GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: Floyd McKissick

INTERVIEWER: Eugene E. Pfaff

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[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

[258 feet of tape are not transcribed due to mechanical failure]

FLOYD MCKISSICK: --year of the CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] was the year of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] convention in Kansas City. And I knew by the time, I knew by the time that I got to Kansas City, I was participating in a demonstration which I was taking NAACP people over to join with CORE, with the CORE group there. I just wanted to get that point straight. So now even though CORE did not have an organization, I was already associated with CORE from earlier years with George Houser, Bayard Rustin at that time who was with the Fellowship of Reconciliation and CORE--and George Houser, Bayard Rustin, and a couple of other guys at that time as a result of that first Fellowship of Reconciliation trip in Asheville.

EUGENE PFAFF: Well if there was no CORE structure in North Carolina, what sort of--

FM: There was no formal structure, no. There were just individuals that would call upon me here. I was an attorney with the NAACP in full blast and with the, with the students working as a director of the youth, NAACP Youth.

EP: Is it correct to say that CORE's activities in North Carolina began with the sit-ins?

FM: I would think that somewhere during that period of time, yeah, active role. I think Gordon [Carey, CORE field secretary] is pretty right there, yeah. But there were a number of CORE people who contributed to CORE and were very familiar with CORE ideas, aims, and objectives, but had never formed chapters.

EP: Did--was there much activity with the Freedom Riders in North Carolina?

FM: The activity--not too much because the freedom rides went in another direction.

EP: What sort of things did Carey and [Marvin] Rich [CORE exectutive director] do in Durham in connection with the sit-ins? Was it just related to workshops and participating in sit-ins, or was it something else?

FM: I think that there--there were two campaigns that were very important. But one of the things that Gordon had come down here--and he had come down here, and he had come to see me. And when the sit-in movement was--the sit-in movement prior to the really start-off of the sit-in movement. And we were working together, a group of us, to bring about certain changes, and we were not so concerned with organizational structures. He, Gordon; there was Douglas Moore, who's a minister at Asbury Temple here in Durham; and myself. We had gone out on various Sundays and sit-in and refused to do certain things, even before--under the aegis of ourselves, not under the name of any organization. There was just a group of young people around here, and I was a part of it. David Stith, I recall, had just decided that we were a little disturbed about the attitude of any of the groups to do anything, and we were moving in that direction. I think when--and George Simkins knew about the group and et cetera.

EP: Did you work with people like [Charlotte NAACP leaders] Kelly Alexander and Reginald Hawkins?

FM: Kelly Alexander was--yes, I worked with Kelly and Reginald.

EP: Were they good working relationships between the NAACP and CORE?

FM: Pretty good at the time that I was there. I've got the whole records and files on that.

EP: Well, in Elliott Rudwick and August Meier's book *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1965,* they suggest that frequently there was rivalry between the NAACP and CORE, particularly once things picked up after the sit-ins, suggesting that there was competition for the young people and that there was certain antagonism over the young people who were leaving the NAACP and joining CORE chapters. Did you see much evidence of that? Would you agree with their assessment or not?

FM: I wouldn't use their same words to arrive at the conclusion that there were certain rivalry. There were certain elements of rivalry, but you are now talking about structures, and I am talking about that the kids were more concerned with objectives rather than structures. Most of the young people felt like that. The young people that I dealt with were a part of

both organizations. We in Durham called ourselves NAACP-CORE, or CORE-NAACP and we carried ourselves like that for years. And that was objected to because we were--we belonged to both organizations. We went to both annual conventions, attended both projects, and we would sometimes to avoid--and we would also work with SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference].

EP: Why was there--I have talked to [CORE founder] James Farmer on this point, and to Gordon Carey and B. Elton Cox [CORE leader in High Point], and he, they all suggest that more or less the eastern part of the state was left to SCLC under Golden Frinks, and that the NAACP and CORE concentrated on the Piedmont in North Carolina. Is that an accurate assessment?

FM: Yeah. Now that you talk, the Atlanta meeting was concerned when--where we would exercise our influences in the areas where we had existing organizations, chapters, and functional cadres in order to work. We did agree to work in such a way. So long as you had activists working, it wasn't really concerned with whether we had--whether they were named CORE or whether they were named NAACP. All of us, having one shared, one common philosophy functioned under an activist-type of banner and would came to the support of each other.

EP: The sit-ins in Greensboro, at least the focus on Woolworth's and Kress, died down after those two stores desegregated in late July of 1960. And then there were intermittent activities by the Greensboro Citizens Association, but very little activity amongst the students. How did things go on in Durham? Did they continue much more actively, or was there a low point or a hiatus in demonstration activities in--

FM: I think you had your first demonstrations that occurred in '60 were the ones that set the tone for the demonstrations which were occurred two years later. Now, my dates may be a little bit inaccurate here, but when you're talking about the period when Joe Richmond--you're talking about, that was when you had the original sit-ins. That was the key and the impetus to get the thing started, but you had to come back and consummate it two years later.

EP: I get the impression that Greensboro served as a symbol, but actually there was more activity and activism in Durham. Is that correct?

FM: Durham did it, yeah, Durham did it. Durham is one of the few places where we had a demonstration that Roy Wilkins [NAACP leader] participated in with Farmer. You talk about trying to heal some wounds, brother, that's a long story. But I got Farmer and--and this is when we had the, when we were broadened our search, when they had the

campaign against Howard Johnson's [hotels]. And we, they demonstrated at Howard Johnson's. Now, I have most of that data already recorded. I've got files on that.

EP: Was it difficult to get these gentlemen together to cooperate?

FM: I'd say a little bit [laughs].

EP: What was the nature of it?

