

C.L. Owsen 1

J: And he was kind of a shadowy sort of a person. Quiet, he wasn't in the lime light and all.

S: That's what we hear.

J: He was. Had something to do with, I think. There was always a kind of tension, in the movement, between blacks and whites, as to who was going to control what national thing, and ah, more than a few whites were well, were conscious of that (beep beep) and sulked...to act accordingly um, I vaguely remember Johnathan and ah. He was just a polite and ministerian in some way um, and I think that whole...that whole thing about...the black white who was in charge had something to do with, that whole group too over there in Lownes County, was, was so damn extreme. Stokely was running the whole thing for a while over there and, and, Stokely was speaking then, what Malcolm X was to say years later, that's how far flung he was and all that um...preaching separatism and all that. I remember Stokely coming over here. We stayed up all night one night in a place called the chicken shed. We were just getting ready to run the first blacks for public office after the 1965 Loadings Rights Act, and we wanted to get rid of Jim Clark and we felt certain we could do that if we got behind a moderate white person. We also, and Stokely was having a fit about that, he had to run a black person. That's the only thing that get him out of those damn heels of Lownes County, but he came over interfering and going on. Johnathan had to put up with all of that.....Oh, I didn't know you were running.

?: They're not now.

J: (laughing) I was just waiting for ya all to do that, then let you ask some questions, we'll talk.

S: No that's great. One of the things that's kind of to us, is that Stokely at that point, would sort of vouch for Johnathan and bring him into the Lownes County because it's our understanding that, you know, that when he did that, that caused controversy in and of itself. That a white would be brought into Lownes County, which was dangerous, you know, and might cause some problems and ah, for the black people that had to work with him, that he was going to attract a lot of attention. So it's kind of interesting to us that he ever found his way to Lownes County.

J: That Johnathan did?

S: Yeh

J: Well..what I think, it would be in character for Stokely...Carmichael, to encourage (Beep beep beep) Johnathan Daniels to come, as a white person in Lownes County, the shock value and all that, and Stokely was a fast master at that ah. Stokely was quite different from Martin Luther King at many different levels. He would also be absolutely in character for Stokely to be very involved in getting Johnathan to come to Lownes County, but then getting word to Johnathan, one way or another, that this is a black movement run by blacks and, pretty much, the whites who operated in Loenes County, operated some what in Stokely's shadow. The truth of the matter is that the blacks who operated over that, operated in Stokely's ah, character, because he was



forever coming over here to Dallas, 40 miles away telling us how we ought to live. One of the things that bothered, most of what Stokely said though was correct. He was a young man of unquestioned dedication, and he had vision. Johnathan was a quiet, ministerial, dedicated young man. I only vaguely remember him among several other whites. Except for the fact that he was white, I would not have remembered him at all. It was so rare, in Lownes County, at that time, to have whites in there working with the likes of Stokely Carmichael. That alone made him stand out. Other than his dedication, I would not have paid him that much of attention. I don't believe that I ever had a conversation ah, with Johnathan Daniels. I had some conversations with Stokely Carmichael all the time, about bringing whites into Lownes County, for the simple reason that the legal defense and education fund of the NAACP was pretty much quitting the bill for all the civil rights activists in this area. And I represented them. I was on their payroll and they were not looking to provocative acts which would lead, really to no resolution of anything. And Stokely was one always engaging in provocative acts. Sometimes for the sake of being provocative, and parading white people around Lownes County in that era was a provocative act, and then NAACP would be stuck with the litigation calls, bombs and everything else. So we watched closely what was going on over there. That is how Johnathan came to my attention and some discussions with Stokely about whether or not this is the thing to do. Of course these conversations would go nowhere, primarily because of Johnathan's dedication and because Stokely's dedication. They really didn't care who was paying the bills. They, they were in pursuit of an objective. One which meant more than life to them, literally so. So they would argue with me and then they would tell me what New York could do and they meant it. Then they would go about with their program.

S: Um,

L: cut, for my benefit, sorry

J: It's all right.

S: UM, we've got to ask you too, I don't know if you knew a project that Johnathan did with Eugene Pricett, I mentioned his name. They went around, and we were kind of intrigued that a white person would do this. We have a tape of Eugene Prichett and Johnathan Daniels going around the Dallas County talking to people in rural areas that lived in pretty dire circumstances, and they would, the purpose of the interviews would be to see what the problems were and how you might imilieorate those problems to offering social services. And so they would go into a poor person's house and ask, if it was a woman, how many children she had and whether she practiced birth control and it just strikes us as really kind of...

J: I don't remember that.

S: Yeh, what they did, it was a SNICK project. They made up a memorandum of social services available in Dallas County, that was then to be distributed to the people that they interviewed, and I don't know if you have any recall of that



J: Well, the first, the first SNICK worker to come here, was Bernard Laffeyete, who set up shop literally in my office. And he was here for weeks before we could even find a church that would let us have a mass meeting there. The next worker to come here from SNICK was Worth Long who came here the day after the bombing of the children in the church. As a matter of fact the same day I think, of the church in Birmingham, and SNICK was engaged in a whole variety of....causes, but after the march to Montgomery, the SNICK group went off, part of the SNICK group went off on his own, particularly in Lownes County. Stokely, that's when they settled and Lownes County became the black panther party and went off on their own. In Selma, while SNICK was the first to come here, it never really put it all together until Martin came here. Martin brought a kind of respectability to the movement a SNICK could never do. Certain teachers and people like my mother, would come out here for King's speech but they were not interested in Stokely Carmichael, and that sort of thing. And, I think to compensate, SNICK engaged in a whole lot of ground level zero projects, you might say, is going round and making social services available to people and so forth, and it was forever bringing, SNICK was forever bringing in young college people, white, from all around the country to engage in a wide variety of programs. It really wasn't all that unusual to see a white person, part of SNICK and working with SNICK in Selma and Dallas County. But almost, up until the end, it was unusual in Lownes County. I think people need to understand that Lownes county...was a place that was awful, even by Alabama standards. When I first came to practice law here, I knew full well that even though I was situated in Selma, that more than likely the most serious trouble and the first trouble I would have would be in Lownes County and indeed that's where it occurred. In the court house, I almost got killed with the sheriff (beep beep) that would not have occurred in Selma back in 1960, but it would in Lownes County. While the judge, all this occurred in the courtroom, while the judge sat there smiling on the bench. Now this is what Stokely Carmichael and Johnathan Daniels were up against in Lownes County. They perhaps had picked the toughest place in the United States to crack. It was no question about it. These great land barons in Lownes County were not interested in equality for poor white people. Talk about equality for black people were out of the question. You could literally get killed in Lownes County in the early 60's for not saying sir or mam to a white person, or for not yielding the sidewalk. And the sheriff literally called all black folk his niggers. He said that in the courtroom, "This is my nigger, this ain't" that sort of thing, and all of that was sanctioned. While law enforcement, you go into the courthouse in Lownes County and black folk would be standing in the corridor, what few were there, with hats in their hands and speaking softly as if they were in a church or a hospital. Now that's, that's the kind of Lownes County that Johnathan Daniels lost his life in. What Johnathan then was doing in Lownes County, probably wouldn't have gotten him killed in Selma and Dallas which is 30 miles from there,



