divinity School. I took a major in religion and higher education. I received basic professional degree, a master of divinity.

From there--from graduation from there in '62, I went down to Greensboro, back to Greensboro to work at A&T College [North Carolina A&T State University] as director of the United Southern Christian Fellowship Foundation, which was a campus ministry program. I worked there from '62 to '64, at A&T College, and then I went to Bennett College and was there for two years.

Subsequently, I went to Detroit, Michigan, to be an associate minister with Dr. Nicholas Hood, who is also a councilperson in the city of Detroit, and I was there through ’67. And January ’68, I moved to Washington, DC, to be the pastor of People’s Congregational United Church of Christ, and subsequently to found the People’s Neighborhood House Corporation, a multifamily service.

I’ve worked with government. I worked for a year and a half as a director of the Office of Bicentennial Programs for the Nation’s Capital. I’ve written many articles for professional and other journals, and have completed one book at this point, and do frequent lectures. I lecture from time to time at the Howard University School of Religion, and next year, I’ll be lecturing at the Lutheran Theological Seminary of America in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. I’ve held many denominational offices, been appointed to many boards and commissions in the city, and very active in community life.

EP: Could you describe the--how you came to become an advisor of CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] chapter in Greensboro, and could you describe how that chapter came to be formed?

KS: I cannot describe how the chapter came to be formed, because it was formed prior to my coming to Greensboro. I really took on responsibilities of A&T College [North Carolina A&T State University] for the United Southern Christian Fellowship Foundation, which had private funding but a relationship at the college. It was housed there. I had a teaching responsibility for the college. But I became acquainted with the CORE chapter in Greensboro basically through a young lady that I was engaged to be married to, Beatrice Perry, whom I eventually married. She was very active in CORE.

I had recently graduated from Yale University, and I was frequently called upon to speak upon the civil rights movement to groups, especially white groups around. I attended CORE meetings, I was not terribly active in it. But in the, I believe in the fall of ’62 or early winter ’63, when I was away at Duke [University] giving a presentation to a campus ministry program there on the ethics of the sit-in movement, my fiancé and several others were arrested. And that stirred me into more activity, because I really had a sense of guilt about not being there with them.

EP: Was this the picketing of the S&W Cafeteria?

AS: Let me--yes it was, in fact. It was. There were arrests there.

EP: Was that a short-term or a long-term campaign at that time?

AS: The S&W? The S&W campaign?

EP: Yes.

AS: That was, that was a long term campaign because we felt that the S&W somehow symbolized public accommodations. It was a target. And at that point in time, CORE had only about a hundred very active participants, and so we focused attention at the S&W.

EP: Was your fiancé a student at Bennett or A&T?

AS: At Bennett College.

EP: I see. I understand that initially the majority of the CORE members were indeed Bennett students. Is that correct?

AS: That is precisely the case. The most active ones were. I think one young lady, Lois Lucas, held the vice presidency at one time. That was under Bill Thomas. But by and large, the most active persons in CORE were Bennett College students.

EP: Do you know the sequence of the senior officers of CORE? It's my understanding that one point Ezell Blair, Jr., [now known as Jibreel Khazan] was president, and then subsequently Bill Thomas became president. Is that the correct sequence or where there others in between them?

AS: I would judge so. There may have been intervening officers. I came there under Bill Thomas's presidency.

EP: You said that this arrest of your fiancé stirred you to greater participation in CORE. Could you describe what you subsequently did?

AS: Yes. I, as I pointed out to you in our conversation on yesterday, I was somewhat marginal to the whole movement, because CORE, of course, had been active and organized prior to my return to Greensboro. I was also more amenable to talking to the white community and negotiating than were some of the other advisors to the CORE chapter in Greensboro.

I had a knack for strategy in terms of demonstrations. I always had the feeling that demonstrations should somehow symbolize the intention. Demonstrations, especially in Greensboro, were highly symbolic.

I was not only an advisor to CORE, but I think in a real sense a personal counselor to leadership, which made me very close to them. And I was of some value, I think, to the movement, and they recognized that early on.

EP: Now, at the secession of the picketing in November of 1962 at S&W, I understand that there was a minister who was arrested for conducting a kneel-in or a pray-in at that time. I believe his--that was on November twenty-sixth or twenty-seventh, right around Thanksgiving.

AS: Yes, that is correct.

EP: And then--

AS: That would be Mr. Bush, Rev. [James] Bush, on the faculty at Bennett College.

EP: Was S&W the only target at that time?

AS: It was "the" target, because we thought it was the key to opening up other accommodations in Greensboro. It was more easily accessible in terms of entry. It had a large storefront, long storefront, and it was also an interstate chain which would make it significant as a court case[?].

EP: In talking with other CORE officers at that time, I gather that the, there was a mayor's committee that asked for a secession of demonstrations while they came out with a report that eventually came out in February.

AS: That is correct.

EP: Was this the same committee that--under Ed Zane, that had worked for a resolution of the sit-ins, or was this a different committee?

AS: I can't attest to that. I do know that Ed Zane was one of the persons who was most vocal and active in the negotiations fall of 1962. I can't attest that to the fact that it was the same committee because that committee was prior to my return to Greensboro.

EP: Then as I understand it, the report did come out, and in essence the final paragraph was, "We urge desegregation but we have no power to enact desegregation."

AS: Right, which was what we knew. [laughs]

EP: So you weren't really banking on the report of the committee?

AS: No. The tone of Greensboro was far more militant in 1962 than in '60, as I understand it. A part of that had to do with the nature of the students involved, adult leadership, and the

fact that we had not made significant progress in the integration of public accommodations, except in five and ten cent stores and so forth.

EP: When you're talking about increased militancy about the students, whom are you speaking of in particular?

AS: The Bennett girls, particularly, were militant. Not militant in the 1964, '65, '66 context, but far more aggressive, far more trusting of the system and people who claimed they could make it work. The proof of one's commitment was in what they accomplished. That is to say, Ed Zane and so forth, who I think became totally disillusioned at one point because he couldn't understand why the students didn't trust him of his effectiveness in 1960.