FM: It was difficult because of getting Farmer. I think the NAACP had a structured board. And I think that, of course-- you had one of--I think that the youth sort of gave, it gave some concern to some of the conservatives and elderly persons in the NAACP.

EP: Was it jealousy?

FM: Well, why don't you ask Kelly Alexander about that [laughs]. I think that Banks, Reverend Banks in Thomasville can probably tell you more about that than anybody. I think Banks--they were trying to get me to run against Kelly Alexander. I never ran against him. And they finally got Banks to run. I don't think anybody that every run, they thought that they were going to run against him. [laughs] It was a problem. Anyway, I never did.

EP: Did CORE stay in the area after 1960 to try to organize chapters? And if so, why was there such a slow growth of CORE chapters in North Carolina?

FM: Well, now, we had CORE chapters in North Carolina. I don't know if you have the history. We had a CORE chapter in Goldsboro, we had one down in New Bern. We had one in--I need to get the files on that to show you. We had chapters. We took them all to Charlotte. We had a CORE chapter in High Point.

EP: I get the im[pression]--

FM: We weren't organized like the NAACP. If you are going to compare us to the NAACP and that kind of a chapter, no we didn't have it like that.

EP: When you say that you didn't organize like NAACP, do you mean that you didn't organize as formally?

FM: We didn't organize chapters as such. We did not organize. We were organized--while we wanted local community structures, we would take an organization that could become a

CORE affiliate without changing its local name.

EP: In other words, it didn't necessarily take on the name of CORE.

FM: That's right. That's right.

EP: But they were being advised by CORE, is that what you're saying?

FM: CORE would be there and they would affiliate themselves with CORE, to work with them and everything else. CORE was responsible for creating many of the community organizations which became poverty agents, because the trend was moving towards getting something done through, getting something done through the necessary vehicles that could accomplish these things.

EP: Did you have much--

FM: We were also interested in labor union movements, organizing Duke workers and such places as that, Duke University.

EP: Did you have much contact with the individuals that evolved into the Greensboro CORE chapter prior to the spring of 1963?

FM: Yeah, through the NAACP and those, but yeah.

EP: I asked Bill Thomas this--he was chairman in 1962-63 of the CORE chapter in Greensboro--and he said, "Well, Floyd McKissick wore many hats. Sometimes he was there as our legal representative, sometimes he was there as a participant in the demonstrations, sometimes he was there as an advisor or counselor on tactics." Is this a fair assessment of your role?

FM: Well, I suppose if they said that, that would be what they felt [laughs].

EP: How do you feel about that?

FM: Well, I did wear many hats, there is no question about that. I was with the NAACP as an attorney, but now in many instances I would be there because the kids had invited me, or sometimes the kids' parents would want me to be there. And I was there just about as a CORE representative.

EP: I get the impression that the Freedom Highways Program originally had been planned for

Florida, and then there was such a success in getting the desegregation of the Howard Johnson's in Florida that they decided to move it to North Carolina, and held it at Bennett College. Do you know who was responsible for that? The workshop, that is, two weeks prior to the actual beginning of the campaign.

FM: Well, they were--I came over. I think they had invited me over there on two or three occasions. We came over to the--Bennett. We didn't have but five thousand dollars, and the question of it was "How can we carry on this struggle against Howard Johnson's in the state of North Carolina?" I think we were trying to desegregate Howard Johnson's in the state of North Carolina with only five thousand dollars.

I said "We can do it. I don't know how you can do it with the way that you are spending the money over in Greensboro," but I said that "If we were in Durham, well, I believe that we could do it."

That's when they met and said "Okay, doggonit, we're coming to Durham." [laughs]

I said "Okay then, let's go to Durham." So I called a group of people over there and we got the housing set for the people, and we made our headquarters there. We got a guy that agreed to serve at the housing for a dollar a day, and feed the kids for a dollar a day. We called a mass meeting at the church and raised the money, announced our community plans, and called for their support. We then went to the Durham Committee--the minister's alliance in Durham. We called all of our people together from the various organizations that I was associated with. And I remember that I was, at that time I represented the Ushers Association of North Carolina who made major contributions for the civil rights movement. I represented the *Carolina Times*, that was the paper there, a black paper there in North Carolina.

EP: When you say represented, you mean as their legal--

FM: I was their legal counsel for them. I was their legal counsel for the Durham Business and the Professional Chain. I owe many positions to, that will enable them. And I used to do a lot of work for churches in that area, three or four churches that I represented the ministers there or the churches. So the East End Betterment League over on the other side of Durham. I was organizing the workers at Duke University at the same time. I had another young lady, Carol Silver, who went on out to California and organized the California legal assistance program out there, was working with me. So we were doing much work in the area of civil rights.

EP: Was this under the aegis of CORE or the NAACP?

FM: This was under the aegis of--I was involved in many things, because many other people

were fighting for civil rights, not in the name of either CORE or the NAACP. They were just fighting for basic rights as citizens.

EP: Can you summarize the activities of the Freedom Highways Program? I gather that it was designed to be focused in the month of August when you could utilize college students, but that it dragged on into December. And then apparently around that time there was a major breakthrough when at least half of the Howard Johnson's in North Carolina desegregated. Did it, did it go on longer than it was originally scheduled or anticipated?

FM: I think the campaign, it did extend longer than it was anticipated. Well, it certainly--I would think, yeah, I would think the answer to that is yes. Once again, I'm attempting to answer a series of questions without really having the opportunity to go over all of the files.

EP: There was one memo in--

FM: I'm going by, I'm going by my memory, which is not-- well, if I had refreshen records I could do a much better job.

EP: There was one memo in which Gordon Carey attempted to restructure the Freedom Highways campaign. And he indicated that they had taken on too many cities at once; that they were moving staff personnel--these volunteers that came to be called the Task Force--around too much; that there were some people who just weren't working out well in the program. Do you recall this restructuring effort, and what really brought it about?