and, and, and Johnathan Danieals understood that. Stokely Carmichael understood that, but they also knew that Lowndes County was where the action is, if it falls there it's going to fall everywhere. So, I think really, that what they did in Selma, whatever it was, in terms of the overall objectives of the movement and the ultimate success of the movement, pales an insignificance almost when you contrast it to the chances they took and the impact they had in that god forsaken place.

S: I'm going to ask you, what's your understanding of Coleman within that, just that, what kind of a person was he?

J: Lou Coleman?

S: Tom Coleman who shot Johnathan.

J: He was

L: Hang on gentleman please. I've got a quarter of a tank left. We've got 4 minutes of film left. This is great, I mean. Do you want me to load another magazine?

S: No, that's all right

L: Okay.

S: You're getting the central stuff.

L: Okay, let me know when you want me to tape and I'll lighten it up a little bit.

S: Okay

L: I think what we ought to do is a formal process for the last 4 minutes, so I can get it right, I think Mr. Chestnut is used to this kind of thing and we don't have, see most of the people we interview have never been before a camera and get really nervous and we get there with the slate and we yell cut and all that and they loose it. They just don't.

S: Okay, well maybe we'll come back to something for the final. Go ahead and tell me about Coleman.

J: Coleman, Coleman was typical of white southerners ay his time. There were more like Coleman than those unlike him, and they were people who were convinced, in their own heart and mind, that black people were less then human, and should be kept in their place. And this was something on the order of a holy crusade. It was the protection and the preservation of the white south and the white womenhood, and whatever one did in defense of these things, no matter how depraved it was, it was somehow excepted from and not to be graded accordingly. So that Coleman would, would have that view of black people. The only people he would see lower than black people would be some white northerner that came south to join with blacks. So he was a person not only dedicated to upsetting the order in the south, but he also, in Coleman's view, is a trader to his own race and thus less than a dog. And that you could kill him and you would not loose any self respect or any respect in the community. In fact your, your ah, whatever, may rise, your reputation and your standing in the community. Now of course that would be a handful of whites at the top. The big land barons who, in order, I think, to maintain their sanity, would kind of shy away from a Coleman, but they'd shy away from a Coleman anyway, but at the same time they benefited from what the Colemans were out there doing ah, a man like Coleman was



just as used to taking orders from the blue bus, the country club, as were blacks. As a matter of fact he did almost nothing on his own. He either had expressed or complied consent from the real white powers or he wouldn't do it at all. And ah, I don't think that ah, Coleman suffered one minute over this needless killing of this young man ah, and and immediately, the whites in Lowndes County would move to justify on the foolish basis that Johnathan asked for it. That he was an outside agitator among us telling us how to live and all that. But deep down, deep down they knew that that was wrong. That is why I think, to this day, so many people in the south are paranoid, have these secret obsessions, carry around this monstrous feeling of guilt, have all sorts of difficulty in looking black people in the eye, some have difficulty looking at each other in the eye because from generation to generation they have swept under the rug these awful things and hid behind these magnolia trees and Gone With the Wind, foolishness, when everybody knows what the ugly reality is in Alabama. Now we have come a long way, but that's like telling somebody who's dying from AIDS how much progress we have made along the way toward a treatment. That's fine but people continue to die from AIDS, and I think white racism in the south, and now I'm beginning to see all over the country, is somewhat a kin to that fact. So the Colemans, The Tom Colemans were many in that era and they lost nothing, and I doubt if he had a moments remorse over the cowardly, dastardly killing, killing of this young man who was doing nothing but really trying to make America a better place for us all.

S: It would be interesting, we did some research, some footage on Coleman, we found a length, ah, clip. They interviewed Coleman a year after the murder and he says, "I do it again!"

J: Yeh, it wouldn't surprise me at all, it wouldn't surprise me at all ah, that wasn't, that was an old lawyer in Lowndes County, his name was Pardue, I don't remember what his first name was. But he was a classic illustration of the upper class white, who in the dark of night would be issuing orders and egging the Colemans on to all kinds of acts and deeds and so on, but then would go to church on Sunday and disassociate himself and refer to the Colemans as white trash and that sort of thing. Pardue was a typical example and I had many arguments with him. Not many about the law, we had many arguments about that, but we had many arguments about what he thought was the rightful place of black people, and then he was convinced that black people were put on this earth to run errands and to cook and to be maids and that sort of thing for white people. He told me that blacks had never created a civilization and that they never would. That it was not in our genes to do that and I remember telling him, I remember showing him a book one day that indicated that there were kingdoms flourishing in Africa before whites came out of caves in Europe. Well that meant nothing to him. He had the typical southern, white mind set and he didn't let facts get in the way of that. He wasn't interested in facts unless they supported what he had



already concluded. Now he was the prosecutor and a leading white person over there and one that all the Colemans looked up to. But he sent the Colemans out there to burn down churches and to shoot people and to beat black folk and he called the Coleman's white trash and all that, but he hid out with them at night and gave them instructions. Another interesting angle to all that and who was more dangerous and , in my view a bigger fool than Pardue, was John Edgar Hoover. This maniac in Washington. We begged for years for him to send some help down here and come to find out that most of his people were in the clan and most of his people were out there meeting with the Colemans, and Hoover argued to the congress that that's the way he picked up his information. But those of us who had ground level zero know they were doing a hell of a lot more than picking up information. They engaged in several of these acts and they knew that Hoover sympathized to large extent, with some of this violence against which he called, the communist led civil rights movement. In those days, down here you have to remember that most of the FBI people were just goo ol' boys from Alabama who joined the FBI and were stationed here because they automatically had inroads you see. So we were dealing with same white people who were just on the federal payroll now and, and John Edgar Hoover was a very dangerous man. I remember having some conversations with him in Washington and finding him one of the most peculiar individuals I'd ever met, this is true. I was fascinated to learn that the man had never been married and that he had these peculiar hang ups and everything and there was this fella, Delotious somebody, standing there next to him and so solicitous of him you , well it was a bad situation. I said, "My god, that's who's at the top!" It, these were ah...dangerous times, they were crazy times. America has no idea of the debt it owes to young men like Johnathan Daniels.