EP: Why did they not trust him?

AS: They were pretty convinced that he couldn't deliver what he said, and plus the fact of, simply to write a report and to do research was not the order of the day.

EP: You have mentioned also militant adults. Who are you speaking of in this context?

AS: Well, especially [Bennett faculty members] Elizabeth Laizner, John Hatchett, Bush.

EP: Would you call yourself a militant?

AS: [pause] No. Revolutionary. [laughs]

EP: I see. After this report came out--and talking with Elizabeth Laizner, she says that Bill Thomas then called a mass meeting at which--at Bennett, I believe--and she said at which they had to decide whether they would try to do something before classes were dismissed in the spring or wait for a massive push in the fall. And that the mass leadership then--or the total leadership of CORE turned it over to the executive committee to decide what to do. Do you recall this meeting?

AS: I do not. It would not have been at Bennett, by the way.

EP: Where would it have been?

AS: It would have, no doubt, been at the Providence Baptist Church, which was then about where the new post office stands on East Market Street.

EP: Do you recall any meetings, either of the total CORE membership or the executive committee, between or during the time--first of all, during the time when demonstrations ceased, waiting for the outcome of this report, or between the February release of this report and the beginning of mass demonstrations in May of 1963?

AS: I don't think that the demonstrations were--I don't think there was a master strategy. In fact, I don't think that the group would have dared discuss it, because if you had a master strategy, we had learned not to, to trust going very much more than a day at a time. And I don't recall such a meeting, to be very honest with you.

EP: Were there any meetings between you and other members of CORE to discuss this in an executive committee context, or just as individuals during this time?

AS: No, not particularly. I don't have the chronology of It, because I don't have my file out on it. But if you check, there was probably a cessation of demonstrations after that November meeting, at that November arrest, and sometime in January a little later.

Now the reason for that is very simple. Many term papers become due before Christmas, and there are examinations afterwards. That was the way it was in the old days. In those days, when you came back from Christmas holidays, you were in preparation for semester finals and other papers that might be due. So there was some curtailment of activity. Since we were dependent upon Bennett College students by and large, and some A&T students, most of whom were from out-of-town, you'd get some cessation around that time.

EP: It's my understanding there were two picketings of city hall in March of 1963 by CORE. Did you participate in these?

AS: Yes, I did.

EP: Could you tell how the decision came about to do this and what occurred?

AS: Usually what happened is that there was an executive committee meeting, which included adult advisors. They presented it to the whole CORE chapter. And after long debate and discussion, with some change of details, the CORE chapter usually went along with what the executive committee had proposed, in essence.

EP: Did--were you actually one of the picketers?

AS: [pause] I believe so. Well, that's difficult for me to recall. There was nothing particularly sensational about that.

EP: It does seem to have been of short duration, I believe about 1 to 1:30 [p.m.] to coincide with the lunch hour.

AS: Right.

EP: Do you recall any observers, the reaction of the police, any heckling or anything of that nature?

AS: That same demonstration, which is very hard for me to, to recall, it wasn't terribly successful and we didn't have a good many people.

EP: Did this represent a change in strategy from directly picketing the businesses involved--the S&W--to changing it to city hall?

AS: Yeah, but that was of short duration. The discussion around that was that the city itself, of course, had a responsibility. And not realizing the city as a relevant mayoral system, we thought that the powers-that-be at city hall should bring their influence to bear, in terms of what was constitutionally legal within the whole United States context. And--but it was a strategy which was short-lived.

EP: May I ask you to--do you recall what the feeling of CORE was at this time, given the fact that these interviews did not--I mean the picketing of city hall did not work out satisfactorily?

AS: [pause] You know, the Greensboro CORE was not a thoroughly self-conscious movement, and I'm not sure that all of them were so that you can, you know, deal with a particular strategy. We, we had to capture the mood of the moment. And sometimes we went unexpected ways. Also, it becomes difficult to maintain picket lines without success. Which is to say, you know, you can picket S&W to death and people just become very accustomed to it. There was one point in time--I can't remember if it were this one--when we felt that business at S&W was picking up because we were picketing there, and we were doing them a great favor.

EP: So your efforts were, in effect, counterproductive?

AS: Yes. Plus, you demoralize picketers if you don't get results over a period of time, so we changed the place from time to time.

EP: What other places were picketed?

AS: [pause] None during that time save S&W. We always had some other targets though. One was the Center Theatre. I think that was--is that the one downtown?

EP: Yes.

AS: The Carolina Theatre. The National [Theatre]--not as much, I'm not sure why. But we always had those as targets. Now, we didn't picket them, but we had those as targets in mind. We had the Hot Shoppes in mind, also, and secondarily, McDonald's. Now we shifted strategy on a Saturday, late winter, early spring '63, and we went to McDonald's. This is when things really got heavy. I don't remember the date.

EP: Now the paper mentions that four individuals were arrested: I believe yourself, Bill Thomas, Rev. Bush, and Pat Patterson--

AS: That is right.

EP: --on Saturday, May eleventh. Is this the--

AS: That's the, that's the time.

EP: Why did you decide to go to McDonald's?

AS: Well, we had been there before. We would send pickets out to test. We, we would send folk various places to test. And testing was simply to reaffirm what we already knew, but it helped you also to deploy troops, so that people didn't get bored with the movement.

McDonald's was one of the places that we had tested. What would happen is that a person would go to the counter and ask to be served. They were refused, they would move on. We also were using at that time a kind of a rotating line thing as a matter of strategy. You'd get ten, twelve, as many people as you could, and they would stand at the McDonald's window. They had windows then opening to the outside. And each one would be turned around, and they'd simply get back in the line and keep it rotating on that basis.

We were determined to be arrested, because there had been no significant breakthroughs in the protest movement. The manager really didn't want to arrest us. We--upon refusal to move, as I recall the incident, he called the police. The police officers who came were very cordial. They took us in the back room of McDonald's, around the outside. And we instructed the police officer what to do to arrest us so it would hold. It seems to me that was, the day was a Saturday. We were placed in the city jail.

