

ure 1
L: Test, test

T: and of course, by declaring Malcolm X's birthday as the national birthday.

?: Malcolm who?

T: Malcolm the tenth (laughing)

L: You know I've got a good strong signal. We're all set. So what we thought we would do is do a tape interview and then um, there's two ways we do it with the film; we either, with people who aren't used to the camera, Bill will signal me and I will just um, try to catch it on the fly but ah, sometimes if I don't get it in the beginning I'll ask people to say it again. It's not like video where we can,

T: No problem, no problem.

L: Okay, well I'll just sit back here then.

B: Okay and Larry will join in when,

T: Since I noted, you're not doing retakes to retake?

L: No.

B: So, we're just going to concentrate on the Alabama project and maybe you can just begin by telling us when and how you came to be in the leadership in the Lownes County.

T: Um, I'm not sure I occupied a position of leadership um, I was working in Mississippi and I was ah, congregational director for the second commissional district for our projects which covered the delta. If my memory serves me correctly, I was in charge of some ah, close to 18 or 22 projects of several counties in that area ah, after the Mississippi freedom democratic party, a project which I was politically opposed, but ah, we were in the minority and did not win but ah, being a disciplined member of an organization we ah, continued to push a point that they voted and not our point knowing that they would arrive at contradictions quickly and then our point would have to be seriously considered. So ah, when the Mississippi freedom democratic party ah, was rebuffed by the national democratic party, which, it being a racist party was foretold ah, those who were in SNIC, pushing this type of policies ah, aligning themselves somehow together with the democratic party found themselves in a vacuum. At this point, those of us who ah, of course those were the nationalists inside the organization who had been studying seriously of Malcolm X, recognized the opportunity for third party politics were ah, now possible um, I understood that if I stayed in Mississippi, it would be difficult to implement this with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. So I resigned from being congregational district and asked to do one county in Alabama. Lownes County of course was easily picked because of reading SNIC's theory. SNIC had a theory that wherever the racism and the terrorism is the most intense this is the area we should first go to, because if we cracked the toughest area, the others would likely fall in line and Lownes County was especially important when you recognized that it sat between Montgomery and Selma and ah, Montgomery had had movements since 1955 with Martin Luther King which was spotlighted all over the world and Selma's become imparched in there since the 1960's which we're working with seriously, and we saw that Lownes County sat

between both of them and it had not one registered voter, ah, African registered voter by ah 1965 and ah, as we even got into Lownes, you could come to see the terrorism of the county because even those who worked in Montgomery, because you had many ah, they were ah, part time share croppers working on the land but had to supplement, would go to the city of Montgomery to find a job and then come back. Those who were working in Montgomery and coming back as part time workers or part time farmers, ah peasants, ah, were involved in the movement with Dr. King but themselves did not even think of bringing the movement into Lownes County. So when I was assigned to Lownes County after a request from SNIC, Silas Norman, who was the project director, I explained to him the concepts that we wanted to work with, he was 100% for it and we chose Lownes County, because it was, for all practical purposes, the roughest county and it certainly was a rough county. There's no question about that. The terrorism there was brutal ah, to break the county however, it was funny. It was a release of backside but ah, you know ah, SNIC and ah, SCLC became involved with us on the march. I'm sure you have some history on this so I won't go through the history, but it was important for us at this point, is that SNIC and SCLC were having contradictions. SNIC was attacking Martin Luther King. I was opposed to SNIC publicly attacking Martin Luther King, not for any more reasons or because of sentimental respect for King, but I knew that attacking King in the press in this way that we come out the losers and ah, there was no way we could stop the march. That was clear. The liberal machinery had all ready cracked up. There was no way to attack King as far as I was concerned. That was also clear. So what we had to do was make a negative a positive um, Bob Mans and myself, we were at that time assigned to Lownes County but we had not yet been into Lownes County and we were planning to go but with the march coming, we knew it was impossible to talk about the work we had to do along with this march because the differences between the approach of SCLC and SNIC really highlighted this march. SCLC was for mobilization, you know, temporary movement at every given area. SNIC was for organization, long range movements. So the 2 would ah, not balance at all. But one thing was clear, I knew that wherever Dr. King went, he would bring out the people, he would bring out the people, and even those who were afraid would come out for Dr. King, and the strong ones, they would come out. So we had no contacts in Lownes County. So Bob Mans just decided that we would follow this march because the march was going right through Lownes County and ah, all the people from Lownes County that come out for this march, we will take down there names and that's the core of our movement. As a matter of fact, that's exactly what we did. We didn't march, but in the march of course the people came out to greet all along the road and we went to call their names, greeted them; of course to them we were Dr. King's workers so to them it made no difference. "Yeh we're with Dr. King and when the marchers go on, we'll be here." You all go stay where you are going to stay, you know, so when the march was finished three days later, we had all our

gear, we had already found a place to stay, because on the march we found people and told them we had no place to stay we had no house so they'd give you a house. They take care of everything, they had absolutely no movement at all so these were only strong individuals themselves who would be ah, you know, giving us this place to stay, giving us contacts and ways of moving, even helping to finance our movement and ah, it was actually from this beginning that we started with the Lownes County movement off of the enthusiasm raised by King out of his spontaneous movement to which we were in total disagreement. It was from this that we were able to capture this enthusiasm and ah, kick off the Lownes County movement.

S: Do you think your goals in Lownes County were...

T: Our goals in Lownes County were clear. We wanted a party outside of a democratic party um, of course the democratic party in Alabama made it very easy for us at this time.