FM: Yeah, I remember something about that. I remember when they were talking about restructuring. We were talking about getting people with commitment, people who could stay and carry on the struggle a long time, who could deviate. Yeah, I remember that.

EP: There was one very important strategy meeting. It was a closed meeting held by CORE and the NAACP at St. Joseph's in Durham.

FM: St. Joseph's AME Church.

EP: And apparently, what was to be decided were the long-term goals of the program. Do you recall any of the specifics of that meeting?

FM: I remember the meeting. Right now, I don't recall.

EP: Was there any real conflict or indecision about where the emphasis should be and that

sort of thing? Was that the reason that those were called, to resolve these kind of things?

FM: I think that the reason, primarily, at that time, it was not--the reason that it was called to basically to get ourselves organized as to what we were going to do over a period of time, rather than just reacting to pressures and actions which were occurring.

EP: I get the impression there were several really sticky problem areas, and that--or cities, and one of these was Statesville. Was Statesville a very difficult situation and if so, why?

FM: Yes, that's one of the towns. We had a CORE chapter in Statesville, too.

EP: Why was it so difficult?

FM: I think that the--Statesville was, Statesville was a difficult town, based, I would think, primarily because of the white leadership there. This was one of the few towns where we were sprayed with DDT and all this kind of thing back in those days.

EP: Was that fairly unusual for North Carolina?

FM: There might have been other towns. I remember that Hawkins, Reverend Hawkins--you asked me about Hawkins the other day--Hawkins and myself were there on a Sunday and we were there for about three days. And we were sprayed, we were victims of that. We were sprayed by DDT while leading a demonstration there.

EP: Was the Freedom Highways Program essentially a success, and was that the big push for CORE in North Carolina?

FM: Freedom Highways achieved its objectives, yes. Freedom Highways broke the back of Howard Johnson's, or certainly was the catalytic force which organized CORE chapters all around the nation to do it.

EP: I gather that Greensboro achieved a lot of press attention because of the large numbers of people that were incarcerated in the polio hospital in the spring of 1963. But just how important was Greensboro in terms of other North Carolina cities? Was it a special focus for CORE? Did it stand as a symbol, or did it establish any guidelines for tactics, or was it just one of a number of cities?

FM: I think Greensboro was certainly a very--

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

FM: --were slow in Greensboro, then we'd move to Durham. Durham was always a pepper pot; we had more schools and colleges. We could get more done.

EP: Were you involved much in the planning of the picketing of the S&W Cafeteria that occurred during October and November of 1962 in Greensboro?

FM: I was involved in that. And I was involved in the one, the other cafeteria--

EP: The Mayfair?

FM: K and something [K&W] over in Winston-Salem, too. In fact, I defended the kids in Winston-Salem, Thomasville, and all of that area, either as a lawyer or as part of the demonstration. I did not demonstrate at the cafeteria. I attended the meetings and do know about those.

EP: There was a white lawyer here in town who more or less served as the legal representative for the theatres and cafeterias, Armistead Sapp. Do you remember any dealings with him?

FM: Who is that now?

EP: Armistead Sapp.

FM: Yes, I know of him. I never had that many dealings with him. I met him and knew him.

EP: Did you attend meetings or negotiation sessions with he and the managers of these establishments?

FM: As I recall, I think that was to be left up to the local community. That was generally a policy that I attempted to follow, and in Durham we did the same way-- local communities handled that, my being as a general counsel on the outside. The community relations group that was settled in the city of in Greensboro would work out all of those details. And I particularly--unless it was a national, particular program of CORE, did we try to get involved in every negotiating session in every community. That was not our policy.

EP: One person here who was an advisor to CORE in Greensboro says that James Farmer came down that fall ostensibly to ensure them they had the support of CORE. He said but in reality, James Farmer was quite forceful in saying that you must suspend these

demonstrations while the mayor's Human Relations Committee was working up a report about trying to affect voluntary desegregation, and to the point that he threatened to take away their affiliation status. Do you know anything about that?

FM: I don't recall. I remember there was some discussion, but I don't recall him threatening to take away their affiliation status, no.

EP: Did you ever meet with any of the city officials or members of the mayor's Human Relations Committee here in Greensboro?

FM: From time to time. I think that there were a couple of meetings. Most of those meetings I did not participate in, no.

EP: In those few times, did you find them intransigent? Do you think they were just fighting a delaying action or do you think there was some sincerity in trying to work out a resolution?

FM: I think that [Greensboro attorney] Kenneth Lee and I--you ask Kenneth--now, I know that I went to so many of these meetings from time to time with other groups--Goldsboro, Raleigh, Durham to--I no longer have an accurate count. And I would think that, I didn't think--I believe that the Greensboro group was pussyfooting around, and that was the reason that we had to go back and demonstrate again, as I recall. Now, I have most of these clippings in my files, the series of demonstrations that happened city by city.

EP: There--the thing that really kicked off the major demonstrations the spring of '63 in Greensboro was a four-day picketing of McDonald's in May 11, 1963. Were you aware that they were going to do this? Did they consult you beforehand before carrying out activities here in Greensboro?

FM: I think they did.

EP: Clarence, or Buddy, Malone [Durham attorney] told me that you called him up, things had already broken lose in Durham and that he got back very late one night and you called him up and asked him to come and more or less hold the fort in Greensboro until you could get there. Why did you select Buddy Malone?