S: Maybe we better ah

L: I think that would be,

S: Let's go back and set up for that and if you could.

?: Do it now?

L: Yeh

J: Okay

S: Yeh if you could.

L: Yeh we should. Okay give me a second (long pause)

BEEP

L: Okay

J: Unless some films, such as this one and some different kinds of books are written, America will never know the monumental debt it owes to young men like Johnathan Daniels, who at the risk of life, ridicule and everything else, did not send a check down here to Alabama, but they came down here. Johnathan came here and joined hands with black people and sang We Shall Overcome as they went out together to face the almost invincible and crazy power of the state of Alabama and with a kind of subtle backing of the United States government. America needs to remember that when Johnathan Daniels was here, it was not clear where the



United State government position was. We didn't know whether they were with us or against us and more often than not they weren't. But there was Johnathan Daniels in this awesome sea of black faces and poor faces, standing within them, suffering with them, dying with them, and as a result, America is much better than it could possibly hope to be had there never been a Johnathan Daniels.

S: I was going to ask you a few questions about the present um, that we could, no need to film these but,

J: Okay

S: We're kind of interested in it, oh, you talked about changes. How is Selma and Lowndes County now? How would you characterize it?

J: (long pause) In my book I talk about,

S: This is in Black and,

J: Celia, I talk about the longer march.....freedom did not come rushing after we crossed over the Edmund Patters bridge. It did not come rushing upon us when congress passed, in 1965, a voters rights act and we went from, say in Dallas County, 150 black voters to about 10,000 black voters in about two weeks. Freedom didn't come. We were just embarking on a longer march. One that is in progress right now, and one that is infinitely more difficult than going over the Edmund Patters bridge. The only thing we had to fear on the Edmund Patters bridge was physical injury. The only thing you could lose there was your life. We're in a march now where you can lose generations. Most of the counties in this area are 60, 70 sometimes 75, 80% black because this is the section of Alabama where the large slave plantations were, and even now when you go to Mobile or Birmingham, most blacks there have their roots in this area. This is where they come from, and because we outnumber whites, you get what we call, South African Syndrome. White people look out and say, "My god, I can't give an inch", if I do I'll be drowned in this black sea. So resistance is always greater in direct proportion to the threat and the threat's always to find out how many of them are there. And in this area there's too damn many. So since 1965, we have been engaged in trying to turn this sleeping giant, this black majority and to a viable, political and economic entity. We have had far more success politically than we have had economically and it has been a long struggle politically for years and years. We would win at the polling places and then when they counted the absentee ballots we lost, and when we called on the federal government and said they're cheating and the federal government said in effect, well you have to learn how to cheat, says there's nothing we can do about that. Finally we mastered how you go in the nursing homes, how you find out which children are going to college. You get all these folks and get them to fill out absentee ballots. Only when we mastered that, did we then win elections and blacks took office. This was 1972, 75, 10 years since the civil rights, ah, voting rights stats, and the moment we began to win elections, along comes Edwin Meese and Ronald Reagan in 1980 and says the FBI who would not come for us, now comes against us and says that you are



subverting the ballad and they come with 200 indictments, and they've picked the black leaders throughout the black belt and indict all of them. We have all of these expensive trials to deal with. But to some extent we over come and we get blacks into office. But now, how can you run a school board with blacks, some of whom have never gone to school, who have no background to do that but are the respected people in the community for other reasons, they run and get elected on the school board. White people have pulled out of the school system and go to private schools, and they will defeat any way they can, any tax that comes up to fund public education. In addition to, to having to utilize only what's available in the black community because you got the whites who will not lend any assistance to that and the great brain power that is with experience and the white community is virtually withdrawn. So you have that to contend with. If you go over to the black belt today, invariably what you will find, court houses run by black officials surrounded by white officials who own and run everything else, and there's a virtual silent war going on between these two groups and every damn thing come pretty much a stale mate or a stand still, 'cause you got to have both things working to progress. In addition to that, you got the ol' line, white southern politicians that we finally defeated and got out of office. Well he's never giving up. He is now joined with certain pliable blacks and created what he calls a coalition. There is no coalition really 'cause in the true sense, he runs it, and if let that black he might as well put this white, the whites back in it. So in 1990 we are battling with these kinds of problems. We, we have, well Alabama is 47th in education. It's damn near 47th in every category that matters. Whites would tell you that thats because they have to carry this semi-illiterate black population along. Well one of the reasons that the black population is as bad off as it is, is because they have systematically broke both our legs and then criticized us for being cripple, and they refuse to learn what Booker T. Washington said 100 years ago, that there's no way to keep me down in the ditch unless you get down there with me and hold me down. South hadn't learned that yet and, and the south is a peculiar place. I was born almost, December 60 years ago. About 5 blocks from where we sit now, and I remain, to this day, absolutely fascinated by this damn place. The southern white man is really fond of many blacks as individuals that he knows. He's scared to hell of the group. I have gone to black funerals and seen white people there crying. Really, literally. In 1965, when this city was in turmoil, there were black maids and janitors and all that who contended to go cross our marches and go work with these people, and these people have to send some of there children to Alabama State University. All that went on in the midst of the whole, I remember Martin Luther King used to marvel at that, "What is this that I can't get these folk to a mass meeting and the enemy continues to get them in the kitchens, and wash a floor. What is going on?" The south is a peculiar place that my son got, my middle son got into some