George Waniss was governor and King said mouth was dripping with (laughing) I forget King's powerful terms, racism and the Alabama democratic party, it's emblem for the state of Alabama was a white rooster, a white cock with the slogan white supremacy, you know so with a slogan like this and an emblem like this, you know holding up before people, I mean, you want to join this. There was no question that we had history on our side and that here racism was actually a powerful aid in helping us to show the people that you really have to join this party. Of course Alabama had the law for third party and it was a simple law, an easy law. The reason being, they were certain that no third party would ever start when they made the law. So to become a third party was really simple. But one thing was in the law that you had to have a symbol because of the high rate of illiteracy among whites in Alabama, you had to have an emblem so you would know. So, well the emblem of the black panther picked of course in reaction to the white rooster and um, while the law said you had to call yourself an organization or something else before you became a party only after receiving X number of votes in the election X percentage, would you be able to call yourself a party. So it was called the Lownes County Freedom Organization. That was the official title and the black panther was it's symbol. Well, needless to say, people paid no attention to LFCO, Lownes County Freedom Organization, or they paid attention towards the black panther (laughing) and ah, the democratic party from outside Alabama, recognizing the danger that this represented to them because ah, if you talk about this spreading throughout the south, you know, killing the democratic party, there's no question about it ah, for this tooth and nail every step of the way. From Bobby Kennedy all the way down labor unions, everyone. Even King himself would not tell the people that they should vote in the democratic party. So ah, we were up against everyone and you know, I think one of the ways they thought was if they named it the black panther party, people would be afraid of it, they'd run away from it and we would back. But unfortunately for them, they picked the wrong symbol because, if the people were unified around anything in

Lownes County, they were unified around that symbol. I mean, of course for them, what it represented and what it meant so, when they began to call it the black panther party to scare us, the people started to call it the black panther party. One other thing that we must make clear here just for history, because people are confused as to where the black panther party was founded, this is where it was founded and this was an armed party because decisions were made by the people and they decided okay, you people are SNIC, you have nonviolence with Dr. King and we understand that. But we live here. We know these people. We are carrying guns here, what's your position? Now whatever you say we just organized, you say carry guns I hope you carry one for me too (laughing) no problem with it. So it was an armed party and even on the day when we had to ah, do the election a certain distance from the courthouse, people brought their guns in front of the justice department. The law said, you know, that guns had to be left X number of feet from the polling place and there was a place where people would come, deposit their guns, walk, vote, come back, pick up their guns, get in their car and drive away. You know Alabama state, I imagine the law is still there, as long as you have a weapon and it's not concealed, you have the right to carry it. So none of these weapons were concealed so it was even clearer that this was an armed party um, I'm not sure, I think we have some statistics on the median age of the people, but I could easily say that the median age there of the people would have to be mid-50's, late 50's of the people involved in the struggle. So these were old people who were properly armed ah, just to continue with this, which is out of context but just to follow it, ah, we brought down young people at the end of the year when there was going to be the vote because the white terrorist organizations made it clear that there was going to be no voting and anybody who tried to vote would be killed. So ah, the people were ready to vote but we also thought well you know, it's not too bad to have more guns than necessary. So ah, I was even given the task of going around to big cities, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Detroit etc. and getting young brothers and sisters who were using guns and were prepared to come and help. So we collected quite a few and we made it known to the justice department, listen we're bringing in these young people and they got guns, so you tell your white terrorist organizations they got the first shot, it's there's, we're not going to fire first. But they got the first shot, after that we got it and ah, one of the groups that came down was a group from California headed by a brother named Mark Comfort and all of these groups that came, these young groups, which is something we hadn't thought about, when they came from Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Oakland etc., when they saw the black panther party, they, at that point in Lownes County, asked SNIC for the right to duplicate black panther parties throughout the country and the form would follow the history correctly, one would see at the same time there was one in California, there was one in New York, there was one in Philadelphia, in Chicago and Detroit.

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The one in California, for any number of reasons, was the one that really took off and that's not our issue here but just to correct the historical records, it was Lownes County was first founded and those in California, Harry Newton and Bobby Seal asked the student nonviolent coordinating committee for permission to start their black panther party and I was the SNIC field representative that was sent out to California to work out with them the details of the formation of their black panther party. So ah, it was here in Lownes County that we started, as we said, we expected debts, a lot of debts, we knew it was a terrorist county and that we prepared ourselves for inevitabilities.

S: Do you have any particular examples of the sort of white resistance? Anything that kind of sticks out instead of what you might encounter when,

T: Well you know in the very beginning before we even got into the, Viola Louise was killed in Lownes County so ah, even before we went in there was already the terror there you know and ah these terrorist groups would make it known that they would have none of this in Lownes County and when it got to them that people had come and were going to stay in Lownes County, well ah, just in the beginning, they went on a rampage ah, terrorizing ah burning certain houses, burning certain churches, shooting up at the people, intimidating the African people in Lownes County, you know, just stepping up their terrorism, you know, screaming at them in the streets, yelling at them you know, informing them they want them to have nothing to do with these freedom riders or freedom fighters or whatever other choice names they used for us (laughing). But ah they definitely wanted them to have nothing to do with us. So even before we went in there was a wave of terrorism which started to intimidate the people. Unfortunately, because of the enthusiasm kicked up by King, it didn't have the effect that we thought that it would have. Course we expected that when we go in in the beginning, because this is the usual pattern, they would speed up and bring an overkill, if you will, of terrorism to intimidate the people so that we won't get the initial thrust to get the momentum moving. But ah, luckily, for the work of King, this had no effect, the resistance spirit had already set in for the people. As a matter of fact, their wave of terrorism was making those who were strong even stronger. So it worked against them in the beginning.

S: Now Daniels was in Selma and Davis County, how did your connection get...

T: Our connection began, believe it or not, in ah, an awkward manner.

L: Should we film this, you want me to film this?

S: Sure.

L: If you don't mind?

T: No problem.

L: Do you just want to do it again?

S: Sure.

L: Okay LONG PAUSE

T: Well I'm sure you know what you're doing, I'll leave your technical problems to you.

BEEP

S: Okay, your beginning of your relationship with Daniels.