FM: I selected Buddy because I knew him. At that time, I knew [attorneys] T.T. Clayton; [Julius I.] Chambers, who is now down in Charlotte, wanted to work with me. And the guys--I chose Buddy because I think Buddy started off with me, and I put him to the test in choosing a jury in a rape case--capitol case, rape-murder, one of that nature. And I

started Buddy off and they had, we were--to be involved in civil rights, you had to have a commitment for it too. And Buddy had indicated his desire, and I knew his parents. And I knew him and he was ready. And he had talked to me from time to time, and so after he started with me in trying that case, I put him through the test and I was pretty satisfied that he could do it then. And so I started calling on him.

EP: Did he consult with you on a daily basis about this, or did you more or less leave it up to him about what legal strategies to employ in Greensboro?

FM: Well, what we had done was to--we had had a series of strategies, we had a series of meetings that had been sponsored by the Legal Defense and Education Fund in which we discussed all of the possible legal defenses we may possibly employ when a series of facts presented themselves. And he had attended the clinic, and so had Moses Burke and a couple of other of our lawyers. So we tried to get a couple of those lawyers [so] that you didn't have to start over from scratch. You didn't have to give a formula, too. They were already familiar with the formula--they had been weaned. So, it was after--if they had that basic knowledge, then you were in a position to, you were in a position to move on, you know.

EP: Did you, and Mr. Malone, and Mr. [Major] High, and Mr. Lee ever get together to discuss strategy?

FM: Yeah.

EP: What strategy did you intend to employ? What was going to be your major defense strategy?

FM: Our strategies depended upon a series of things. That's a question that would have to relate to the times. In other words, our strategy was not to do nothing to hurt the demonstrations. If there was a desire to demonstrate and the demonstration could serve a useful means, then we were going to let the students control that organization and keep those demonstrations going. Many times, the strategies that we followed as civil rights lawyers would not be the same strategy that a straight lawyer would give them. I would say that that would be the case many times. Many times, if we knew that we could keep them on the street, or if they wanted to fill up the jails, if their desire was to protest was by filling up the jails, you'd follow another strategy. If the strategy was desire to stay on the streets and continue the protest, you'd follow another.

EP: Several of the members of the task force that was created during the Freedom Highways Program continued in Greensboro and High Point, and several of the names that I have

are Isaac Reynolds, George Raymond, Hunter Morey. Do you recall these individuals?

FM: Yeah.

EP: Whom would you say was the most effective among them?

FM: I think that each, each was effective. Each was effective. I think that Hunter was a good kid, he was a white kid, but he was very effective. I think that he could write very well. I think Isaac was a good community organizer, could talk the language a lot better. Who was the other one now?

EP: George Raymond.

FM: George Raymond eventually--George Raymond is dead, I understand, went down to Mississippi and was around Canton. And I went down there two or three times with him down there--was another type of organizer. And each of them needed each other. The great thing about CORE is CORE had a versatility of people that could both blend in and do a thing. While the NAACP was still concentrating on structure, we were concentrating on objectives--we were the shock troops. We were the shock troops. We knew that we were going to do some things that were not going to meet with everybody's approval. But it was our desire to do, to bring about some changes in society. We had commitments, classes, teachings, commitment to nonviolent demonstrations; we expected to get hurt. That was the differences between us, rather than sit down and creating structures. History now fades on--maybe we should have created more structures, because so much of what was accomplished by us was not recorded in some ways.

EP: I understand that one of the people that worked with CORE from the American Friends Service Committee was Harry Boyte. Do you recall him?

FM: Yeah.

EP: What was he like? Was he a good worker? Was he somewhat controversial, or what?

FM: I don't know all of the details, but I don't remember anything negative about him, not unless somebody could point out something.

EP: Well this same Armistead Sapp got some attention in the press by saying he was with the American Newspaper Alliance and tried to paint him as a Communist.

FM: Well, during that day, everybody, every white who was associated with us was--they tried

to paint--tried to find something wrong with. That was, you know, par for the course at that time.

EP: Did you have frequent meetings with the CORE national office personnel that came down here?

FM: Yeah.

EP: What was their strategy? Did they just offer advice to the local chapters, or did they try to do more directing in sending down directives from the national office--"you should do this, you can't do that," that sort of thing?

FM: Basically, our CORE chapter--I think Gordon Carey, during his tenure, was here; he and Farmer were the two major forces from CORE who were in this area. Others came in and out. B. Elton Cox, of course, was in High Point and I was here. And as between what was happening in North Carolina, most of the time we always got together, B. Elton Cox and myself, and others. But we were the two who--we were a one-two team. We always functioned together.

EP: Can you summarize B. Elton Cox in terms of his effectiveness and his abilities or lack of?

FM: Reverend Cox was a very likable person. He had a wonderful outgoing personality. He kept a smile. He was an excellent minister. He was what you would call a creative minister, and one who had a masterful use of the parables of Jesus Christ. He could inspire the young. But most of all, he would set an example. He would never ask anyone to do what he himself would not do. And the man just was--had no fear bone in his body.

EP: I gather then that--

FM: He wasn't scared of nothing.

EP: I gather he was quite controversial in some of the things he suggested. I know that he frequently gave a speech where he listed twenty-some "ins" like "be-ins," "kneel-ins," "marry-ins," that sort of thing. I gather he frequently raised a great deal of controversy. Is that true?

FM: Well, I would--oh, sure. Any, any--I would say that I did the same thing, too. They would criticize Cox. Cox could make some statements that would not meet with their approval, and he did. He was not the typical minister or else he would never have been in the

movement. He was not that typical man. He believed that Christianity was to be practically applied, and that he would be, he should be an example. And that he was the kind of man who could joke, who always had a joke, and he was always dressed well, too. He took pride in what he said and what he did. He knew how to make a joke. He realized that young people--what appealed to young people. But he always, would always let you know that he was a minister, and if something was going on, he'd say, "Wait a minute now, I don't believe God would like that." You know. [both laugh] He was a loveable guy.

