Vivian, SR 4001

Blackside, Inc.
Eyes on the Prize
"C.T. Vivian Interview"
486 Shawmut Avenue
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CAMERA CREW MEMBER: Okay, this is C.T. Vivian, it’s sound roll 4001, camera 387. [Miscellaneous]

INTERVIEWER: I’M GOING TO START- WE’RE GOING TO START OFF WITH NASHVILLE, AND MOST OF IT WILL BE ON NASHVILLE, O.K.?

C.T. Vivian: O.K.

[Miscellaneous]

INTERVIEWER: WE'RE GOING TO START THE SHOW WITH NASHVILLE, AS A TOWN, AS A PLACE TO LIVE IN ‘59 AND ‘60, THAT WHOLE PERIOD. SO JUST A NOTE, IN A FEW SENTENCES, HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE NASHVILLE, UH, IN TERMS OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY - WHAT WAS IT LIKE AS A PLACE TO LIVE?

Vivian: Nashville was one of the better places to live in the South. One of the reasons for that is because of its colleges--both black and white--uh, and because the image that it tried to portray, uh, it saw itself as the “Athens of the south,” and uh, had uh, a three-quarter replica of the Parthenon. Uh, it was uh, one of the more cultured centers of the south. Uh, it had uh, three black colleges, two of them colleges and uh, one of them a medi- a medical school. Uh, it had uh, uh, quite famous colleges such as Vanderbilt and Peabody uh, so that, and a number of other colleges. It was also a center of religious publications for both black and white. There were three major black publishing houses in that city. Uh. . .

INTERVIEWER: LET ME ASK YOU A QUESTION IN TERMS OF- YOU SAY NASHVILLE WAS A GOOD PLACE TO LIVE, ESPECIALLY IN THE SOUTH. . .

Vivian: A better place.

INTERVIEWER: WHY WAS IT SORT OF A PROGRESSTVE TOWN COMPARED TO OTHER SOUTHERN CITIES, IN TERMS OF RACE RELATIONS? NOW, WHY DID IT HAVE THAT IMAGE?

Vivian: It’s, it's because uh, the- see, that's because, see, given. . .

INTERVIEWER: O.K., START WITH “NASHVILLE.”

Vivian: 0.K., see given what T was saying about its religious centers, um, of publications now, right? You have to understand that because there you have a better chance of getting your religious intellectual. You had divinity schools there, all right? Black and white, all right? You begin to think about those who try to purify their religion and give it a, a greater realness. Uh, then, uh, uh, the Parthenon. . .

INTERVIEWER: BUT WHY DON'T YOU START AGAIN WITH “NASHVILLE” JUST AS A, A, JUST SO T CAN GET THE SENSE THAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT NASHVILLE, JUST SAY. . .

Vivian: Oh, I see what you mean. You want me to just start over again?

INTERVIEWER: YES, JUST START AGAIN, JUST, BUT IN BRIEFLY, JUST LIKE. . . [Overlap]

Vivian: Well, I thought your question was, it was going to give that, but you just give me the question and I'll just start over, it's very simple.

INTERVIEWER: SO, WHAT WAS NASHVILLE'S IMAGE AS A PLACE TO LIVE AMONG BLACKS?

Vivian: Black, it was one of the better places to live. . .[Overlap]. . . Nashville was one of the better places to live. . .[Overlap]. . .Yes, that's what you want, I, I'm sorry, uh, ask the question again. We'll start again.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., JUST IN TERMS OF, UH, COMPARED TO THE REST OF THE SOUTH ESPECIALLY, HOW WAS- WHAT WAS NASHVILLE'S IMAGE AMONG BLACKS?

Vivian: Nashville as, uh, during that entire period, was one of the better places for blacks to live in the south. Uh, you uh, it had uh, a number of, of schools of higher education- had uh, two black colleges and a black medical school, Meharry Medical School, which was uh, uh, and it had uh, a number of white colleges, uh, Vanderbilt uh, Peabody uh, and a number of other smaller colleges. Another thing that Nashville had that made it stand out is that you had publishing houses in Nashville, three major black ones, and most of the major white ones. There were, I think, eleven, uh, to thirteen different religious publishing houses in that city. Uh, what you're saying at that point is that you have religious intellectuals--not just your southern religionist uh, who was really uh, a racist, though he totes hiss Bible, right? Uh, you're thinking about people who try to purify their religion and think about it. You're thinking about educators that are not simply concerned about the normal segregationist and racist policies of education through the south, but are more inclined, more inclined, not necessarily purist, but more inclined to want to see the full development of education of everyone, right? Now with these tendencies within Nashville community made it a better place to live. Now let's look at another part of that too. It's because the very image that the city tried to give to tourists, and to itself, was that it was the "Athens of the south." There's a three-quarter uh, uh, replica of the Parthenon, right? They tried to set a tone uh, far different than most cities. It tried to set a tone of, of cultivation and, and of being civilized human beings. The rest of the south didn't necessarily do so.

[Miscellaneous]

INTERVIEWER: O.K., SO NASHVILLE LIKE, LIKE WHERE COULD THE AVERAGE BLACK HOUSEWIFE NOT GO, WHAT WAS NASHVILLE--STARTING WITH THE WORD "NASHVILLE."