T: Ah, of course everyone who had stayed around after the march, King had left, had heard about Lownes County and um, were very interesting in coming into Lownes County. Now, of course the Southern Christian Leadership Conference ah, now after heavy attacks from SNIC that all they do is come and make trouble and run away. This was the line from SNIC, not the correct line but this was the line of attack. To counteract that, they began to say that they would stay in the counties but their organization was not even set up to do the type of work we were doing. Their organization depended really very strongly on Martin Luther King and even when somebody went somewhere and said they worked for SCLC, the first thing that people asked them was "when is King coming to my house?" (laughing) So ah, we knew that they would not be able to sustain it but they would stay for awhile, of that we were also certain and um, one of the things that SCLC was doing, of course you know, we understand it as just ah, intraorganizational disputes and even rivalry, was that SNIC was against white people, that we didn't want white people in our organization, of course the march brought down many liberal whites etc. etc. so this was also a way to try and isolate us. Um, Johnathan, we used to see him, you know, who's this one? He's moving a lot you know and, ah, so finally they told him about Lownes County and he wanted to come to Lownes County and they told him that SNIC was doing the project and I'm sure they told him that SNIC was anti-white, even though, when he first approached me about it, he didn't allow any of these feelings of Snic being anti-white appear. So ah, he said he wanted to volunteer and I told him we were happy to have that and he wanted to volunteer for Lownes County so I told him that's good that he volunteered and that Selma was a good place and that Davis County was even better and ah, but he felt that he wanted to volunteer for Lownes County and ah, I explained to him that we would never let him work in Lownes County and I explained to him there's a danger that you know ah there's a very dangerous place here. They've already killed Viola Louise, you were too visible as a target, we're not strong enough in the county to protect you even if we were to use (BEEP BEEP) white organizers, but ah, were we to bring you in at this point, there would just be ourselves, we would be committing your death and ah we know that and we're not like others, we don't have white people killed to get our names in the newspapers. Of course this was our answer to the anti-white thing (laughing). But ah, he was persistent and because of persistence always meeting, we became, even though we had different positions, we became friends, we got to say each other but opposition was firm and his insistence was also firm.. It was here that we began to meet each other and he began to meet, because he was persistent, to meet others who were working in Lownes County like Gloria, ah like Ruby, like Willie Vahn, like others to put pressure on them, he was clever. So you know, Johnathan Daniels became a name inside of the Lownes County movement even before he had physical presence. You know "Oh Johnathan Daniels, the Johnathan Daniels. Why doesn't SCLC

send him to Mississippi and get him out of our hair" (laughing) you know. But the resistance to him was not a hatred, you know, he's a nice one but really is not the wrong place for him. So it was out of this atmosphere that we became to know him so that we could develop genuine feelings for him must ah show his personality because we were against what he wanted but still by being against it, we were able to have friendly relationships and very warm you could say.

S: What was motivating them to get.....

T: I think ah, he was being motivated by the fact that he recognized, number one, that the work that (BEEP BEEP BEEP) SNIC was doing and that's the reason also, I think why ah, we should also say that one of the reasons that we actually stayed close was because he recognized the work that SNIC was doing was really the more important work rather than this mobilization. That is he would see that most of the people that came for SCLC would be leaving after awhile and he would recognize that SCLC had no program to keep them but SNIC did. SO his insistence on coming to SNIC was realization, he understood that this coming and going was not going to solve the problem, you really have to be here. He was willing to be there and recognize that the only way he could really be there and really, well of course I may be being here, the only way that he could recognize that he could be of value was to talk himself into a SNIC project and um, since Lownes County was the challenging county and he ah was not afraid of challenge, as a matter of fact, I think one of the reasons that most people liked him was that he was unafraid and was courageous and ah ready to ah...attach himself to the most dangerous project. So, you know, even when we were discussing Lownes County I said, "Well he just wants to make himself a martyr but we will not let him do that. He'll find, we'll let some other organization make him a martyr." But um, not that he had the martyr like complex but that's how we used to explain him among ourselves, never saw anything of a martyr like complex in him. He loved life far too much to ah (laughing) to just seek martyrdom voluntarily.

S: So what were the roots of the courage then?

T: Ah, that one is not difficult for me to explain um, I don't exactly know but I do know that he stood out in Selma, not just for SNIC but for most of the population in Selma above others because of his kindness, gentleness, good humor and ah courage.

S: Were there other whites working in Lownes County with him?

T: No not at all

S: He was a single,

T: He was single one pushing to come in, he still, we still, as a matter of fact when he came in he came in with SCLC not with us ah, through what we consider the back door approach. We even ah, because even the demonstrators knew that it wasn't our policy. Our policy in SNIC was no demonstrations, hard organizing work. No demonstrations because when you get demonstrations it's temporary and ah, if he's going to do demonstrations it's like going to jail, get out of jail and you have a direct target, we want this sign down. But

if you're talking about organizing and giving the people power than demonstrations, if you don't have a strong enough base, can work against you, which was not the policy of SCLC. So even in our style and our methods of work we would conflict. So we were not for demonstrations at all.

Johnathan began to see and to understand, after discussions over and over again, because I don't know how he wouldn't know, but sometime, everytime we were in there he would somehow find us, you know, even sometimes I would come in for a quick minute, run in to get a quick sandwich at a little juke joint there and I would be sitting down and before I even recognized him here he comes and pulls a chair right next to me. You sure you don't work for the FBI, how come you following me this closely (laughing) He said, "I have my spies in the community to help me follow you."

(Laughing) so we have spies for this one, this one (laughing). So he had a network anyway that was clear enough to let him know so he was insistent, he was insistent and he recognized at least this difference between demonstration and hard line organizing and he saw it clearly. But he wanted ah, he wanted to make his contribution and ah, he recognized Lownes County was actually the place where he could make this contribution. S: Did he have a political ideology or was it more or less pragmatic to system when you get something for the people

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP

T: He had it but um, he was certainly more politically conscious than the average white liberal, there's no question about that now. I don't know much about his reading background and ah, we would get into some pretty tough political discussions which would let you know that he had put up with consciousness unlike most of the others you would know. They had good feelings, good sentiments they wanted to do good. They didn't have much clear understanding of the forces that were up against the center, but he had a clear understanding um, you know, I remember telling him, I said, "Look if you come to Lownes County you'll just get shot." so he said, "You're a racist." I said, "Oh don't hand me that you going to tell me just because..." and he said, "No, you can get killed. You think you can't get killed." and I said, "Of course I can get killed." he said, "you and Bob? and all the other organizers think they can get killed. So you just want you to get killed you don't want me to get killed." So he was ah (laughing) lets just say that his consciousness was not on the simple level like the others. The others said precisely so you just want you're people to get killed and you don't want me to get killed. And I said all right all right I see your point. SO his consciousness and his points were clear and they certainly would make their mark once he made his arguments. They were not the usual whit liberal arguments that you would get. So his consciousness was certainly much higher. I certainly don't know what his political background was that ah accounted for this.