EP: I gather that he was designated a field secretary and that these other members of the task force were field workers. Was there that strong a distinction between individuals?

FM: In CORE, we never made so much of a distinction. That distinction was based primarily on skills and organizational ability. Cox--they talked to me about taking Cox out of North Carolina many a times. They said, "Since you are here and things are well under way, we need Cox in Louisiana."

I used to say, "Look, if we are going to set up some structures up, you better keep Cox up here." Because Cox could go anywhere, and anywhere he went in a short period of time he was sort of like the Pied Piper. [both laugh] You know what I mean?

EP: Surely.

FM: And I felt that with the things that I had to do, besides being in court on such a regular basis and having so many demonstrations to watch, bonds, and this kind of thing, that it would have been to CORE's advantage to have set up a Southern-based office in North Carolina. And I don't think Marv Rich was inclined to do that. I strongly suggested that, and I suggested to Farmer that that be done, that we set up an office. We ended up having a convention here, but I would have much preferred having a permanent office of CORE. We then moved to the concept of COFO [Council of Federated Organizations], but that was all right.

EP: Was there resistance to organizing a stronger structure, a la the NAACP in CORE generally, in North Carolina in particular?

FM: Actually--was there resistance within CORE you say?

EP: Yes.

FM: There was a resistance. I don't know whether--how to say this. Your question is was there resistance in CORE to setting up chapters in North Carolina?

EP: Well, you mentioned that CORE had this very loose kind of structure, and you even suggested that maybe you should have spent more time in building up a stronger structure a la the NAACP. I gather that the reason that this wasn't done was because there was certain resistance within CORE to do this.

FM: Yeah, I think that there was some resistance in CORE. Marvin Rich who was--had a strong effect. I think that lots of--sometimes the national office had certain ideas about how CORE should run, which was not real, in a sense. And I think that field and the office sometimes had these conflicts. And I think Gordon, who was really a field man--

EP: Could you be more specific about this, this difference of how CORE should work and the national office? Did they feel that there should be more autonomy in the field or that there was too much autonomy in the field?

FM: I think that they felt there was too much autonomy in the field.

EP: They wanted more central control.

FM: I think that they wanted more central control. I think that there was--I think that many of the kids, they felt that CORE would say, "Come to New York and do this." Kids would go up there and raise money, but, and tell their stories, but then the office didn't quite--they didn't end up--so many people in the field didn't like the national office, didn't have the feeling about the national office that they had for the field secretaries. I think the field structure--the national office was developing a fear of the field structure.

EP: How much clout did these field secretaries have? Could they only suggest or did they carry certain directives?

FM: Marvin Rich controlled the pocketbook. You think like Marvin or you'd have to--

EP: I see. Or else you didn't get the money?

FM: Yeah.

EP: I see. Were there particularly effective field secretaries in North Carolina, and what exactly was their role in decision making and planning?

FM: Well, the field secretaries' structure grew out of the task force. North Carolina was the place where they were really--CORE principles were really taught and trained. Pardon

me, I'm eating. You know, I didn't get home until late anyway.

EP: Sure. So I gather what you're saying is that North Carolina was a very important kind of testing ground for CORE?

FM: Oh, yeah. North Carolina and New Orleans were, became CORE's stomping grounds. I've got--I wished that I had the opportunity to sit down and refresh this, but, and maybe one day I'll take it, but right now I haven't got it. I have the history of each CORE chapter that was organized in North Carolina. At least I have enough data on it--of the people and numbers on the various chapters that were here. But we had a very good structure, but we were not trying to outdo anyone, you know, try to outdo the NAACP in that sense.

EP: I gather that there were certain rivalries--

FM: I think that the State Conference of the NAACP feared us.

EP: I gather there were certain rivalries in fundraising, that where one or the other felt that--

FM: You see, we didn't pay big wages. We didn't pay great big salaries.

EP: I get the impression that--

FM: I think that we were paying people about twenty-five dollars a week, or fifty dollars a week, or something like that.

EP: I gather that CORE frequently would complain that, or on occasion would complain that whenever they went into a joint fundraising action for, with the NAACP that the NAACP didn't pay their fair share or claiming too much of the money raised and that sort of thing. Was there that that kind of rivalry in North Carolina?

FM: I don't recall too much of that. I know that we had, I remember that we had a Nonviolent Coordinating Committee--you remember SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] was created in North Carolina also.

EP: Where you, did you have any input into that?

FM: Yeah, I was involved in that. All of us were the same people just about.

EP: And when it had the organizational meeting over at Shaw [University]--

FM: Organizational meeting was held at Shaw.

EP: Well, if it got organized over at Shaw, how come SNCC didn't have much influence in the state? Or did it?

FM: Well SNCC--primarily, [Martin Luther] King had a great influence, as we well know, and he wanted a group of young people. You see, you have to understand the flavor of all of the things that we are talking about. There are just not answers to questions. You have to understand the times in which we were living, and then you can understand the better as to what King was doing and where he was at that time. It wasn't as completed a story as it is now. Many things that we now assume, no one knew that they were going to happen then [laughs], you know what I mean? And you have to understand it in that way. It was decided that they would, King would have some young people working with him rather than just old people. So SNCC was being organized as young people, and I think we had the first meeting at Shaw, the second meeting at Rev. D.E. Moore's house, and then I remember that the NAACP got mad at us, because we were a part of SNCC, and I remember that, so--

EP: When you say *us*, who is *us*?

FM: I have always been with the NAACP. I'm still a life member now. I have been a member two times.

EP: Oh, they kind of resented your lending your efforts to CORE and SNCC?

FM: Oh, they excommunicated me after I was elected national chairman of CORE.