trouble with the law and the mayor of this city and all kinds of white people were calling and saying they understood, They were parents and genuinely wanted to help in any way they could, these are the very people to go to any length to keep my race down. But they would do these things for their, the south is peculiar and it hasn't changed a lot. Selma is paranoid of it's image. It falls out with NBC news CBS, every damn body, 'cause nobody portrays them the way they want to be portrayed. I'm forever arguing with them to hell, CBS is not the Dallas County Chamber of Commerce. But they don't want, well let me put it to you this way, if they spent one third the time addressing the problems that they spend hiding these problems and arguing that there's no such problem, we'd be so much better off. But that's one of the peculiarities of the south. It has always lied to itself, and you have to do that. How else can you, how else can you live with an institution like slavery unless you lie to yourself about it. you have to do that. You have to put a face on it that you sleep with and after that 100 years of the worst kind of segregation and just blanket depravation of the whole race. In order to do that you got to be a good rationalizer, you got to be able to hide from reality, and Selma has done that but it's taken enormous toll and I see it in the white psychic all the time in talking to people. There are white people in 1990 that are ill at ease shaking hands with me 'cause I'm black, in 1990! I was talking to the governor of this state, and you all talk about Signew here, you all, Signew is a role scholar compared to Lil' Abner over there, let me tell you about him. We filed a law suit trying to force him to take the confederate flag down.

S: We were talking about that, we filmed it.

J: You did?

S: Yeh ,yeh

J: Well we went over to take his deposition and ah, and I said, "Governor, you know, you could end all of this controversy if one morning people woke up and mysteriously the damn flag just wasn't there. Probably be two weeks before anyone noticed." and he looked. He said, "Well who's goin' to take it down?" that's how stupid he is. I said, "Well that would be the 64 dollar question." He said that all and all, "They would blame me because I'm the governor." I said, "hey wouldn't expect you to be out there 24 hours a day sitting on the lawn watching some damn flag." He said, "Wait a minute", this is the truth, he and his legal advisor and two other of his men, now his men went outside the office and like a football team huddled it, and they went out and discussed that. (laughing) The governor of the damn state really. They were gone about 10 minutes, and huck comes back and says, "Let me tell you one thing" he says, "a hundred years ago, the president of the United States said the end of the war between the states" I said, "You mean the Civil War", "NO I mean the war between the states" he says, " The president of the United States appointed a carpet bagger republican governor of Alabama and said, the first thing that rascal did was he sashayed up that damn



pole and took down that flag (laughs). And he says that when the democratic party came back into power, they put the flag back." And he says, "It's been there now for 80 years." and I said, "None of you blacks said anything about that flag until I, the first republican governor since the president (Laughs) and now you come over here and you want me to go up there and take it down. I'm not going to do any such thing." And I (laughs), this is a conversation with the chief executive of the state of Alabama, ?, and he, I said, "We are not saying that you ought to go up there, and you, send some of these people you got on the payroll. They're not doing anything. And he said that he flatly was not going to bother that flag unless the legislature got him off the hook or got out there on the limb with him, and said that I ought to see his mayor, said the mayor was running 80-20. I said, "That figures, the population is about 20% black." He didn't like that at all and he said, no there was a lot of his good black friends who thought the flag should stay up, and I said, "Name one." and he named somebody that was working for him on this day. He, it turned out, during the depositions, he put before him the Alabama flag, the confederate flag and two other flags and asked him to identify the confederate flag and he couldn't do it. That's right.

S: Couldn't do it.

J: Uh-uh, he couldn't do it. It's in the deposition, didn't even know what it was. He, have you met him?

S: No, (laughs)

J: It's mind boggling to think of Guy Hunk sitting down with college presidents and the president of the Alabama party, he doesn't even know what the hell they were talking about. He really doesn't. He is a, former Anway salesman and a baptist priest, one of these fott, they wash your feet in all the, primitive, he told me he's a primitive baptist. I said, "You got that right" (laughs) The governor of the state, that's what Alabama's all about. Now he could make you, he could make you a speech about how far Alabama has come racially and that Alabama be somebody, people like J.L. Chestnut and all that, and what he is, is a minor league Ronald Reagan. Even now you call Reagan a name and he's just bawling.....The fact that he is the governor of Alabama, even by accident tells you a whole lot about the question you asked. Where are we in 1990? I guess this about sums it up.....In these struggles that I was telling you about, the longer march, in around 1980, 82, I began to see and detect some subtle changes in white Alabama, especially in the black belt. The war cry was no longer never, but it was obviously one of damaged control. Let's give what we have to give but not one ounce more.....It is significant that, that not one change, not one social, racial change has come to Alabama voluntarily. Everything you see, every ounce of progress by black folk, has come either because of direct action in the streets or court decree...a boycott or something else. None of it came voluntarily or out of the goodness of people. That's nothing extraordinary if you look at the history. Power does not concede any damn thing, The



only way you can get anything out of power is you go with more power, and that has been the history here. Slow and painful. Around '82, '83, nobody knew what the new order would be, but it was clear that the old order was just about on its way out. It was also clear, to those that thought about it, that whatever new order took place, would probably be there for another century, and so there were monumental struggles in the field of education, and what the hell do you do in one of the poorest states in America.

Side one ends

J: high school principals, two high school coaches, two high school mathematics, you got two damn school systems here, The new order has to deal with all that. You got....these old customs that prevailed when I was a child, that obviously will not last, but what's going to take the place, You can't send blacks, when they go to the theater now, to the busses, 'cause hell, there's a law against it. Even if there wasn't a law against it, blacks now no longer except that. But what's going to take it's place. Does that mean that blacks are going to sit there and go there socially with whites. Exactly what does it mean. Everybody's trying to define that. We are in the process of doing that now ah, what will be the relationship of white people to black people across a whole range of ah, a spectrum there. The banks in Selma have not produced one black on the board of directors yet. There's a black credit union two blocks, no half a block from where we sit. There's two, three million dollars in the white bank, doesn't make any sense at all. I mean the blacks go around and put it in the black credit union and the black board of the credit union then take it and go down and give it to the white people's bank, who will not put the manager, the black manager of the credit union, on the board of directors, and when you talk to them about that they tell you how many black tellers they have, and that in 1965 they didn't have any. To them that's a monumental leap forward and, once again black folk, white folk are looking at how far we come, black folk are looking at how far we have to go this, perverbial glass of water, whether it's half full or half empty, and you get it all the time. But the struggle goes on every day. It is every bit as intense in 1990 as it was in 1965, but America doesn't realize that. The difference is I don't worry now about them coming down here and blowing up this building, there are some out there that would do that but they are rare, and in the 1960's the Tom Coleman's were every damn where. I don't have to worry about that, the jury does not have to close the court down in the winter, so I can leave the building before dark. We don't have that any more, but this longer march is there, and it's difficult, far more complex. I was making a speech in Wisconsin not to long ago and I was telling them about the billions of dollars black America spends every year. If we weren't a nation, we'd be the 10th largest nation, there gross national product would be the 10th largest on the planet. But a dollar does not stay in a black community long enough to sneeze at it and that's a problem only we can resolve. I also tried to tell them about