S: In the take we gave you, you talked about how he was able to go beyond the surface of things and to see causes, socioeconomic causes that were deeply embedded and that that

surprised you or struck you as being unique in terms of Johnathan.

T: This of course would have to do again with his even seeing SNIC's concept of organizing, of the long range going for power. But he recognized this, you know, he recognized oh we're going for really institutionalizing power and really wiping this out. S he would help by showing you this was the correct path, you know, you really do need power, you must have the people organized and somebody to organize for us that would be able to deal with this. So ah, as I said, unlike the usual white liberal, I'm not in any way making derogatory remarks, but of course they mean well, they want the problems solved, but I'm not sure they would penetrate the necessity for really long range struggle here. Of course there were many who saw it but the overwhelming majority just saw it, we have to do something let's go and sacrifice and they were willing to give their lives to, I don't want to make believe in any way that they thought they would come. No Mrs; Louise, she didn't think as deeply as Johnathan DAniels certainly recognized that her life would be in danger and at risk so they were willing to put their lives at danger and at risk but ah, they were not willing to recognize the long range aspects of the struggle where as Johnathan recognized this. And ah, we had more similarities and dissimilarities, obviously in our political thinking and that's why he was drawn so closely to SNCC people and they even had respect and great comradeship with him. You know, every time we come, he said, "I'm coming to Lownes County" and I'd say, "Give me time, we going to work for you, you going to come in and make a mass meeting but let us get it ready for you.

S: Can you remember any of the bigger differences between you , I know he talks in his writings about, one time he said, "I'm ready to take" and then he moves from that position and says, "No, no, I have to go back to that principal of not buying ones into thy enemy (BEEP) I don't know if you got involved (BEEP) in any of that or not.

T: I'm not sure he got involved in it but he was aware of the fact that most SNIC people were carrying guns because even this was the sort of thing that SCLC was spreading, you know, "Those SNIC people talking ... but they carrying guns so if you go with them you're not going to die a nonviolent death, they'll have a shoot out and you'll be killed in that shoot out and you will not be able to serve the ah" you know this was all part of the interivalry. So he was aware of the fact that we carried guns and in our discussions ah, he was aware of the fact that we were defending ourselves in Lownes County because ah, in Lownes County, the first few weeks we were in there, in this over riding of terrorism, you know the routes will have , you know, bring in a lot of terrorism the first time they come and to scare them away. They came by our freedom house and shut it up and fire was returned and of course SNIC people were discussing it and Johnathan was aware of it and so he said, "So ah, you guys were shooting back at ah, " and I said, "'Yeh we shoot back, we shoot to kill. That's why we don't want you because when the shooting starts we might get you confused

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with the others Johnathan " (Laughing) He said, " You don't have to worry about getting me confused, I know exactly where I'll be." However we don't know so when the shooting starts that time you just be seeing color so you know, you may get on the wrong side Johnathan so. But ah he understood the choice and he said, "I'll be on the right side don't worry." But ah, I'm not sure if we ever discussed this aspect of his writing though he knew that we were armed and he knew, course unlike other counties, people in Lownes County were speaking of arms and carrying the arms. So Lownes County itself and among the others and certainly those who were attacking it from a nonviolent position it was known they were not talking nonviolence, they were talking arms and they were talking about going to an armed revolution, could you imagine them going to an armed revolution? So Johnathan was certainly aware of this discussion and now that I refract about it ah, the fact that he was still insistent about coming must have meant that he at least had ah seen and understood SNIC's position as a tactical position or nonviolent as opposed to SCLC's philosophical position. So even if he had moved from philosophy to tactic, at least, even if still philosophy, he was willing to work with those who tactically used nonviolence.

L: Let me just say Bill, how are we doing in terms of filming. I mean, let me talk about the statuses here. This magazine has about 4 minutes left and my other magazine has the remainder of last night. So I can run this one out and reload becuae we still haven't gotten to anything about the jail. But this is all great, I mean I like we should get it all on film. This is the kind of background that no ones told us.

T: Janet Badger, the young lady in New York, she'll be able to give you a lot more, because she was in cause when we were chased with Johnathan, you know, that I'd even forgotten about and other people.

L: Can you get us in touch with her?

T: Yes, I have her phone number I'll give it to you. She's waiting because I spoke to her and I thought she, I thought she'd been contacted and I told her well their doing this,

L: Her name hadn't come up at all.

T: Yeh, she was with the Medical Committee for Human Rights so that's why I think she was, but they were based in Selma and you know, and Johnathan had to come back to Selma a lot so, these are really the people whom he had great contact with so they were together all the time.

L: Well we'll be going down there in May so we'll give her a call.

T: Yeh, you will really have to do a lot of work with her because she has a lot of information on Johnathan, the information that you are seeking that I do not have, you know because our meetings were always in a political framework although, you koe, there were social interactions within that politacal framework but it was mainly political, he's pushing to come to Lownes County, I got to be nice to him and tell him he can't come.

L: Well what I want to suggest then is um,...let's see here,

there's not much left on here. Well I ought to run this off on a short take and then let's use up the rest of the other magazine and discuss maybe the days in jail. You think that work..

S: Well we'll see.

L: Okay, because I don't mind, I can reload it will just take me a couple of minutes.

S: Yeh, okay, well I'm just going to run through the chronology and see what is up.

L: Okay because I'll need 5 minutes to,

S: Yeh, we'll take a break.

L: Because an hour or so I'll be over ????

S: So when was this first action, there were actions I take it before the Fort Deposit?