EP: Did they, I mean, did they officially ask you to leave NAACP?

FM: No. They cancelled a program that I was supposed to appear. My family was there and I was leaving the CORE convention to come there, and they cancelled all my participation and part in the program, just ruled us out, so--

EP: George [sic-James] Forman has some very bitter things to say about Kelly Alexander, for the lack of support that both the NAACP and CORE--the support they didn't give to the Monroe Non-Violent Action Committee.

FM: Who is that now?

EP: George Forman.

FM: He was criticizing CORE?

EP: I mean James Forman, I'm sorry.

FM: James Forman of SNCC?

EP: Yes. He more or less said that when Robert Williams [Monroe, NC, NAACP president] needed support, that Kelly Alexander turned from him. And I know that in CORE, at least in the Greensboro chapter, when some members of this chapter attended some rallies in favor of the Monroe Defense League, that--

FM: They were considered Communists.

EP: --and that's why the NAACP and the CORE wanted nothing to do with him?

FM: I remember that. I remember when Robert Williams came to the, came to the, came to the--see, he was the NAACP man. And I remember he went to the convention at the Henry Hudson Hotel in New York. The old Henry Hudson Hotel.

EP: Was he more or less--

FM: He was excommunicated by Kelly. Because Kelly Alexander became power up there; he was on the board and he pretty near got what he wanted.

EP: So he had considerable influence at the national level in the NAACP? Is that correct?

FM: Hold on one minute.

EP: Sure thing.

[pause]

EP: You were saying, I gather, that Kelley Alexander wielded a great deal of influence nationally in the NAACP.

FM: Yes.

EP: There seems to have been--

FM: See, the NAACP was at one time was against the sit-in movement, and then later joined us.

EP: I was wondering about that. Several people have written about that say that was more or less why George Simkins turned to CORE because he couldn't generate any enthusiasm.

FM: That's true. By the time that we went to the NAACP convention--what year was the convention held in Minneapolis?

EP: I'm afraid I don't--

FM: --they had now come around and the North Carolina kids were the center of attraction. The following year in Chicago, they were the center of attraction, the North Carolina kids. I think that I got the Ike Smalls Award from the NAACP that year.

EP: So they realized that this--the strength, and extended this nonviolent direct action movement, and decided to go with it?

FM: Yes.

EP: I gather they felt that otherwise they would be left behind?

FM: That was the prevailing opinion. I know that a number of the delegations from North Carolina, a number of delegates from North Carolina were afraid that--they wanted me to certainly indicate and show their NAACP's role. Now, the NAACP had another young man who was down here, Herb Wright, who was supporting the NAACP, and they later fired him.

EP: Why did they fire him?

FM: I do not know, and I have never to this date learned the real reason.

EP: I gather that there were problems with--that some of the task force members wanted to work with--particularly Issac Reynolds--wanted to work with the Bradens [Carl and Anne] and Southern Educational Conference Fund [sic-Southern Conference Educational Fund, SCEF], and in particular Reverend Fulgram[?], and that they were rather severely reprimanded by Gordon Carey for pursuing this avenue. Do you know what laying the basis--

FM: [unclear]

EP: Yes. Do you know what was CORE's reluctance to work with these people?

FM: I don't know. They never gave me any problem.

EP: Well, Carey more or less sent a very strong memo to Issac Reynolds saying under no circumstances are you to work with the Bradens and the SECF. And he said we know Reverend Fulgram and alluded some problem with him I think in Hickory. And he said we choose not to work with this individual. Do you know anything about this controversy?

FM: Yeah, it seems as though that does ring a chord somewhere. But I knew Reverend Fulgram, and I don't think that--I know that Anne Braden--and I remember that they took the case for Willa Johnson, who was a schoolteacher down there. And I remember that the lawyers who worked with them were one time associated with Kuntsler & Kennoy[?] in New Jersey. I remember all of those and I talked to them.

EP: Well, I got the impression from Gordon Carey that CORE considered them if not Communist, they had too many suspected or supposed Communists working with them for CORE to want to have any association with them.

FM: Well, I tell you, I don't know--that might have been true. I know the national office did designate certain, did make certain designations of people which the local chapters tried to follow, but that never gave me any concern [laughs]. It was never a problem with me, because it was just--all this, as I told you earlier, before you got to this point in the conversation [laughs], any white person was deemed to be subversive.

EP: They were automatically branded as red.

FM: Yeah, they were branded. And, hell, the people that I knew just couldn't go along with it. So that was my attitude about that.

EP: Why did CORE fold so quickly in North Carolina? It seems to me that the summer of 1963, the spring and summer, seem to be the high point in North Carolina. And after that there is virtually no activity in the CORE chapters, such that by 1965 or '66, CORE was virtually defunct in North Carolina. Why did that happen?

FM: I wouldn't say[?] actually defunct.

EP: Pardon?

FM: What is it that you are saying?

EP: Well, I know that the national office shifted its emphasis down into Louisiana.

FM: The national office made its emphasis shift down to COFO, to voter registration down in--this is something that I objected to.

EP: When did you object?

FM: I objected to Marvin Rich and their emphasis. You know, why don't we keep our activities going here? And, you see, your program and everything was carried out by your, your national program was carried out, and then your field secretaries picked up on it. But your field secretaries would try to deviate. But when they moved all your people out of here--you know what I mean? North Carolina furnished the leadership for all of the task forces that we created; went down to New Orleans; Baton Rouge; to the Crown Zellerbach Company, to fight that fight; let's see, Monroe, Lafayette, and Bogalusa [Louisiana]. All of our people here went down there--you see what I mean?--to carry on the--

EP: Why did, after the national field secretaries moved out of North Carolina, why didn't the local chapters keep up activity in North Carolina?