our experience in Alabama. You cannot resolve all of our problems politically. Some of them are not even political in nature, and they are saying that we have put all our eggs into one basket. We expect to be delivered politically, and you can't deal with black on black crime, you can't deal with this economic bread basket we in solely for the ballot box. So we got all of these problems in 1990. We are miles behind on the economic front as compared to where we've gone politically, but we got serious problems politically, lo and behold we have found...that once we elect blacks, hell, they get just as bad as whites and they pull some of the same stupid stuff we got. Let me tell you this then I'll let you go, 'cause I,

S: I have one last question for you.

J: Okay, I think this dramatizes it some what. This law firm represents about 5 or 6 school boards which are predominately black, in the black area. One reason we represent them is because we're out there in the streets with them and got them in the position of the polls so they get election. But Alabama came into some offshore oil, you might have read this, states were fussing and going on with the United States government for years about who owned the oil offshore, and the states were wrong. And Alabama got millions, I forget how many millions, but it was a win fall for the school systems. They had some formula where they allocated this much for the school system and so forth. This little black school system cam into, I think about 2 million dollars, and we were in this meeting and I asked this little black fella on the school board, who I think probably did not go to the sixth grade himself, but he worked hard for the little mom and pop store in the community and he had become one of the most respected people down there, and because he was thrifty and put his money in the bank and all that, the white banker was pretty close to him and all that, and the white banker was very interested in the 2 million dollars to get him in his bank. So he gives to this fella, and we sitting in the school board meeting and the whole business comes up of what we going to do with 2 million dollars, and this fella jumps up, the little black fella on the board, and suggested we put 2 million dollars in a CD in his friends bank. I said, "You crazy, they'd put us under the jail if we did that" and he pretend Mr. so and so such a fine man, hell we not talking about whether, he's not worth a damn anyway, but even if he was a fine man. We are going to have some people, some institutions bid on this money, and he said, "You bid on things, you don't bid on," this is what he knows, and we went throught the process and some banks in Mississippi got the money, and we got to greatest return on it. He learned something, but the fact is there he is on this board, and that's how limited he is in what he understands, which I think dramatized the problems we got in the 1990s.

S: I was going to ask you, we've spoken somewhat , we don't understand it so we would like to get an answer to you, we'd heard repeatedly, if you'd react to this, that what went on in '65 was right, that people were being deprived of the



vote in 1965 and now we recognize that. We supported it or we support it now, whatever the case may be. But now they see what's going on, if I could paraphrase- you guys help me out- that this new movement, as they see it, they call it a power grab and they use words like it's political, it's a power grab and it's something that's going to, something that's going to result in the separation of blacks and whites.

L: We've heard that from so called liberal, you know, they are saying that the blacks in the community are going too far and they are being unreasonable.

J: Well let me say this to you: This city is about 53% black....the city council...whites have a one vote majority. That is duplicated systematically on every municipal board in this city, including the school board, which means that at this point, there is nothing that the white majority can do that the, there is nothing the black majority can do that the white minority opposes.....The struggle remains, to an extent, over the vote.....When, when other folk controlled the economy, jobs and everything else, and when my generation is still there with all of the baggage I carry, reaching back to the depression, I yet don't want, when I'm talking ah, figuratively, I yet don't want to disturb white people, and if somehow it is going to antagonize a white person, I would just ? with voting. I would rather not do that. We have an awful time turning blacks out to go to the poles because...whites control everything else just as effectively as they did in 1965. The struggle has changed in form but not in substance. It's still an argument about freedom, about dignity, about access. You, there is no way to equate the black situation in the south with the white situation. You can't take a person and put him in slavery for 3 or 4 hundred years and then tack on another 100 years of the worst kind of discrimination and then wake up abruptly one morning, now I'm going to pass a public accommodations law so you can go buy hamburgers and stay in a Holiday Inn, and then next year pass a voting rights bill. so now everything's equal, the playing fields equal, so now you go out there and make it. That's what has happened in America and once again white southerners are fooling themselves because they don't want to face the reality of the situation. We are arguing now about tracking in the school system because we have a predominantly white school board, the blacks, they walked off in December and they haven't been back yet, and they were up there giving all of the attention, all of the money and everything else to the children at the top. A handful of children at the expense of those at the bottom. So once again a whole race is being cheated out of his heritage, and blacks are tired of that. That's what the struggle is about here. Whites continue to elect Joe Schmithim. Why do they do that? Because he has convinced them that he and he alone can control the niggers and up until this year, that's been pretty much true. Well his ass is in deep trouble now because he clearly can't do it. What the whites in 1965 said, the same, some of the same whites said the struggle wasn't over the voting. The blacks



J. L. (M) 19

could vote if they wanted to vote and were qualified. Now 30 damn years later we hear a variety on the same theme song, rather than get with it and face the truth and we try to work together and make this place prosperous, but they are not going to do that because deep down....in the average whit southerner is this great ugly reservoir of racism which he can't get over. It's in his soul. I grew up hearing that the average black man went around all day long with his tongue hanging out trying to find some white woman to seduce, and I kept looking for that. What I saw was, white men coming in to the black community with immunity and impunity doing all kinds of things to black women. And as a boy growing up in this town, I kept trying to reconcile what I was hearing with what I was seeing and I never could do that. I finally came to some conclusions about the white south. I also noticed that where I lived in the south, there were no lights, street lights. It was just pitch dark, and I, there was not one paved street or sidewalk. Yet when my father sent to go to the bank on my bike, I knew instantly when I moved from the black community to the white community, the pavement began, the houses were pretty, the lawns were there and I kept trying to reconcile that. The white folks tell me, they said the reason that white people are thrifty and hard working and black folk are lazy, you walk rather than tap dance. And I knew a black man, working 14 and 15 hours a day and making 6 dollars a week and all that. Once again I was confronted with a myth and the reality, and Selma is full of that, in 1990, because they don't want to face the truth. Everybody is equal now. How in the hell, that is a ridiculous statement, but they say it all the time. They call me....and said, "What do you all want?" and I said, "Who the hell is you all?" and they said, " You know the blacks" I said, "They want the same damn thing you want. What do you want?" and ah he said, "I just want to be left alone and take care of my family" and I said, "Hell that's all I want. and I wish you would get your hand out of my hip pocket and god damn foot off my neck." And then I become a radical or something over there, but I don't pay them any damn attention. Joe Smithum is a personable fella, easy to like, but he's long since outlived his usefulness in this town. Every day he stays down there, the strangle hold on Selma gets tighter. His era has passed. Joe is a year older than I am. When I come back all this too, for this book, hell I'm going to shift gears and start doing something 'cause I've been here 30 years, it's time to let go. It's past time for me to make a career out of racism. Now that's what it's all about down there, and whites can easily see what they consider to be our excesses and all that. But they have all kind of problems see, and he called, you'd be surprised about some of the conversations we've had over the damn telephone and all that, really. The things he would just admit behind the scenes and all that. The newspaper says that he feeds me and I feed off him, that's, I don't know whether that's true or not, but I do know this, he didn't make Selma and neither did I, and the way you get ahead here, hell, he didn't create that. Hell he