T: No that was his first one.

S: That was his first?

T: That was his first action and ah, you know in Fort Deposit it was SCLC and ah (BEEP BEEP) we were even unaware of it. Now you know the youth are always ready for activity, so it's not at all difficult to rise up the youth for demonstrations and SCLC were working through Fort Deposit coming in through, if my memory serves me correctly I have to check but I think it's Wilcox County that joined Lowndes County down by Fort Deposit, I think it's one of those counties, but SCLC had a project so unbeknown to us they had moved their area close to the border line with Lowndes County. They began to recognize that Lowndes County was going to be the determining county an ah, of course I know the Democratic party, the labor unions, the group we were up against wanted to break Lowndes County and ah, it could only be broken, obviously, by pulling the youth away from the program of SNIC towards this mobilized program, get them up, make some quick reforms and ah make the people, I think the reforms of maybe taking down the signs would solve the problem. SO they were making ah forees into Fort Deposit un be known to us by then we recognized what was being done, it all ready reached a stage where it was impossible for us to stop it unless we came into an open war with SCLC, which we would never do before the people, you know, we would lose in the first place, except for those who we allready had contact that knew what SNIC was working, against King you couldn't fight, that was clear, so there was no way for us to fight that um, this is how Johnathan came in to um, Lowndes County with them with the demonstration project.

S: We can just continue,

L: When I come back, if there is a take that you.....

?: It's just the timing that got me, he ran out of the magazine just as you said Johnathan Daniels.

L: Oh that's all right.

S: Johnathan was a reluctant participant from what we can gather.

T: I really wasn't aware of that. I've never been aware of that. As a matter of fact I thought that um, oh well that's important, I thought that you know, he went along with it because he finally thought this would be his chance to get into Lowndes and we would have to deal with him. That's what

I assumed. Yeh, I didn't know he was reluctant, so I thought on the contrary.

S: That could well be true. The image we have up to this point is that he wasn't that anxious to do it but that what motivated him was that ah, young kids themselves were endangered and once they failed to talk them out of doing it there was some discussion about that, whether they should do it, once that was the move away from and they were going to do it that he said well I'll go along with them because they need some kind of presence. But again, that's the picture we have so far, so maybe you have a different picture of him.

T: No my picture again, I just assumed, it was obviously before all these years, I assumed, I said well he finally got his chance to get into Lownes County so he probably took it ah recognizing that once he was in there that SCLC would have a base and we would then definitely have to deal with him. That was my assumption all these years. But what you say is quite possible um, it certainly was a tradition in both SNIC and SCLC you know that ah, if people decided to go even though they were going to get killed, at least you go along and share the suffering with them, you know, you had to do it because you are organizing the area and people are going on demonstration to confront the enemy that you told them to confront and you are not there, well you'll just be finished (Laughing) You had no choice you know. So those of us who had these positions we could easily understand when you have no choice, you have to go and fight the enemy at this time whether you want to or not because, even though you had plans and you were planning a nice army to go meet them, once these people spontaneously decided to go since they are your army, you better at least if you are not leading them you better be one of them (Laughing) My Armies running away from me.....So this was a theory, so it's quite possible that this was part of it, I never ah, I just assumed that he was so happy to get in there, even through SCLC, by any means, he would go.

S: There was quite a debate about whether to do it or not, I guess that seemed to be the situation. I guess Fort Deposit was such a scary place,

T: Yeh and they hid us at Fort Deposit because we were working around Fort Deposit. We had some contacts in there but we decided let's develop the whole county which was rule area. Of course at that time we used to read Mousey Tome and say yeh we going to come from the country side and sweep (laughing) so we had our country side theory and Fort Deposit was ah, though not the capitol, was even more industrialized than Hainsville. Hainsville is just a cow town compared to Fort Deposit so ah Fort Deposit was more urban than Hainesville so we were just moving slowly around Fort Deposit holding it out for the morning for the last area and just overwhelm it so they tactic put our whole program out of wack and I didn't think they were going to the demonstration, I really didn't um, it was on that Monday when they were really doing it, so I wasn't even in Fort Deposit. I had to go to Fort Deposit after. Matter of fact, that's why my arrest was different than theirs. I was

"Mao Zedong"

arrested after they were after coming into Fort Deposit to try and ah see the best of saving the situation into which our organization was plunged by the actions of another organization, SCLC in this case.

S: We noticed in the jail register that a number of names were misrepresented, I forget what they called DANiels,

?: Vaniels

S: What was it?

?: Johnathan Vaniels

S: Vaniels and Morisroe was Morris and we didn't know whether this was just a misunderstanding or what was going on. Whether Johnathan gave an alias or whether Morisroe gave an alias.

T: They wouldn't have been able to give an alias in this case because that was our first law understood, you couldn't give aliases.

S: So probably it was just a misunderstanding.

T: Probably the racist type jailer just didn't care what name he put down which is possible but they could not give aliases.

S: SO were you in that little holding place in Fort Deposit and then

T: Yes, but um, believe it or not we were there for the roughest period because they had already been taken and the town had now gathered when we were arrested and a lot of the terrorist organizations knew me, you know that was their job. So those others they didn't know, but they knew me so for them the assumption was that we had done it you know it's just something you are forced to do so for them they didn't know about SCLC, they didn't know about King but they knew about us, they had information that was probably passed out by the FBI ah about us. So the knew who we were because they would tell there workers on the land you know, you go and tell that Ture we know him, we know where he stays and we got him, so they used to tell the people that they are coming to get us and give them our names, you know, we are coming to get this man and we are coming for this man so ah, they knew and understood and we knew and understood well they know who we are. It's nothing unusual, even if the FBI didn't give them our names, the terrorist organization licenses council was well enough developed and efficient enough to have pictures of all ous and pass these pictures out.....