FM: The local chapters didn't keep up activity because a lot of the personnel, the leadership personnel, had gone with the movement down to the other parts. They had the COFO, in which we sent people; we were to concentrate and to break the tide in Mississippi. I agreed to that myself, but I believed that you should maintain your local chapters here, and you should service your local chapters. But they said, no, we're going to organize. And we were given--we contributed very heavily to the confederated organizations down there. And that was the point of concentration, that all of the civil rights would do, all the civil rights organizations would do.

EP: What were the major problems of civil rights activities in North Carolina? I'm thinking was it personnel, was it finances, was it the fact that many municipalities passed rather tough local ordinances against demonstrations and picketing and that sort of thing?

FM: Well I don't think--I think that it was a combination of events. I think that first of all, the emphasis, as far as CORE's national office was concerned, was to no longer concentrate

on North Carolina, but to now move to the Deep South. I think many of the objectives that we wanted in North Carolina were now accomplished.

Secondly, it was now time to use some personnel. We've always done--the civil rights movement has always been short of personnel any way that you wanted to go. Even now if you examine, everybody knows everybody, and even with death and attrition, you had the masses who would come out for localized actions in communities for projects that were affecting them. But the real true believers or those who were there, you didn't have that many people. You understand what I'm trying to say?

Now you had--CORE structure was based upon, at the height of CORE's movement, we never had more than two hundred people on field staff. I don't think they ever had more than a hundred and some odd people. You understand what I'm talking about? But one hundred to two hundred people--and these were the mechanics who could put it together, who would have to do everything in conjunction with the local community. That's the thing that I'm trying to talk about.

Now, when the decision was made--now that was, once again, that was a decision that was made by the Marv Rich--not Marv Rich personally but the board and that staff. You see, at one time, you had decisions made by a staff, not a board. National Action Council didn't get really active until the time that I became president, and they criticized me then. Many of the whites still feel that I'm anti- or said I was too black for them.

EP: What was the basis of that charge?

FM: I don't know. I think that I've heard many of them say that they felt that I was too black. But at any rate, when you go back to the change in leaving North Carolina, that was the thrust then, to go down there, that North Carolina had made substantial progress. I don't think that it was the fact that North Carolina had passed repressive laws or something, by any means, or else we never would have decided to leave.

EP: It was just the shifting of the personnel and the--

FM: It was the shifting of your best personnel. It was not only that, the issues. The issues had already been raised and basically cleared in North Carolina. And we still have not accomplished what we wanted to do with the voter education rights struggle that was down in Louisiana. I went down to Louisiana myself. I've been down there four or five times. And then there was some different emphases in the movement, and you had CORE chapters scattered all over the country that had to be serviced. But the sit-in movement had served its part.

EP: Well, in connection with that, what was the effectiveness of nonviolent direct action, and what limitations did it have as a tactic?

FM: [pause] I think that it had--it was very effective. You couldn't, as a tactic, you couldn't--it held back violence. There was no reason for someone to be violent against you if you are not violent. Now, that does not mean that [laugh] you did not receive the brunt of violence often times. But far more times, you prevented an act of violence by being nonviolent yourself.

That's just as a matter strategy. As a matter of philosophy, which was held by a lot of people, they just believed the Christian principle that they are not going to be violent, they didn't want to be violent, they didn't want to shoot nobody or do anything else. You know what I'm trying to say?

EP: Surely.

FM: That was one feeling about it, and there was just another pragmatic attitude: Hell, you can't win, so, you know, why just waste yourself now? And I think that was another attitude. I think that, I think that out of the sixties there grew the rumblings for the big urban centers. I don't think that you, I think that you, as you look at the, as you look at the total picture about--you've got to realize that the urban centers were demanding the tactics that we had established and proven to be workable in the South were now being looked at in these urban centers where you already had a measure of integration, but you didn't have anything else. So now, how can we use these tactics in the city up here, you know what I mean?

EP: Yes.

FM: So now that was a new point of focus and the center of direction to be geared toward labor organizing, geared towards unionism, to be geared towards so many of the problems of some of the bigger cities.

EP: I guess the limitations I was thinking of is the fact that most of these big pushes depended, as you said, shock troops, the college students.

FM: That's right. And we sent the CORE organizers. They had learned how to organize in many ways, and they were all over the country organizing, and particularly into the big cities where the circumstances were different.

EP: Did nonviolent direct action not lend itself to the more long-term battles of, not so much public accommodation desegregation as economic issues like equal opportunity--

FM: I think that it did, too.

EP: You think it did?

FM: I think that out of nonviolence it grew some other ways of accomplishing the same thing, and it could move to economics.

EP: Well, I guess the question I had in mind was, it--after about ’63, or certainly ’65, you didn’t see anymore of the mass marches or the mass demonstrations like you had in--

FM: Okay, why?

EP: That’s why I’m asking you.

FM: All right, yeah, but why? You say you didn’t see them.

EP: Was it because the media didn’t focus on them? Or that--

FM: There are about three of four reasons. One, the media didn’t want to focus on them anymore. Two, the issues to people were now bread-and-butter issues, not just spending money with someone else--to be respected. And then, the emphasis has shifted that you’ve accomplished all that you can by nonviolence. And many of the CORE people, I would think, by the time that we had our convention in Oakland, we had 90 percent of our CORE chapters went to the panther movement--became Black Panthers in our metropolitan areas. Did you realize that?

EP: No, I didn’t.

FM: Yeah, well, you better check that out. Our CORE groups then became Panthers.

EP: Was this disturbing to you and other leaders in CORE?

FM: Not really, not really to me, not to me. It didn’t disturb me that much. It disturbed me because I understood the consequences that would have to be paid or borne out of it.