EP: You say you instructed the officers as to what to do?

AS: To arrest us so that it would hold.

EP: What sort of instructions was this, were these?

AS: Well, he had to order us off the premises, and we failed to heed, basically.

EP: I see. Were there other CORE members there, or was it just the four of you?

AS: There were other CORE members there.

EP: Do you recall who they might have been, in terms of leadership?

AS: I'm sure Lois Lucas was on hand. I don't believe Bush and Hatchett left--or came to that. Mostly other than the--no, Bush was there. Bush was there. Hatchett was not there. Elizabeth Laizner, I'm sure, was there. The rest were active CORE members. We must have had twenty, twenty-five people.

EP: What happened after your arrest?

AS: We were taken to the Greensboro jail and booked, held overnight, released on our own recognizance the next day.

EP: And then what happened?

AS: We were never tried. I don't, I don't know yet the disposition of that case.

EP: Elizabeth Laizner told me that you were contacted by one of the black ministers in town [who] said, "If you can keep something going, I'll try to get the involvement of the adult black community." Is this how you recall what transpired subsequently?

AS: Probably so. There, there were--the adult community in Greensboro was--that would be an interesting thing to describe. Here again, in that setting I was marginal. I had just come out of school, about twenty-six, twenty-seven years old, twenty-five maybe. The adult community--and the marginality in this sense was that I didn't belong to the student community nor to the adult community, really, because I had grown up in the town. And so I was kind of hanging out there.

But the adult community, let me see if I can categorize some attitudes. There were some who were very much in favor of the movement--you know, whatever it took short

of outright violence. The movement could be aggressive and militant and so forth. There was another category of people who were sympathetic as long as the movement weren't terribly aggressive, and as long as the kids looked good and were orderly and did not embarrass folk, black people.

There was another group that was opposed, they thought we had enough. But in that category of people, whenever there were emergency human needs, because of being jailed, so forth and so on, there was always tremendous response to it. There was another category of people reluctant to express which way they came down on this whole thing, especially publicly, because they were in sensitive jobs in state and city kind of employment.

One thing that I note with interest, the most insensitive thing that I detected with the police department was that black officers were usually on duty during demonstrations, so forth, and arraignment. And it was very painful for them.

But the incident that Dr. Laizner recalls, I would judge that the people who, the ministers who would have assumed that position were ministers like Cecil Bishop, who's here in Washington now, Lorenzo Lynch, who's out of the city of Greensboro--he was at Providence Baptist--and Otis Hairston, who is still in Greensboro. Yes, I would say that that no doubt occurred.

EP: So did someone post bond for you or were you just released on your own recognizance?

AS: Bond was posted but it was minimal. If it were more than fifty dollars, I'd be surprised. And Connie [Conrad] Raiford, bondsman around there, posted that for us.

EP: On behalf of CORE?

AS: On behalf of the individuals.

EP: I see. So what happened after your release? What did you do then?

AS: Well, the movement became more aggressive then.

EP: Did you anticipate there'd be large numbers of participants coming to the CORE meetings and volunteering?

AS: That was a part of strategy, yes. And that's precisely what happened.

EP: Did you determine--was this effort at McDonald's on that Saturday just to be an isolated incident, or was it to be a concerted campaign at McDonald's?

AS: That thing was to--the, the--there were two things involved there. We had not been successful at S&W with picketing. To move to McDonald's gave us a change of place, with the likelihood of something breaking. But also, it was a studied move to engender enthusiasm and involvement in the protest movement.

The other thing that it was, rank and file members of CORE had--were in the process of becoming demoralized and disillusioned with leadership, because, as they put it, we weren't doing anything. And to do something meant to get involved and to get arrested and to show forth your commitment. And for Pat Patterson, Bill Thomas, Bush, and me to go to jail restored faith in leadership that we were willing to sacrifice something, gave us a cause to rally behind. It was a turning point in the movement, which was studied.

EP: Do you recall any hecklers or any white spectators on that first day that you were arrested?

AS: At McDonald's?

EP: Yes.

AS: They were not significant.

EP: Now I understand that you went back the next evening, is that correct? To set up picket lines?

AS: That is correct.

EP: Now were there large numbers of spectators and hecklers then?

AS: Well, across the street at that time was a Hot Shoppe. It was more susceptible to hecklers and heckling. It was a sideline heckling with very little possibility of physical contact. Although, at the Hot Shoppes they had a drive-up kind of a shed there where you ordered through a speaker system. And I don't--have you been in Greensboro for a while?

EP: Yes. I'm a native.

AS: You remember the, the old Hot Shoppe?

EP: Yes.

AS: If you can imagine this, one of the things, of course, that you had to do at that drive-in was to pull in. And what would happen when blacks would pull in is that a whole line of cars filled with whites would circle the whole drive-in shed, just continue to circle. And it would mean that you could not get out. There was never physical contact, never anything thrown, particularly, but harassment. And you were unable to leave the place.

EP: I'm a little confused as to that--you say that across Summit Avenue was the Hot Shoppe.

AS: Yes.

EP: But your picket lines were over at McDonald's. Is that right?

AS: Yes. But Hot Shoppes was targeted then, too, because they were in close proximity.

EP: So you were also picketing the Hot Shoppes?

AS: That's right.

EP: Okay. It had not been desegregated at this point?

AS: [pause] I believe not. They desegregated very quietly. It must have been mid-late May. They didn't make a big to-do over it. But it must have been mid or late May.

EP: As the newspapers say, and as Dr. Laizner has indicated to me, that beginning with the second day there were large numbers of white hecklers--and the newspaper says in the hundreds--and that you got in cars and drove back to the campus. But there was also one time, the paper reports that--and Dr. Laizner says--that the mass number of people walked back. They left McDonald's and walked to the downtown area and walked all the way to the Carolina Theatre and conducted a kneel-in or pray-in there. Do you recall this incident?