END SIDE ONE

T: how to effectively stop this demonstration it was possible it was already started, how to bring it as quick as possible to a conclusion without make it appear cause it was clear to me that we couldn't make it appear as if we were afraid thats why we started the demonstration if we did that we would be in so much trouble. so we had a serious problem on our hands cause we couldn't stop a demonstration which we had to stop to make it appear that we were afraid so we had to stop it with some sort of victory exactly what that victory would be, how it would be worked out were things that i was working rapidly in my mind. as we were speeding towards fort deponsit you know and then it had reached its full ahh flower or blossom in the demonstration how then to s

other demonstrations. so these were the problems that raced through my mind as we aproached fortdeponsit. and when we got there driving around I saw that the demonstration was already overthe white people where there, some of them had guns out so i recognized the demonstration was over and I imagine they were arrested now the next was to find weree the arrested see about there arrest see if fcllc at least had other people there or lawyers if they had it and all I intended to do was make sure the had there lawyers it was there case leave fort deponsit and come back a little later after the dust had settled or go now and have a real political fight were the clc tell stay out this county don,t come and give us any trouble but all that was to no availthe mess made plans as mice and men often do often times go a stray these didn't even get a chance to give into the stage of implitation (?) (?)they went astray before we had even got there so all those plans worked out so we had to come up with new plans , so Chris who was driving was alittle bit nervous it was his....

S: CHRIS WHO?

T:MM it was Weilly(?) he was driving and unfortunately he was young and it was his first time really in a situation like thisone we had been in other demonstrations before you know but fort Deposit was something to behold you know you ride into a white town with people raising guns screaming at you if your not used to this it can really unnerve you to say the least.especially when they are calling out (blah blah???) we are going to shoot you so I recognizedthat i did not want to go to visit any of our contacts because our contacts in fort deposit were quiet and we couldn't expose them at this point so I In the town the contacts I knew we couldnt think of going I knew the town of course because when you are a stakes organizer the first thing you do is learn that area you know those roads like the back of your hand so any ways your chased you know how to get out of it so i knew the lay out of fort deposit i knew where the jail was i knew were everything was the only problem was how to get there unfortunately running into the town and on my way to the jail i ran into a solid block of whites and they were just screaming and you know the recognized that we were part of this group so the really started toget hot to say the least so I told chris to tirn the car around quickly there a way we used to turn the car around quickly and while he knew the way, he was not experienced in doing this and whith the peolple yelling and screaming at us he slammed into a car belonging to a white man who must have been the laeder of the group so when he slammed into that car and we had an accident I knew that this was it so turned of the engine and said dont you move you move you sit here ijumped out of the car and said oh so we made an accident here let me see your license, you know (laughs) I would have quickly make believe this was a normal procedure to knock them off. "Let me see your license and how much insurance do you have, you know" my white man was smart, he said "license, " he's a little kid you know (laughs) So ah, just then I saw the police so I said to the police, "This is your job, your the policeman. We're ready to continue here with all these problems" You

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know the policeman can't say you all started the problems. I said, "Well no matter what runs aside, your the policeman, this is your task" and the crowd was really getting menacing so I thought he himself recognized the police that ah, maybe this ???got out of his own hand and there was no question about it. So he quickly said, "Well I'm arresting you." and I said, well you know usually I would have given him some question about 'you going to arrest me for an accident I wasn't even driving in' but I said, "Well that's what you are going to do, arrest me (laughs)" and I was just saying let's get out of here quick anyways (Laughing, something about jail fees). So he ah, "No don't kill him let's string him up" you know, so he said, "No we'll take them to jail, " so quickly, you know I think he too had recognized it he said, "okay ah, follow me, " we didn't worry about the cars, we left the car, didn't care about the car (laughs) and he threw us in the police car and left everything like this and took us to jail. But I'm sure he recognized the situation that if we stayed there a few more minutes it was going to get out of hand, no question about it and ah,

L: I'm just going to load this up, one second, you let me know when you are ready. I figure we've got 45 minutes before Quame's got to go.

S: What time is it now?

L: It's a full mag, 10:00, so we've got 10 minutes to film here

S: OK great

L: Just tell me what ah.....continue with what you were doing, I just wanted to be ready

S: Yeh, we're all set

T: So he took us to jail and ah, of course the crowds followed to the jail screaming at him, he's one of the reasons why they got the people out of Fort Deposit as quickly as they did, because they recognized themselves that this one really got out of hand. SO um, that's when they quickly said, "Okay we're taking you to, " I didn't know where they were taking us. They said, "We're taking you out of here" so ah, I didn't care where(laughs), because I realized this one could really get out of hand. So the quickly blew us out, put us in the car and drove us and as soon as we got out of Fort Deposit, you understand, I relaxed completely. Course this was rural area, this was our countryside (laughs), we didn't have the ???but we had the countryside and ah when they took us to Hainsville we had no problem because we had Hainsville already organized, all the people would know we were in jail, where as in Fort Deposit we had no base, no one there. So I knew in Hainsville we had everything we wanted. People were strong enough to come to the jail, speak out to speak, to face the sheriff, you know, make sure that the welfare was probably taking care, you know, bring food and all that. We were well organized in Hainsville so when I recognized on the road that they would probably take us to Hainsville I just relaxed completely and said oh well.

L: You might want to know it's Hainville. We were saying the same thing all along. There's no S in it I don't think.

T: Well you know, when they speak they want to register to vote, so when they say Hainsville (laughs)

L: So they took you in a garbage truck?

T: No

S: No he wasn't there for that, we just went to,

L: Sorry

T: They took the others. We went into the police car.

Chris Wiley and myself, we were arrested after them separately, yes with this accident.

S: So when you were booked who were you in the cells with?

T: We were even separate from the others. AH. number one, they ah, I was the only SNIC organizer along with Chris Wiley and they knew we were the leaders of the movement so they definitely wanted to intimidate us probably more than the others and also keep us away from the others afraid that if we went there, the intimidation they were going to use against the others we would be able to ward off but it made no difference because they were, you know I mean they were strong. It made no difference, they'd already reached the point where they reached the resistance, they couldn't be intimidated any longer. But they didn't know this, they thought that we might help so they isolated the 2 of us.

S: So you had no communication with Daniels or any of the others.?