EP: In other words, this would give the white power structure the opportunity to come down hard on them and use--

FM: Right, right. I knew that, and I told them that two or three times.

EP: What was their reaction?

FM: The reaction is that "We know that you know. We know that you understand, but you know that what we've got to do. And it now becomes our time to do something that advancse the struggle in our way and in another way; and we have to be ready to assume the risk."

[End Tape 1, Side B--begin Tape 2, Side A]

EP: --the civil rights struggle, or was it sort of the backwater? Just how important was it?

FM: I think North Carolina was the, was actually the, was the forefront of where the nitty-gritty work that I've often heard [audio malfunction]. I was just listening to Jesse Jackson characterize it the other day. He said the reason why all of so much happened in some other places that are highly-publicized like Montgomery, Birmingham--he said the difference is that in North Carolina, they were organized. They put something together designed to accomplish [things and accomplished them][audio malfunction]. It was just as bad as any other place, but the press wanted the, looked for certain key things to publicize something.

But we were organized in North Carolina. And we--if we really beat--if you go back and you look at the records at how well we kept those records and spent that money and did everything, and kept those kids together and kept them committed, kept them housed and labor, you know, kept them going from day to day, it's amazing what was done with five thousand dollars. And the training that was carried out, it was a commitment. I don't believe that those times will come back by again.

North Carolina really was the place where you could get a whole lot of people to come together in a given city down there. And you could get one or two charismatic leaders, yes, but the real struggle against economic inequities, say, for example, there was the strike against--the Durham boycott, which was successful; the organization of Duke workers during the same period of time, which was going on, which was successful; the bringing of cases against the Housing Authority which said that tenants did have rights--which was started by me, but later completed by Van Alstine after I left--was going on; the original sit-ins and the second group of sit-ins, which were the cases started in Durham and carried to the Supreme Court; the filling of the jails and the kids serving the thirty day sentences, which was in Durham; the bringing together of CORE and the NAACP as a united front and us going to Chapel Hill, the Chapel Hill battle and that--all were, I think, couldn't have been done without organization and trained technicians, which we were, without having the casualties and the brutality, and the organization that was so well done that the state of North Carolina yielded, it came into. Never will say, "Yes, we bowed down and did it," but it made them do it.

EP: You said you don't believe you could get that level of commitment again in this day and time.

FM: No.

EP: Why do you feel that way?

FM: I think that there comes certain people along at certain times, and I don't see people as concerned about each other anymore.

EP: You mean strictly amongst--

FM: I think there has been a, I don't know, rather, a rather, there has been a--society has become, has become in a way, society has changed.

EP: Were you speaking society in general, or specifically among blacks?

FM: I'm talking about society as a whole. I think, for example, integration has not meant, integration has not meant what it was intended to be by us. I think it has been distorted.

EP: In what sense?

FM: I don't know, and I think people look at these things and they no longer--I think that so much hope has been killed. I don't know whether people are willing to fight and risk their lives like a generation was in the sixties.

EP: You mentioned that you--some of the difficulties you had as, when you became national director of CORE. When did you become director, and what were your main goals to accomplish as national director?

FM: I became director in sixty, sixty, sixty--[pause] I forget my record[?] now.

EP: What were the main programs you wanted to focus upon?

FM: Well, I had an entire program that I wanted to bring into CORE. The changes that I wanted to bring about in CORE was first to get down to, was to really concentrate on organizing the masses. When I say I wanted to bring into CORE, it was a concept held by Farmer, myself, and Carey.

And that concept was, first of all, we have a massive amount of ignorance in the black community, illiteracy, and that we were going to have to train. And we had these

freedom schools to really bring about things, teach people who they were, what they were, what they needed to do. And we believed that that education should have been, there should be some massive education program to rid the entire United States of illiteracy. If the Japanese could do it, we should too. And that was one of our realistic goals, that was one of our very realistic goals that we thought was possible. Jim had got a psychiatrist, I mean an educational psychologist. And he was trying to push this thing. We were all trying to push this thing in conjunction with some black schools' "Each one, teach one" concept to come out to go all over the United States. And that was supposed to be sponsored by OEO [Office of Equal Opportunity]. That was one of the concepts.

I was interested--that was a concept which I conceived of as [unclear]--I was interested in that CORE should come along in the area of business. Don't forget I was representing the Durham Business and Professional Chain as a lawyer and had devised many programs of black businesses, and was in black business--three or four black businesses--represented black fraternal organizations and lodges, et cetera. And I saw that as a need--economic development as a need, and I developed a platform and a program on that which I wanted to push on in the days ahead. They could not see that.

And there was a third thing, is the, was what I called "Black Power." Black Power, however, the only kind of Black Power that was accepted, that the press really wanted to take, was the concept of Black Power which was to be violent. And I was opposed to the violence in Black Power, to a concept of self-aggressiveness, community awareness, develop your community and go forward with your own, with the development of white partners to help.

Even the national board of CORE--not the national board, the national staff--by the time I was elected they knew what our program was, and they just disagreed. And with the anti-Semitic thing which had came out of Mt. Vernon, it was escalated way out of proportion. And we had, by the time that I took over as executive director--I took it over plagued with problems and debt, because by that time, Marv Rich and those that created this other organization had already taken away all the financial sources when they created [unclear].

But our concept to bring about a massive education program and a massive six-point Black Power program which is geared toward cooperation, self-improvement, education facilities, and to--would have been about the kind of program that we would have loved to have seen coming into the seventies is what we wanted--the seventies and then to the eighties. We moved along and some of the concepts that we carried out, we see carried out now, but they are being done less. Soul City was a concept that I wanted to carry out through CORE, and I ended up going on my own. That was a concept that I had even [prior to CORE. But these were some of the ones that I had.]

[End of Interview]