AS: The sequence on that is very foggy to me. See, you know, one thing that surprises me is that the date for our arrest was May ten, which meant that there was about a month at most before school closed. It seemed like years to us. We were at it around the clock, either involved in demonstrations or strategizing and so forth. And it seemed like years. Therefore, sequence for me is very faulty at that point.

EP: Do you recall any of the suggestions, points of view, or actual statements made in any of these strategy sessions?

AS: [pause] Strategy after May ten became almost exclusive property of those of the executive committee and those who had been active in CORE prior to it becoming a very massive movement. Our CORE meetings open to everyone after that point in time became rallies where you almost announced what you were going to do, because fifteen hundred people or five hundred people used to sit in that church for the rallies simply could not make a judgment about it. There were--strategy was based on the, in part, upon the strengths of the movement in terms of numbers.

EP: Bill Chafe [in his book *Civilities and Civil Rights*] calls you the intellectual strategist of CORE, and Bill Thomas the field general, and Jesse Jackson the media person or the attention-getting dynamic flair for public speaking, and the media would focus on him. So in that context, first, would you agree with those assessments of Chafe?

AS: Yeah, that's, that's accurate. That helps me to focus more on how we strategized. My thing was to--in strategy sessions--plus we had some national CORE people there by that time who had come out of Mississippi, some out of Alabama, eastern Carolina. They were more militant, and at points, I felt less sensitive to what was really happening in Greensboro. What we would--then, of course, [pause] Mac, what's his name, the CORE man?

EP: [James] McMillan.

AS: Yeah. What we would do is to sit and talk, let it all hang out. And it was usually my responsibility to pull together the feeling in some compromised position in terms of strategy as to what we would do.

EP: Do you remember what courses of actions you advocated?

AS: It's difficult, because it was--usually I developed strategy on the basis of some dialectic process, which represented a compromise of the various points of view that were being expressed. And I usually brought into those meetings what I had picked up from the black adult community and from the white community.

It was a strategy of responsibility within a very unusual context, where you had to decide almost on a day-to-day basis what was responsible, what was responsible action. It usually involved concern for the safety of the students.

The image of the movement was very important to us, even in terms of the way you dressed. I don't know if anybody ever told you that we insisted the young men wear jackets, no jeans. They were always dressed very well, not dressed up, but dressed well, which would probably be unheard of now.

It was a position that usually took us on a day-by-day basis a little further beyond where we were. And--which was not to be anticipated by the press and city officials, police department until such time as we wanted to reveal it for the safety of the demonstrators. For example, we would often let Captain [William] Jackson know in advance our parade route. We wouldn't refer to locations, but we would certainly let him know that.

EP: Could you characterize your opinion of the leaders of CORE at this time--Bill Thomas, Pat Patterson, Rev. Bush?

AS: Yes. This is in May?

EP: Yes.

AS: Okay. I, I think a dateline is very important. Bill Thomas: very mature young man, as has proven to be the case. He's far more thoughtful than he could articulate and far more responsible. Highly seasoned young man. He was never militant in the sense of being destructive. He's very studied in his opinion and so forth. Very brave young man. He was aware of the realities of the situation in Greensboro.

I know one thing that occurs to me. I was complaining about something in the jail that had to do with what I thought were constitutional rights--and I still believe so, in terms of the condition of the jail itself and the attitude of the person responsible. And I remember Bill said to me, he said, "Look, one thing you have to remember is that you are in jail. You're not at home."

He was a very compassionate person. He was always very open to the press, not to get his name in the paper, but so they would understand what was going on. He was very sensitive to that. He was homegrown, which made him a person beyond suspicion. Most towns, even this one I live in now, have a suspicion of the outsider. So he wasn't a college student from some place in New York or Atlanta or wherever.

EP: Do you think that made the white power structure--police and so forth--more tolerant, more amenable to work with him and yourself?

AS: Absolutely so, and also the black community.

EP: What--you mentioned that there were these, what you considered constitutional rights violations in jail and a particular individual responsible. Could you describe this?

AS: Well, I'm not sure that we were, without insistence, fully accorded the one phone call that we felt we were allowed. The other thing, the condition of the jail itself, as I remember it,

it was not absolutely dirty, but you did have to sleep on blankets that had not been washed. I complained about that. The fact that the, that you go to the toilet right in the place, right on the floor. Some things, of course, you, for obvious reasons, you could not bring in. And it was not like the comforts of home.

I was also convinced that since we would be found guilty anyway in the North Carolina--the law in Greensboro, police regulations, that why waste time with an attorney, I would plead my own case. And I was asked--I asked for an opportunity to research that, which was denied.

We did some singing in jail. We were immediately told to be quiet. It was not--there was never any physical brutality, and so forth and so on.

EP: You mention a specific individual responsible. Who was that individual?

AS: In the jail?

EP: Yes.

AS: I would not know. He would be a modest jail keeper, no doubt attached to the police department. He was not a terribly friendly person, but not physically abusive.

EP: Did you personally go back to McDonald's during the four days of picketing of McDonald's?

AS: I'm sure I did.

EP: Were you ever arrested again?

AS: You know, I don't recall. I know that I was not jailed subsequently.

EP: Did--I'm sorry.

AS: Parenthetically, it was not unusual, after the movement grew so large in terms of individuals, for Captain Jackson to exercise leniency with leadership. He was aware that a leaderless group of fifteen hundred people, with the possibility of more, was more than he could deal with or wanted to deal with and was a danger to the city and to themselves. So subsequently, he was very lenient in not arresting leadership because of infractions of the law.

EP: Bill Chafe mentions that--in his book, *Civilities and Civil Rights*--that you responded to the movement with both impassioned commitment and ambivalent detachment. Do you

think that's a fair characterization, and if so, what do you, what would you think he meant by that?

AS: [laughs] Yeah. I would, I would say so. I [pause], I was very passionate about it. I understand the feeling that Chafe is describing. I am, I'm idealistic still. I don't understand why infractions of justice, human abuse, should exist, and why people who perpetrate it don't understand that. Therefore, I was driven, very often, to much--I was driven reluctantly to do some of the things that we had to do in order to see to it that justice was served.