T: No, no communications with them at all. Ruby Sayles and the others had gone down in the attempt to try and slow down the demonstration but um, obviously were incapable of doing that and once I got there I understood that ah, because once I saw the situation I said, "Well if we had come here during the demonstration we probably would have ended up in the shoot house.

S: You spent a few days in jail...

T: I spent a few days in jail, I don't exactly remember the legal problem but ah, Don Jelnick, who's the lawyer who handled the case, I don't know if you've spoken to him?

S: No

T: Okay, Don Jelnick, he could be tracked down probably through one of the civil rights lawyers organizations. I think he is in California if my memory serves me correctly. He handled the whole case. What they had to do was take me out of jail first for whatever the legal reasons, he can explain it, and then they took out the group. So, as a matter of fact, I was freed first so that I could go into Selma to sign some legal papers in order to work with the release of the others. But since we were arrested on different charges, technically, I don't exactly remember what the technical aspect of the case was, I do remember that I had to sign and then the others got out. So when I was in Selma signing, they got word that they were releasing them. So ah, and Jelnick said, "How can they do that. What are they trying to do?" and immediately I knew it was a trick. I didn't know exactly where this trick would lead but I knew it was some trick. So I left him right there and quickly jumped into the car and headed back as fast as I could go to get back to Hainville. By the time I got withinwithin a good 6 miles of Hainville, I saw Willy Vahn, he was on his feet trying to get to the freedom house. SO I

said, "What's the matter?" and he was just incomprehensible, "They shot him, they killed him, they killed Johnathan, they killed him." "What are you talking about?" "They killed him" I said, "Killed who?"

S: Excuse me

L: Yeh, if we could just back up to that one spot.

S: Where you see Willy Vahn on

L: Not yet BEEP

S: That's a take.

T: So I immediately jumped into the car, breaking the ice and then pulling some trick, I don't know what it is, so I was speeding back, I was speeding. I mean I was doing close to 100, 110 because I knew it was a trick. But I knew the roads and I knew where the police were so what's the problem with being stopped by the police or accidents and ah, I was going really fast when I saw Willy Vahn, probably 6 miles out of Hainsville, and I stopped quickly, you know, and I said, "What's the matter?" and he was just incomprehensible, just totally incomprehensible, "They killed Johnathan, they killed him, they killed him, I saw him I saw him." But ah obviously when the shooting started, people scattered and his only thought was get back quickly to the freedom house. At least he knew there were guns there. But we were away from the freedom house, I couldn't go back but I stopped in the next house and picked up a gun I told them, "Give me a gun." So I took a pistol with me and headed quickly to Hainsville. By the time I got there, everybody was gone. The town was quite but I could see the blood, you know, and since Willy was incomprehensible, I got no idea, but it was clear to me that he said, okay, he said Johnathan was killed, that's what he could tell me. So maybe Johnathan, but what else, who else, I didn't know. There were some whites there you know, but I had my gun and ah, really, I was even hoping that one of them would say something. Of course at this point, I was ready to open bullets, no question about it. But um, as they would have, perhaps they probably saw the look on my face also, so um, nobody said anything. I walked through the entire town, I was the only one there, nobody. Almost daring them to come and shoot but ah, later, even the justice department official had confided in me that ah, they thought I was crazy, you know, and that's probably, it's probably that act that they think was crazy that saved my life because that I would dare to come into town after this shooting, at that point, really, I was really going to shoot a couple myself. So I told him, I said, "Well ah, they would have seen who was crazy if they had come out of the house, we would have had a shoot out right there." And I assure you, as mad as I was, before I die I was going to take a couple with me, that I had already decided, as mad as I was I was clear that was what I had to do. So by the time I got back to the other side of town, I got the story that ah, it seemed, from what I got it seemed that more people had been killed according to the first reports, it was clear that Johnathan was killed, they thought that Richard was also killed, some said Ruby, Joyce, some other people they assumed had been killed. So um, it was difficult but they had already out, the ones were freed

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so all I could do now was head back to Selma where I thought they were taken to the hospitals and when I got back to Selma it was clear now that Johnathna was killed, they thought Richard was also on his way out would be dead and um, no one else had seemed to have been wounded. Of course um, Ruby Sayles was there but I didn't think, at that time, to ask her what happened because she was, all of them were in a complete state of obviously shock so there was no point at that time to try and get from them what happened. The job was just to try and console them and ah, more important to me, what I was thinking about was Lownes County, how in face of this, we must now continue. So um, Bob Manns, who was the other organizer, not being, he was stayed, not being involved there, ah he said, "Well we've got to head back to Lownes County. We have to leave the dead and the wounded and see about the living." which was a statement. So we left them there and immediately headed back to ah Lownes County where our work now were ???and strengthening the forces there for the continuation of the struggle and doing everything possible to make the Fort Deposit just an accident, if you will, rather part of the overall organizing plan and ah strategy. So we went back and after people calmed down and were out of their states of shock etc. etc. they were slowly moving back. There was a problem of course for Johnathan's funeral. Now um, I had not um BEEP BEEP there had been many funerals, especially around Selma at that time and I really had not been going to funerals. I had just put a stop on these funeral, Sammy Young, but ah for some reason, all the people in SNCC felt they had to go to the funeral for Johnathan. In most cases we didn't know where Keene, NH was and we didn't know what his parental background was politically speaking, and we didn't know what they thought and the people from Lownes County really insisted that we go because they didn't want to send this dead body back without it being accompanied so that the people at least whom sent us this live body would know that we the living still cared for him much for the dead and ah, all of these forces, made it impossible for me not to attend the funeral....

S: I know in your book Stokely speaks come to a conclusion that the death of people like Goodman, Chaney and ah, Johnathan, that's sort of a course of a struggle, that that's what happens.