had to use it for his ends, I've had to use it for mine. He wants that white people would have to give up as little power to black people as they can and give up as much power to him, as he can manage. I would white people to give up as much power to black people as white people have and give none to Joe Smith. So we have been antagonists all of these years. There have been times that we have been together like a bondage, when I knew damn well that he wasn't going to get enough white votes to pass a barn issue 'cause he's talking about paving some streets out here, and I have takin' him around to black churches to help promote the barn issue but I very careful to say to blacks that we are here for this barn issue, I am not with him on anything else. That's the way I see politics, as a means to an end, but....one thing about him that's refreshing, he is honest to a point. He claims, he admits that he was a racist, but he claims that is not one now, but he is, and ah, there is no way not to, it is very difficult to grow up in the south and not be racist. The whole culture is, it gives messages all day long from a variety of ways, saying that this is the way we do things and there is a price to pay when you buck it ahhhh, they are very, they being whites, they are very upset now in a different way than they were in the 1960's. In the 1960's they could blame Johnathan, he's from New Hampshire, but who's kicking their ass now is from Selma (everybody laughs) and that's really disturbing. The fella said, "These are our niggers" and I said, "You're damn right." That's his problem.

L: Have you ever run for political office?

J: Three times. I ran when the numbers were not bad, I'll tell you why I ran, that's all in that book. The blacks were losing interest. We couldn't elect anybody, the numbers were not there and then they had the absentee ballot and all the people, the clerks that were counting the thing were white and all that and blacks had just about given up interest in it. It seemed to me the only people who were benefiting from the new black vote was George Wallace and some other folk who went out claiming to be martyrs. So I got out there and ran to drum up some interest and they had a lot of fun, said hell we came close to winning. The numbers were there. Some whites voted for me ah, we talked about some things that Alabama finally got around to doing. They are now talking about the regressive tax system, hell I talked about that....oh...15 years ago. I talked about these paper companies owning all this damn land, paying no taxes and ah, defeating the school tax and come around and gives the school system 100,000 dollars and wanted to be put on a pedestal for that. What the hell you do with 100,000 dollars? It would be a drop in the bucket if you taxed them. So we ran on all those kind of things. We did pretty well. That was the basis on which my partner, Hank Sanders, later ran when the numbers were there and we were instrumental on drawing the district so he could win, and he went out. By that time I was too old, I was only black guy out there ???, but ah, I enjoyed running for office. I had this group, the Gospelairs, and they'd, we'd go to these rural churches you



know and they'd, and I sit out in the car wouldn't even go in and you'd have some local preacher there and he'd be praying for 30 minutes and he want the lord to bless the sun, the stars, the trees and every damn thing, and then the Gospelaurs would really set him on fire, and ah, when I thought it was way up at the top of the emotional peak, then I would come in from the side and go through almost a night club routine, playing with women. I found that to be effective. We're always getting old women you know, not somebody and see how pretty she is and how I moved to this county and all that. It always brings folk closer to you, otherwise you have some kind of barrier. They confuse you with the image they see on television or what they are reading in the newspaper. But when you get down there with them, they immediately identify. It opens up things, The next technique I would use is, I used to use, is take the most feared and the most hated white man, they are usually the richest, in that county. Then attack him by name, I mean just flatly attack him. At first blacks would be stunned and then motivated by it. They knew that the man would know that within a matter of minutes. They knew I knew that, therefore my saying it meant I didn't give a damn, and that meant that they could really trust me and all, and that would really change the meaning and all that. We had a lot of fun. We did a lot of good. I really think it helped to maintain the black interest in that thing....oh,

L: How long have you been a lawyer?

J: 30 years and I'm tired.

L: Did you go to school in Alabama?

J: No in Washington, that's right. When I came back here to practice law in 1958, not one black person in the whole state ever served on a jury. Not one. No woman had served, but that's a different story. There were only 150 black voters in this county, 150. There were no black policeman, no black deputy sheriffs, no blacks worked in the court house, the city hall, except janitors and delivery people. You could literally lose your life for being socially not curious to a person. That's how bad it was. I remember the probate judge calling me in about a week after I came here, and set up shop, and he had all of the women working in his office out front and he got out in front of them and he told, he said that he wanted me to know right off the bat, that he would not tolerate me coming in and being disrespectful of any of the women in his office and he felt it important that I understand that at the outset and he said, "Do you understand what I am saying to you?" and I said, "Yes I do. What I don't understand is why the hell you saying it. That I have never been disrespectful to a woman in my life and unlike you I respect black women," and he said, "Get the hell out of here before," It was many years later that he was begging me to go out there and line up black votes for him. That's how things change. That's right. I can remember standing at the foot of the Edmund Patterson bridge on Bloody Sunday and deciding that the walls of segregation in the south would never fall. They're too damn strong, it's invincible. They'd march and keep running