I don't particularly like this order, but we had to create it so that a new context of making decisions within Greensboro became possible, because the old context did not permit a new thing to occur. Therefore, it was with tremendous, emotional kind of soul searching that I called for some of the things that we simply had to call for. And I suppose that what I'm saying is that it is against my nature to create disorder, but it was necessary within the Greensboro context. And I was compelled to create this order, much to my personal and psychological and social hesitance--

[End of Tape 1, Side A—Begin Tape 1, Side B]

EP: Rev. Stanley, was it your task to decide what targets would be selected, when to invite arrest, when to merely just have a silent march or to--token attempts at, at gaining entrance, or when to make a really concerted effort?

AS: It depends on how you interpret that. If you mean that it was my job to sit alone and come up with a strategy and present it to executive session, the answer to that is no. If you're talking about an informal kind of responsibility that I became entrusted to assume, and that was to listen to debate and to develop the sense of the meeting--it was almost a summary of the positions that were stated sometimes after quite long and serious debate. In that sense, the answer is yes. Now, if in the sense that I was ever voted to do that and assigned that task, the answer to that is no.

EP: Once again, themed throughout Chafe's book is that the influence of the teachers at Dudley, because they, although having advanced degrees, could not teach, given the educational systems in the South and in Greensboro, beyond a secondary school level, that you had a very high level of teachers, and that they instilled the commitment for change in their students. And he singles out people like John Tarpley, Vance Chavis, Nelle Coley. Could you address yourself to this?

AS: No--look, absolutely no question about it. They were not in an advisory role to CORE. But you see, I had--it was seven years before that I had had contact with those people

prior to ’63. There was tremendous influence. You could not have passed through people like the folk that you have named--even seven, ten, twelve years before--and come to the circumstances of Greensboro and the whole national context of protests in 1963 without responding to it, if you had any sense of responsibility about you at all.

I--it’s very significant that I could name every teacher that I had in the Greensboro public school system from the first to the twelfth grade, some of the most remarkable people that I have ever met. And they still have a tremendous influence upon me in terms of their expectations of me and other students that they worked with. And I have, I seldom have contact with any of them, but they still remain quite an influence over my whole life.

EP: Do any names come to mind immediately?

AS: Oh, sure. Mrs. Simkins--that’s George’s mother--that’s my first grade teacher. She still lives. Mrs. Baker was my second grade teacher. Miss Hood was my third grade teacher. Miss Adams, who is now Mrs. Wells, Juanita Wells, was my fourth grade teacher. My fifth grade teacher was Mrs. Bias[?], I’m sorry, Miss Poole, Miss Foster. Seventh grade teacher was Lonnie Bynum. Mrs. Tarpley, the wife of the principal [John A. Tarpley], was eighth. Mrs. Sapp, ninth. Vance Chavis was my homeroom teacher. Nelle Coley taught me history and, I believe, English, also, she taught. Juanita--Barbara Wells was my drama teacher in high school. There were people like Mr. Goldsborough and Mrs. Goldsborough, who are part of the system. Mrs. Humphrey--name them all. Mrs. Robinson, whose husband taught over at A&T College--fantastic teacher at Dudley High School.

EP: Did, did the black ministers during your youth and the time you were a student also instill this commitment to change? Was there this mandate from the churches as it was from the schools? Or not?

AS: No.

EP: In other words, the pulpit didn’t advocate social change.

AS: Not really, no.

EP: In dealing with the police, what is your reaction to the police handling of the picketing and the mass demonstrations?

AS: They handled it very well, as an orderly process.

EP: And to what would you attribute this?

AS: Civilities and civil rights. [laughs] Greensboro had a particular image about itself that it wanted to preserve. But I think, in large measure, it had to do with basic integrity, professional integrity, and personal, too, of Captain Jackson on the police force, who was detailed to that assignment.

I never knew what Captain Jackson's views on race were. We never discussed it. I have my opinion. But he was a very decent human being. He was particularly fond of some students. He just personally liked them. I've seen him on the stand answering questions in the wrong way to get students released.

He acted with a great deal of compassion. He had--the, the thing that provoked him most, the times that I've seen him provoked was when you imposed upon his civility--that's a good word--by defying him in front of officers in such a way that he may not have been able to maintain order and respect among his own ranks. And that would throw him absolutely off. Everything else he had tremendous tolerance for, except violence, and we did not have that. He had tremendous intolerance for the violence and harassment of whites, also.

EP: You mean intolerance by the white hecklers?

AS: Yes.

EP: I see. Did you ever see any example in which he moved against that?

AS: Well, he--we used to march on--when we would come downtown in mass numbers, for example, usually evening marches, we would start out from Providence Baptist Church just about dusk, get into downtown by S&W at dark, sometimes on Saturdays, too. But in the evenings there would be scattered white hecklers, not a large crowd of them.

We always walked on the S&W side of the street. It must be the south side of Market Street. And he always saw to it the hecklers were on the sidewalk, on the opposite side of the street. If they attempted to break ranks, he immediately ordered his officers to keep them right there.

EP: Did you ever see any example which police officers under his command did not practice the same kind of restraint?

AS: Never saw it.

EP: Were there ever any examples of violence that you witnessed?

AS: [pause] Not extreme abuse in the way you ordinarily handle protesters. Sometimes they would double a guy's arm behind his back and push him along, even when he did not resist. But never hitting with billy sticks, clubs, so forth and so on.

EP: Given the nature of this low-key police response, many people discussing the strategies of various civil rights demonstrations around the country, in the South, said that a certain amount of confrontation was necessary to attract public attention. This must have presented an extraordinary problem. Did you want that kind of confrontation?

AS: It was--what made it unnecessary in the Greensboro movement was the fact that we were in a small town. But please keep in mind that we had more demonstrators, or as many under our command as Martin Luther King had at the same time in Birmingham.

EP: Because of the colleges?

AS: Pardon?

EP: Because of the colleges?