T: It's a course of a struggle, I mean um, BEEP BEEP BEEP I know enough now to ah beat off bullets that missed me and I've seen enough comrades fall so that, I've always known that but always in wars and deaths there are always special circumstances obviously and ah, the special aspect of Johnathan was his insistence of doing good, his courage undaunted and certainly the details of his death showed this courage to the point where, where really, you respected what you respected what you thought, you had to certainly give respect to him. But his ah, his determination to do good matched with his courage and all the other characters he had, you know, humble, good sense of humor, he used to get along was well liked etc. etc. But to me his 2 dominant ones were his determination to do good, that is he had, he

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was determined to do good, he was determined to make his contribution, which you have to admire because while some people come to no good, not all of them are determined to do good, you know they come and they can't do good "Well I tried" and they will go back. But he was determined. No force was going to stop him from living up to his responsibility and undaunted courage. Undaunted courage, these 2 characteristics are the ones that certainly stand out in my mind and what distinguished him from others struggling there.

S: One of the themes that we're developing is the war at home kind of theme. Sort of make a parallel with the other war, but he sort of soldiers who....

T: Yes, these are real soldiers because they go up against, they create an army that's not really an army, that's not really part of the governmental structure or the system, one that's in fact opposed to it. An army where your thinking process is more developed than your shooting process so your abilities here on thought, on an understanding what you're doing so you are a more highly trained soldier obviously and one that's on the battle field 24 hours a day because this isn't like war where you go up front and pull back, you know, there's no place to pull back in Alabama. I mean you can't say you'll pull back from Lowndes County to Selma (laughs) I mean there's, everywhere there is a war front, there is no rear in this fight. I mean if you go to a freedom house and the freedom house gets blown up, how many of them were blown up, so there was no rear line, you were always on the front line and if you are white in this struggle, you were on the front line everywhere, all the time. You cannot hide and make believe you are an Uncle Tom (laughs) you know, the police won't arrest me sometimes if I make believe I'm an Uncle Tom, yes sa, no sa, yes sa, oh I hates them people, yeh they try to stir us up against them, but Johnathan can't ah, so for him there was no retreat, there was front line for him everywhere 24 hours a day, no retreat. And ah, even when with us, there would not be a retreat because he couldn't lose himself among the people as we could so it's a 24 hour job as a soldier, a 24 hour job as a soldier.

S: I was going to ask you about the trial too, did you have any involvement in his trial?

T: I don't remember, no none at all, we knew what the verdict would be, there was no question for us. We precisely understood it. It did however, the death did present the ah, breaking gap of terrorism and the overcoming of it by the community....when Johnathan was killed, the Lowndes County community felt it very strongly. For them he was a, first of all he was a mother's child and ah, so the mothers would have clearly a different reaction (BEEP BEEP BEEP) it could be their son, but a mother's son who had died thousands of miles away from his mother's house and died on their battlefield and what is worse they didn't even know who the mother was or who exactly the son was, just an unknown soldier who had laid down to push up graves, to aid in the pushing up of the flowers of freedom. So they really felt it and again as I said earlier, one of the forces which

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ah driving us to attend the funeral without the shadow of a doubt, so Johnathan's death in , I've seen many die before me, I've seen many shot, I've seen many fall by the wayside, even Sammy Young was killed in the same period and ah, he was an organizer, slept in the same freedom, he was an organizer in Lownes County, slept in the same freedom house, but his death, of course you can't make qualities of death, but ah, his death was not the same as even Johnathan's death again, maybe because Johnathan was white so that him joining the fight was an extra step than someone who was in the fight, so to speak. His determination and his courage you know, determination and courage.

S: We understand that Sammy Young, the book on Sammy Young, was motivated by Daniel's death to reengage himself at the civil rights SNCC activities.

T: I didn't know that, because you know, Young's funeral I didn't attend. I just said okay I know him, I saw him here just a couple, I think he left Lownes Count going directly there again for demonstrations and was killed. So even when I was called and told he was dead I said, okay I know his family, they know me, they'll be so many people at the funeral it really won't be necessary, I will do my work here in Lownes County. But I just couldn't take another funeral, I just couldn't take another one and Sammy Young was so young and full of so much potential. You know, just the week before I was joking and I said, "You know, Young boy, if you stick with organizing, you might surpass me in a couple of weeks." You know, then we used to joke, but he was such a promising future, determined, a struggler, clear thinker, unafraid, courageous, you know able to, I mean he just had everything going for him for an organizer, you know and he had just left and we were joking and when they called me and told me he was shot I said, I'm dead ah I think even formal, okay you bury this one for me, I will have a bottle of wine on this one, this is how I'll celebrate his freedom and I'll be on the filed tomorrow and I'll be getting 10 young warriors to take his place.. So even for Johnathan, if Johnathan had not been white, I probably would have taken the same position, okay, you can't stop and bury them all we have to keep moving.

S: Maybe one last question, if there's anything you want to add or think about in terms of 25 years later (BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP)

T: Well I think that 25 years later the Johnathan comes to ah to reconfirm to us the necessity of living a good life so that ah, you will serve purpose even in death. I feel very strongly about this life and death aspect. I feel that the really distinguishing characteristics of human beings is that they can be as powerful a force in for good in death as they were in life and Johnathan certainly comes to prove this. The other thing about Johnathan is that he is not unusual from any other white person in this country, I mean in the same mold, coming from a place like New Hampshire but ah, seeing and living King's statement, one of King's statements that I like the best is that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice anywhere" and ah for me Johnathan lived this, he was certainly showing justice thousands of

← No picture
from here
until keeps

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miles away from Keene, New Hampshire and recognized that he had a responsibility. If opportunity afforded itself to seize an opportunity and make a contribution, thus he stands out as an example for all people to be able to see that even though you are thousands of miles away from acts of injustices, they are directly related to you and he comes to directly relate himself to it and by his blood, drawing others who have never heard of him into the battle and into being conscious. → So 25 years after his death, people still speak of him, people are still inspired by him and I'm sure that people will continue to be inspired by him, thus he has lived a full life because in death he is still alive. So I think this is what he means for many of us so that he also allows us to know that we to in death will live a full life by following in his path.

S: Well thank you very much, that was wonderful.

L: Out of film? Out of remarks?

S: You need some

T: Well there probably close....

END OF INTERVIEW

No picture
from
Chore to end