talking about public, the court of public opinion and all that, what the hell. And the cameras out there rolling while Jim Clark is beating women and children. I don't see any damn changes. I woke up the next day and Johnathan Daniels types are coming from all over the country. I would never believe that would happen. George Wallace had told us, all of Alabama, that there was only so far you all would go 'cause you were white. There was only so far that you all would go on behalf of me in opposition to other whites, 'cause in the end we were white folks, and what he said, I believed, and lo and behold I looked up and there were the Johnathan Daniels and all that and I had to reassess what America's all about. As I mentioned to you, there's one damn thing for Davis, I told Davis Suskine this one night, ain't one damn thing, they sitting there on Fifth Ave. and send a check down here and say "Brother, I'm with you." It's another damn thing to be Johnathan Daniels ah, and I understand the difference between the two ah.....I.....I have seen a whole lot, and I really think that I understand the white south far better than many understand me. It didn't have to understand me but god damn it I had to understand it to survive. I, I know Joe Smithim and George Wallace, Guy Hunt, well I know them and I can anticipate where they going and what their game plan is 'cause I have lived among them. Now I don't pay Joe Smithim or any of them any attention when they put out their Chamber of Commerce crap about it was all right in the 60's but it's different now, and that we are fair and all that. They are as racist now as they were then. The name of the game is white control. They really believe, and Joe Smithim and I had this argument one day, that if whites don't control city hall that the city would die on the vine, hell it's dying on the damn vine. How can you see that sitting right up on the Burmingham in Atlanta and what does he think that Andy Young and Maynard Jackson, what, how can he compare with them and all that. But the white southerner, as I keep telling you, is very skillful at dodging and ignoring or not seeing reality. They can really do that. Nobody sees a white south the way white southerners do. That's right, I bet all these years, I can't see it (laughing)

:  
L: We thought it was just us.  
J: No, no  
?: We've been talking about this for two days.  
J: No, it's amazing.  
S: We're are seeing different things.  
?: Their live ? , it's almost as if their sitting there lying to themselves and they internally believe it. This woman that we talked to today thought she was so liberal and so caring of blacks in the community, and then she came out and said that now they are just going for a power grab, and that it was just a pure power grab and had nothing to do with race.  
J: That's right, that's right. Now that's a mind set that you can't do anything about. It's just there. I stopped even arguing with them. Now they're scared to death, they know



I'm going on this 3 week tour with this book and they know that I'm going to tell ass from coast to coast, that's worse.

S: I heard that, one person said: there's no telling what he's going to say when he gets out there. (Everybody laughing)

J: They know it, see I write a column every Sunday.

L: We heard about you're column.

J: Yeh (laughing)

?: One of these liberals.

J: Well they wake up every Sunday morning, old man sits there and he can't eat his breakfast. I said, "Good you son of a bitch. I know a whole lot of people who don't even have breakfast to eat because," and he's so rich he's got money running all out of his pocket, but what I, around Thursday each week I start thinking of just what can I say to fuck 'em up. (Laughing) and I usually succeed. What it really was I try to do is just jar them into some kind of reality. And the suggest to them that there is at least two sides to these questions in Selma.

?: What I want to know is is there a white who thinks that way?

J: One or two,

?: In this community.

J: One or two but you see...as Martin used to say: Whites are more in prison in ways than blacks are.

S: That's right.

J: For a white to bug the party line, he's going to risk everything and he's got a lot to lose, blacks don't have all that. They'll put him out of business, Joe and them denied this, but I've seen it, they'll put him out of business no time flat. Let me tell you something that's strange about Joe:.....He.....before he was the mayor of this city, they just passed it around. From the president of the little banks, I mean the president at this bank would be it a while and, well that class, the country club class and they were all ready members of the country club. When Joe defeated the blue blood established. There's a major change in Selma and they gave Joe an honorary membership, honorary, in the country club, I mean one way to hold on to him. After all he now patrols the damn city and he was anxious to go out to the country club. Now he told me this 500 times if he told me once because the closest he'd ever got out there to the country club was like me, out there caddyng. I doubt if he'd ever seen the inside. He's anxious to go out there. I don't think he'd been sworn in 2 hours (everybody laughs), so he shows up out there, and they didn't waste any time to let him know that he was only there as an honorary member because of that office. That you are never one of us and you never will be, you can't be, and he never been back. Well the man of his pride and all that, that hurt him. He carries that around with him now, and every chance he gets to slap at them, he will. But he had to deal with the same reality Maynard Jackson told me about, Maynard said that the first time he got elected mayor, he was shot and found out how little power was in his office and how much is down in the



damn board and coca-cola and all that. So he had to go down there and make a deal and ah, he said, "I'll bring you peace and prosperity. I'll bring you demonstrations, you bring me some damn job" Well joe got in there and he came to run Selma, these people they own Selma. So he has to bow to them at every chance he get and you have to watch it closely, but I thought when I see. He slaps them every, when he can do that. He, he's a peculiar fellow, this same credit union down here, the same board of men meet every Thursday and they sit around and drink. He doesn't do it now 'cause he's gotten older, when he was younger he used to show up down there every Thursday night and get as high as a kite around there with these black men, he enjoyed himself, and what was even more amazing is he'd tell Edmund Morse, who's the manager of the credit, who's a councilman now. He would tell Edmund, says ah, "If my wife calls tell her I just left," and that's an extraordinary thing for a southern white man. He does not discuss white women with black men, but Joe did. One of the blacks that he has working down there, running the mill, who's head of urban development or some crap, is married to a white woman. Took the white woman away from her husband and Joe's a man, Joe's niece was carrying on an outrageous affair with another black appointed. Stalins who heads the sanitation department, and a whole delegation of whites went down there to tell Joe there the whole thing, he'd put him out the office. He is a peculiar white man. I think that's all tied up in the fact that they have slighted him. In some kind of way he's getting back at them about that. Well I watched it for years, he's a peculiar, peculiar fella.

S: This was a tragedy, wasn't it I had guessed from my study in history that, I think in the north too, that race could be and was used to separate members of the same class. If your identity was class rather than race the whole history would have been different.

J: That's right. I agree with that. It's absolutely true.

L: I have a question, Mr. Chestnut could we talk to Emilia Bointon do you think?

J: Oh yeh, she, she

L: Do we have a meeting with her set up?

S: No I have to call her.

J: Watch, you have to be on guard. Now her son's here who's a county attorney. Bruce Bointon ah, what you got to be immediating now is so bitter, that she's gone off on the.....she's all around the damn world speaking on behalf of them damn nuts. You have to ah

L: She's a facist

J: Every damn thing, but we were down here campaigning for Jesse and hell, she was down there trying to create a ticket with Jesse and, she's way out,

S: Oh my goodness.