AS: Colleges, yeah. And it's also important to keep in mind that our strategy, rather than confrontation, became creating a problem for the county of Guilford, the city of Greensboro, and the state of North Carolina, because we filled up every available jail space in the county at one time. You remember they had to reopen the old polio hospital. I think that some arrests, arrested persons were contracted out as far as Gibsonville or wherever.

One night when--it became a test of nerve. You see, what--the one thing--our strategy was--Captain Jackson never fully understood this. He did not understand that the more people who were arrested, the more the movement swelled. It would increase our numbers. We, technically, could have had almost every student in jail at A&T and Bennett colleges. And we were getting high school students involved and some more militant adults in the city of Greensboro. But every time you arrested folk, you--it increased enthusiasm for the movement. That became our strategy.

One night, he thought he had wiped us out when he brought Duke Power buses in and hauled people off over to the coliseum, which was more than they could handle, and they let them out wholesale. [Bennett College President] Willa B. Player, I went by her house. She called me at about three o'clock the morning of that arrest when the kids were taken to the coliseum to--when she discovered that they were being sent home immediately without even being officially arraigned. They were simply detained and released. She told me, she said, "Look, you get your lawyer in the morning to see what he can do about getting these children back in jail."

EP: So she actively supported the idea of mass arrests and, and staying in jail?

AS: No question about it. Can you hold a half second?

EP: Surely.

AS: Okay.

[recorder paused]

AS: Willa B. Player, let me tell you an interesting story about her. You, you'll probably discover I'm more likely to remember persons than significant things. But a part of the turning point of the Greensboro movement after that May tenth arrest--I can't remember sequence, but shortly thereafter there was a mass arrest of basically Bennett College students, some A&T girls and a few men. It was the first night that they opened the polio hospital. I can't remember where the arrest took, the arrest took place, probably in front of S&W, I'm not sure, or maybe at the McDonald's.

Willa B. Player was out of town, and she had at least two hundred of her students incarcerated at the old polio hospital. She was notified by whoever the appropriate person was on her staff, and she came back to Greensboro immediately and came immediately to the polio hospital. And she looked at me with very flaming eyes. She was very cold. And Willa B. Player could convey a coldness. She was a very warm person, but could convey a coldness. The lady was really a pussycat. But she conveyed a coldness.

She passed us in the little entryway to the polio hospital. We were out--the community had rallied with personal things that the girls would need, toothpaste, toothbrushes, soap, bath cloths and so forth. She was permitted to go in where they were domiciled.

And you could see that she was deeply moved by all of this. She really had compassion for those girls. And she walked through and talked with them. And in a very aloof way, she asked them about their health and so forth and so on.

And then she came back out, and she had to make a decision. And she made it very easily. What she decided to do was this: to notify her board of trustees that the girls were in prison and that they had her support. Secondly, she sent telegrams to all of the girls. And she gave the appropriate signal to let those girls know that she was behind them 100 percent.

EP: Do you know what that signal was?

AS: She said it to us. She made a judgment. She, she made a little statement. It was informal to those of us who had gathered around. Because we knew if there were conflict within the college itself, that made it impossible for us to maintain morale among Bennett College students and the support of the students themselves as the movement was broken.

And she could break it not even--what--the other thing that she did in making that judgment was to make it the necessary thing to do in order to be a fully-committed Bennett College student. In other words, she had about six hundred students over there, four hundred of them had not been jailed. And it was a signal, also, to them that those who were not in jail were those who were in the wrong, that they should have been.

EP: What is your reaction to the pressure that was put on [A&T president] Dr. [Lewis] Dowdy by Governor [Terry] Sanford and the board of trustees to release the A&T students into custody of the college and to prevent them from participating in further demonstrations?

AS: I didn't recall that Sanford was the person who did that, because my experience with him and his administration was quite different from that. I recall that it was the State Legislature. And they had dealt with it around the issue of college budget. I may be wrong on that in terms of sequence and so forth.

He was thoroughly under pressure. My office was right under Dr. Dowdy's at that particular point in time. And he was a committed person, but he was really over the barrel. The best thing that he ever did was when he testified on the A&T College budget before the State Legislature at that time. If you have a copy of what he said, it's the most nonsensical thing that I've ever heard. And I think that it was quite deliberate. When he was asked what he would do, you know, when he was pressed to curtail demonstrations among students, his response said absolutely nothing. And I think, in essence, that was the commitment of the person.

And I think it's important to add that in personal conversation with me, he did not encourage sit-ins. But at the same time, he let it be known that it was the only possible route that could be taken, and that it was a matter of moral commitment for students to protest in that way, although it made it very difficult for him and the college.

EP: When did the adults first become involved in a meaningful way?

AS: The adults were, by and large, support people. They became involved after mass arrests when emergency needs developed. There was conflict at that time with the adult community, because they felt that since the town was really in a state of crisis because of the arrests, that the fathers of the city should negotiate whatever settlements were to be made. And of course, CORE leadership insisted that could not be the case. They had no

control over it. They couldn't negotiate anything, because they didn't control the troops. It was basically support, positive encouragement.

We got some flack from one demonstration that we had that--it was near the end of the school year. And I lost control over making the final suggestion in terms of strategy. And we were using some citizens in Greensboro, high school students and so forth, at that time. The strategy was to go to what we called the square in those days, where Elm Street crosses Market Street, and they would march orderly. And then they would break ranks and sit down in the middle of the street at the intersection.

EP: Was that the strategy you advocated or which was against what you advocated?

AS: I--my impression at the moment of that decision was it was the most irresponsible thing in the world.

EP: Who advocated that choice of action?

AS: I cannot recall. I have the feeling that it was done under extreme exhaustion. But a part of that has to do with my conservatism about such matters. The other thing that bothered me about that was that no leadership went that evening. And another thing happened, and that was the Duke Power buses that were used to take away the people who were arrested were slashed and so forth.

In retrospect, it was not bad. It was a good strategy, although not terribly thoughtful and insightful. And it was a good strategy for this reason: the city of Greensboro--it's very interesting how folk can't figure out very simple things. Schools were just about to close, and that's why we were, we had gotten some local citizens involved then. They were not people with big names in Greensboro, or professionals, but high school students and others, laboring kind of people.