J: Well she has suffered so much she's just bitter now.

L: Well maybe we should just pass on her.

J: I don't think you're going to get too much from her 'cause she's so far out now. Some of the things Emilia says are ridiculous.



L: Anybody else sir you could recommend?

S: We're going to speak to Ms. Forester.

J: Yeh you got to speak to Marie. Marie is old, so she's been there from the beginning. You ought to ask Marie about her citizenship class, that's a remarkable story and it may tie in to Johnathan. She, just for years and years, on her own, went around getting these black, running a citizen class teaching blacks how to go down there and pass this thing, and when it was almost no chance that they would do that, the stamina, the dedication of the woman is mind boggling, and here she is 40 years later still out there. Now she is a registrar and they can't tell her a damn thing, and she was in the mayors office down there when my pardon was, and turned his office out and they arrested everybody but her and she got in the mayors chair and wouldn't leave, and he said, "Ms. Forester, I'm not going to put you in jail," he said, "You can do anything you want, I'm not going to put anybody your age in jail" and she's still out there battling. She's an amazing woman.

S: I can remember two young black women came in to register and she was all happy.

J: Yeh, yeh, that's her life. That is her life. Martin Luther King used to say, "Where's Marie?" Now that was a remarkable fella ah, you know I never understood what all the damn noise was about got to write a book about him I mean that was no damn secret. It's been out there for years and years. Everybody knew that, you know, all these damn leaders jumping up and down. Martin Luther King was ah....was...human to a fault. I remember we went to a little church one night in Marion, about 30 miles from here, and the police chief came around there to tell us that he had received a message that there was a bomb in the church and it was set to go off any minute. We didn't know what to do 'cause you couldn't trust a police chief. We didn't know if it was a plot to get Martin out of the church so they could take a shot at him, or whether or not there was a genuine threat from a bomb and we were there trying to decide, there were about 10 of us, and we had to decide in a matter of minutes. Martin was so scared he turned white. I mean the world don't know that about him and ah, we finally decided to go out and ah, take him out of site, I tell you he was almost limp. He had conquered fear better than anybody I'd ever known but I've seen him in instances when he hadn't conquered fear and I, I have never known him to try and conquer his desire for women, I mean hell, he was very human. Martin loved to eat and all that soul food, all the greens, he loved that damn shit and ah, ah, and he made no bones in certain, and he was, he was an attractive man and a man of power when few black men had any damn power and women were attracted to that. My wife, she just like to touch him and all that and he would have been almost super human, women were running, literally running behind him and I thought that it is misleading to history and almost gets into this.....kind of fanaticism of the white south when you just run from the truth and try to distort it. I never joined into that. I don't think Martin would have. Now



Martin Luther King was not disrespectful of Mrs. King. He wasn't running behind some woman and all that but, in the privacy of his hotel and all that he had women here that he drank, there's no damn question about it and I don't want to be putting lies, I said that on a television program, way before I read his book,

S: Yeh

J: Yeh and ah

S: I remember the shock I had when I read David Garols biography. That's the first time I knew that the FBI had sent him a letter saying, "We know this and we recommend that you commit suicide"

J: That's right

S: I mean that's a real mind blower.

J: That's right, ah, ah, that was common knowledge ah, this crazy for daddy fool is going around, you know, putting recorders in mattresses in the Holiday Inn and they sit in one room with a stethoscope, I'm telling (laughs) and they send all this to who? Now...Bobby Kennedy himself with the attorney general of the United States and Bobby Kennedy told me that they used to send them down, tape some things up there and Hoover would be in his office for hours, alone, listening to the damn tapes (everybody laughing) and Bobby said, "Get this job," 'cause he told me,

S: I know that's what I think.

J: Bobby told me that he was a peculiar man, and Bobby Kennedy also told me, he said the Deloche was his girlfriend. I tell you something else he told me,

S: Who was his girlfriend?

J: This fella his name is Deloche, but he was a second in command there. Somebody else told me...I think it was Bobby Kennedy that told me...but Linden Johnson who was as big a snake as Hoover in his own way, that Linden Johnson taped the taper, that's right, this is the truth, so they tell me that Linden Johnson put a tape in Hoover's home in his mattress and caught Hoover and Deloche (everybody laughing) and, what, he was trying to get Hoover to do something.

S: Maybe resign.

J: I think it was and,

?: I think he wrote him a letter telling him he should resign.

L: It was that.

J: Yeh, and he had to take, had to take, they managed some awful things but he went on. But I told you I saw Hoover, did you ever see him?

S: No, not in person.

J: You could look at him and tell that he was not...well he just wasn't quite right ah, he was peculiar and....big neck like a football player, shaped like a damn bullet and boy, his eyes were so cold and he sit there....we went there to dedication to try and report to him about what was happening down here to keep him from missing the point, and he was so angry at us but he couldn't afford to say anything. You could just see the steel in his eyes, he was so glad we left, I was glad to leave there. But I knew that John Edgar Hoover was not an ordinary individual, some were dreadfully



wrong there with that damn man. All these years and nobody's ever seen him associate with a woman, never (laughs)

S: Well we have taken a lot of time and it's been very

J: Well I'm glad to do it. Gets my mind on some of this stuff with Johnathan.

L: Do you have any advice to us on our project as we move along here.....

J: Ah

End of interview.

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J: This tells his name is Lincoln, but he was a second in  
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one room with a stenographer, I'm telling (laughs) and they  
and all this to what was... Bobby Kennedy himself with the  
attorney general of the United States and Bobby Kennedy told  
we that they used to read them down, huge some things up  
there and Hoover would be in his office for hours, alone.  
listening to the damn tapes (everybody laughing) and Bobby  
said, "Get this job," cause he told me.  
J: I know that's what I think.  
J: Bobby told me that he was a peculiar man, and Bobby  
Reddy told me, he said the Belcher was his  
J: Bobby told me that he was a peculiar man, and Bobby  
J: I know that's what I think.  
said, "Get this job," cause he told me.  
listening to the damn tapes (everybody laughing) and Bobby  
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one room with a stenographer, I'm telling (laughs) and they  
television in the hallway in the hallway and they are in  
every day for daddy look is going around, you know, guessing  
J: That's right, ah, that was common knowledge at this  
J: I mean that's a real mind blower.  
J: That's right.  
that you could realize.  
J: That's right.  
J: I mean that's a real mind blower.  
J: That's right.