But schools were ready to close, A&T and Bennett. And that was our total source of troops. And we had nothing else to throw out there. Therefore, the, that evening gave signal to the city of Greensboro that there would be an escalation and disorderliness if something did not break very soon.

Now the truth of the matter was, I'm not sure that we could have sustained protests subsequently. When school closed, we threatened to demonstrate every day. It was very interesting that the news never picked it up, in terms of the fact we didn't have anybody. We were operating out of almost a clothes closet because we had that few people. But we could not have sustained demonstrations.

Bill Thomas and I had a business trip to New York City. We flew up, we were gone for about three days. When we came back, the Greensboro adult community had negotiated the thing down and made statements that there would not be demonstrations

for a while, which we felt they did not have the authority to do, but which would have been quite true under most circumstances.

EP: Did that business trip have anything to do with the demonstrations?

AS: Yes. The United Church of Christ, of which I am a part, wanted to invest money--that's the old Council for Christian Social Action--in a field office in Greensboro. And they were talking with me about it and they wanted me to head it up.

EP: Did that ever come about?

AS: They appropriated money for it. I never accepted the job, because I had extreme abhorrence for getting caught in any particular kind of bag, even civil rights. I didn't want my life to be directed that way.

EP: You say when you came back, you and Bill felt that they, these people who had called a cessation to the demonstrations, did not have the authority to do. What did you all do about it to counteract this decision?

AS: There was nothing, really, we could do, because the only thing that you could do--well, we also did not want to embarrass them, although we thought that they had not acted with integrity. But on the other hand, we could not promise to do anything that was contrary to what they said because we simply did not have the troops. The schools were closed. The enthusiasm for the movement was over. And it would have been difficult to have raised ten people.

EP: The [Dr. George] Evans committee [Mayor's Special Committee on Human Rights] was set up. Did you serve on that committee?

AS: I don't think so.

EP: What did you think of its efforts?

AS: [pause] Not negative, not positive. Not positive in the sense that--not positive, not in the sense that I didn't feel it should have been set up, but what could it do?

EP: Did, did the Evans committee have the support of the Students, or was it just primarily supported by the older adult community?

AS: It had the toleration of students. We didn't--see, I say we. The students didn't think that it would do very much. They liked Dr. Evans, he was a solid citizen, open person. But not a great deal it could do. Most of the real hard negotiating on the matter with the governor's office, with the powers-that-be in control of S&W and so forth and so on, was really done by [local attorney] McNeill Smith in an ad hoc kind of way.

EP: Could you describe his efforts?

AS: Well, he had the ear of the governor. And I--he also had the ear of some persons in the business community, folk related to S&W Cafeteria. So did the governor. And McNeill Smith apparently transcribed his conversations with the governor. He can quote the governor verbatim and read it from a sheet. And it was always very upbeat.

McNeill Smith would on occasions develop some somewhat peculiar quid pro quos, but I guess not peculiar from his perspective. There was--I know he was terribly upset about the cutting up of those buses. There were some white militants in the Greensboro Human Relations Council. McNeill Smith wanted us to see to it the buses were paid for, the repairs on them.

EP: I know there was a demand resolution by [local attorney] Armistead Sapp to the tune of thirty-eight thousand dollars. Do you know if anything was actually done about that?

AS: To pay for the buses?

EP: Yes.

AS: No. And the only forum on that, other than in the newspaper, was at a Human Relations Council meeting. That's the thing that--what's the man's name who used to own the two Holiday Inns there in Greensboro?

EP: Taylor, John Taylor?

AS: John Taylor, yeah. We discussed it at the Human Relations meeting. That was an interracial group used to meet in the back room of Holiday Inn North. I didn't contest what McNeill Smith said he was pushing for it. And there were some blacks who felt very embarrassed about it. There were no students there at all. They saw no point and no future in discussions with that group.

EP: Was this the Human Relations Commission that was set up by W.O. Conrad or was this a different one?

AS: No. That was, I think, the Greensboro Human Relations Council or something like that. It was a volunteer group outside of the public sector. Conrad Smith's contribution was the establishment of the Human Relations Commission. And it seems to me the initial persons on there from the black community included [civil rights attorney] Kenneth Lee, [dentist] George Simkins, me. I think Gladys Royal was on that first commission. I'm not certain about it. I can't remember any whites who were there.

EP: What was the outcome of that meeting?

AS: Oh, at the Holiday Inn, the Human Relations Committee meeting?

EP: Yes.

AS: Well, I'd left--a formal vote was not taken. No formal votes were taken much in those committees, because it was basically for discussion. And I was not offensive to McNeill Smith. I simply did not contest it and probably said absolutely nothing. I was disposed, however, to be concerned about it. But two teachers from University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Woman's College, came to me after the meeting and said, "Don't pay for a thing." And that resolved it for me.

EP: Could you describe how Jesse Jackson was recruited by CORE to lead the demonstrations?

AS: [laughs] Jesse Jackson was a reluctant participant. [pause] Jesse Jackson was a reluctant participant. Jesse Jackson was president of the student body. He was a very popular young man. He was reluctant to participate, because he had some--he was somewhat enamored by the administration. But it had to do with more than that--you know, who's going to win this thing?

EP: He didn't want to be on the losing side?

AS: He didn't want to be on the losing side. That's my assessment of it. Plus, leadership was pretty much intact. And you know, how do you break into a situation and become a leader if the leadership is pretty much intact? I take credit for having converted him. I take credit for that, pretty much.

EP: Did you, you talked with him and--

AS: Yeah.

EP: What sort of things did you say to him?

AS: Well, we talked in terms of our needing him. We needed a fresh face. We needed a person who was articulate. We needed A&T College students and we were counting on the women.

See, the ranks were shrinking, because Bennett College students had just about gone down the tube by then, because all of them had been arrested. And we knew Jesse, being popular, articulate and so forth, a handsome guy, could bring on additional troops. Jesse came on board.

EP: Did he have his own opinions about what he'd want to do, and did he work with the CORE decisions, or did he go off on his own?

AS: Jesse didn't go off on his own necessarily. He did not participate in strategy sessions and so forth. What became apparent was, he was a fresh face. Jesse was a media person from the day one. He led demonstrations. He always managed to get his picture taken. And I don't think it was deliberately his. He's just a media person.

EP: Was--were his statements spontaneous or had they been discussed beforehand by CORE?

AS: Absolutely spontaneous. And some of the best statements in the whole movement during that period, including MLK's [Martin Luther King], were made by Jesse Jackson. He was fantastic. He gave a speech in front of the polio hospital one day, that was on a Sunday afternoon. It was an absolutely fantastic speech that he gave without benefit of forethought, script, any input from anybody. But it was equally as poetic as Martin Luther King's letter from jail. And it was given spontaneously, extemporaneously. It was a magnificent speech.

And I remember Dick Ramsey--he was a white fellow I worked with at the American Friends Service Committee out of High Point, southeast regional office--was very excited about Jesse's speech, because it really had national implications and made tremendous sense. We asked him if he could repeat what he said. And he was so unselfconscious about what he had said that he could not do it.

EP: You--did you serve on the coordinating committee that was set up by Otis Hairston--Bill Thomas served on it, I believe Rev. Bush was on it, several ministers--to coordinate the activities of the various groups represented in the black community?

AS: Yeah, at least, I attended those meetings. Some things were more informal. Strategies and so forth and so on changed from time to time.

EP: Did they work with CORE or was their function to, to plan out what the adult community would do?

AS: Well, sometimes in Greensboro, as in--well, it's kind of like the Iranian situation--leadership, established leadership says, you know, "Where's, where is the movement going, because I'm supposed to be leading." And I have the feeling that the coordinating council, that was pretty much their role. It was an opportunity for communication with students and so forth and so on, so that they would know what was coming down if they were to be in charge, or at least maintain the semblance of authority.

EP: How would you estimate the activity of the Greensboro Community Fellowship?

AS: The Greensboro Community Fellowship. Was that the John R. Taylor group?

EP: Yes.

AS: That's what I was referring to as the Greensboro Community Relations Council before. It served a purpose, much of which was group therapy [laughs] and community service. But that serves a good social purpose. You know, it keeps people who are under ordinary circumstances in control from going absolutely insane when they're not.

EP: When--the night that Jesse Jackson was arrested when the students sat down on Greene Street in front of the city hall, was that planned?

AS: No. No. It was not planned that he should be arrested. Captain Jackson threw the book at him, didn't he?

EP: Yes. As a matter of fact, they charged him with what was a felony, incitement to riot.

AS: Incitement to riot, indeed they did. But they did not come up with that until the day after. He was not cited with incitement to riot until a day or so after.

I think it had to do with Captain Jackson's provincial suspicions. Here was a new face [Jesse Jackson], an out-of-towner. Now, please recall that none of the leadership was downtown that evening. I've already pointed that out. And here rises a person who has apparently assumed leadership, who's very strange to Captain Jackson. He didn't know what was coming down. It's the most radical form of protest that had taken place. What are you going to do with him? I don't think he did enough to be arrested on the scene, but he made a speech. I don't know what he said. It didn't have to be much. But he was incited--he was cited for inciting riot.

He was arrested the next day in a most melodramatic setting. We're over at the Episcopal church, I think, that's [Church of the] Redeemer. Captain Jackson came to arrest Jesse, and we had him in the church. There were not many people in there, but he was making a little speech and we were singing. And Captain Jackson came to me and asked for Jesse Jackson. And I said, "Well, he's in the church." And technically, the church was his sanctuary. That's not what I said to Captain Jackson. But it was the symbolism of it all. And the press was already there. And they were trying to--I'm sure they would have been very interested in a story of how he's going to get this fellow out of the church and arrest him.

And Captain Jackson looked [laughs] very much like a puppy dog that day, because he said, "Look, will you go in and tell him to come out." And so I looked to other leadership. And with their eyes they said, "Yes, they'll be nothing wrong with, you know, bringing him out to Captain Jackson," because we really put him on the spot. And so Jesse was escorted out of the church by CORE participants with great hoopla and taken down to city jail.

EP: But it--you're saying then that it was more or less his decision to tell, tell the people to sit down in the street that night before.

AS: No, indeed. No.

EP: That was planned by CORE?

AS: Oh, yeah.

EP: Oh, I see. The--are you saying that the next night when the people sat down in the square and Jesse Jackson had already been arrested, and there was, the paper reported, more tension, are you saying that was leaderless and, and not planned by CORE?

AS: No, no. What I'm saying is, was, that was their Perception. And their perception, or the Captain Jackson's perception, the press's reception--perception, but it was not actual. Both evenings a group was sent downtown with specific instructions as to what to do, and it was not spontaneous.

EP: Apparently this provided the breakthrough, and the mayor announced the formation of the Human Relations Commission under W.O. Conrad. And you served on that, along with George Simkins and Otis Hairston.

AS: Yes. I believe Kenneth Lee was on that, wasn't he?

EP: Yes, Kenneth Lee was on there, also. The paper reports that now, throughout the remainder of that summer and the fall, you continued, along with Bill Thomas, to be a voice of dissent on that and say, “You’re not really moving, you’re not really getting these places desegregated.” In other words, you expressed a great deal of discontent with the movement and progress of the Human Relations Commission. Could you tell me what your attitude was to that commission?

AS: Well, I don’t know if I’m reflecting--in, in retrospect. Such commissions do very little except preside over infractions that are called to its attention. And here you have a commission that really was not rooted firmly in any law that could help it to do anything.

EP: Do you think it made a sincere effort to convince people to desegregate or not?

AS: How could it? The people who were on there had certainly stood on those positions, especially with blacks, Conrad Smith himself. I mean, how could it? I was under no great illusion that there was much power in that commission.

[End of Interview]