Vivian: Though Nashville had an image, and though Nashville was better than most places, in some respects, in terms of average lifestyle, it wasn't that much better [than?] the rest of the South. For instance, uh, going downtown, my wife uh, couldn't uh, go to a bathroom downtown. That limited how long you had to be downtown, right? Seek out a place, uh, try to go into some black area off the edge of town as quickly as you could. You could not eat downtown, right? Your children would be with you and the child would be hungry, uh, you uh, you couldn't stop to, you know, you couldn't take your child in and have a hamburger or share something with the child. Uh, and you would have to drag your child along while the child was uh, asking, you know, to eat, or, "Why can't I eat?" or--and the child sees other people in there eating. Uh, uh, working uh, you couldn't be a clerk in a store, you had to be a janitor uh, you had to have a

lesser position. There was no, there was no role for a black in the downtown area except as consumer and even then, you had to wait for others, whites, to be served first in most cases. Uh, and that was considered the norm, uh, and in fact it was, it seemed as though many people thought that, it was a privilege to allow you to be downtown uh, in that sense, Those were the kinds of daily, everyday problems, that created the atmosphere under which most lives were lived.

INTERVIEWER: GREAT. O.K., AND ONE MORE QUESTION ON THAT UH, JIM CROW, A LOT OF PEOPLE WHO ARE LOOKING AT THTS HAVE NO IDEA WHAT IT IS, CAN YOU JUST BRIEFLY UH, HOW WOULD, HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE JIM CROW PRACTICES?

Vivian: Well, you see uh, uh, Jim Crow was segregation itself, and uh, it meant that two signs were up, it uh, meant that you uh, that you had to drink at a colored fountain, and colored water, as often was said. Uh, there were white fountains. It also delineated white life in another way. Uh, Jim Crow meant that everything was truly separated and that uh, uh, given that separation uh, blacks found themselves always in a negative role--seeing themselves as negative being treated as negative, until they saw themselves negative. The victim, uh, began to even blame themselves for being a victim.

INTERVIEWR: THANKS. [Cut]

Vivian: That is not what you wanted but uh, it's. . .

INTERVIEWER: OH YES, ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION, I WANT YOU TO SAY, I KNOW UH, I WANT YOU TO SAY OUT THE WORD [SIC] “SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE,” SO I. . .

Vivian: Well, in that case, I'll say, “Nashville Christian Leadership Council.”

INTERVIEWER: O.K.

Vivian: You, you see what I mean? First it was the Nashville Christian Leadership, which was a branch of. . .

INTERVIEWER: THE QUESTION WAS, THE QUESTION IS THOUGH, MORE LIKE: “WHERE, IN THE YEARS, SORT OF ‘56 TO ‘60, AFTER THE. . .[Overlap]. . .UP TO ‘60, WHERE WAS UH, THE SOUTHERN CHRISTIANSHIP CONFERENCE IN TERMS OF WHAT, WHAT WERE, WHAT WAS THE STRATEGY THROUGHOUT THE SOUTH IN THAT PERIOD? I WANT A LTTTLE, YOU KNOW, SENSE OF. . .

Vivian: Oh, good, I’ll give it to you. I'll give you, see, because this really has two parts, it's one that was a strategy that was not- not officially and rigidly formed. . .

INTERVIEWER: I'M SORRY, COULD WE START AGAIN, JUST USTNG SOUTHERN CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP, THE WORDS. . .

Vivian: Good, well, see I, I was, I was ready to start--continue then?—all right, O.K., all right, O.K. . .[Overlap]. . .Uh, I suppose that uh, uh, SCLC uh, had two strategies, uh, one uh, before uh, the formal one, uh, the one to get the movement message out, to get the ideas out, to encourage others to, to participate. See, following Montgomery, you had Tallahassee. Now you had that before you had a formal SCLC, but it was an outgrowth of, of Montgomery and the people of Montgomery and the Montgomery Movement and the great leadership of Martin, right? Now uh, once in Tallahassee, Florida- once C.K. Steel started in

Tallahassee, Florida, right then, immediately uh, uh, C.K. told me one time, within the next six or eight weeks, eight to ten towns had begun some form of demonstration. Now, the second phase. . .

INTERVIEWER: [Inaudible] IM SORRY. . .

Vivian: Oh, and I don’t know those towns, and I wished I did. In fact, uh, uh, um, now--the next phase, the second phase of that was when Martin decided to formalize SCLC. He brought together lea- the leadership of various movements across the south in Nashville, uh, uh, Kelly Miller Smith represented us uh, who was our president and uh, was uh, uh, the pastor of First Baptist Church, and the natural leader in our town, and had kept a group of ministers, uh, several ministers together uh, over a period when it seemed like there was no reason for doing so. And uh, uh, and that group uh, became the original SCLC founders.

INTERVIEWER: WELL WHAT, JUST VERY SIMPLY, WHAT WERE THEY TRYING TO DO IF IT WASN'T SIT-INS YET, WHAT, WHAT, BETWEEN SAY ‘57 AND ‘60 IT WAS, WHAT WAS THE GENERAL. . .

Vivian: Well, the idea was to understand the power of nonviolent direct action, as it had been proven in Montgomery. Now, how do, how do you keep that alive, how, do you make it real, how do you encourage other places to move? See what T mean? Those were the first steps. Uh, and uh, and those were its goals--understood Montgomery as the spearhead of a great nonviolent movement that could begin to eradicate ap- uh, apartheid, I'm glad he stopped, uh, uh, segregation, uh, uh, it had just, it had just. . .

[Inaudible] [Tone]

Vivian: Yes, see uh, uh, yes and no. [Pause] Uh, uh, well, that's what I'm trying to show you though, is that some members of SCLC per se, was [sic] already involved nonviolently with the public foundation issues, all right?

INTERVIEWR: WAS THE GENERAL SOUTH-WIDE THING OR WAS IT. . ?

Vivian: No, I know, but you see that's, that's what I'm getting at. But, but members of the inside group were beginning to see how they could achieve that. You, you, you see what I mean, which would have been a major move. See, it's not an accident everybody could break out into that immediately. It's because it, it was talked about throughout, and we were already doing. . .[Lapse, overlap]. . . Uh, see what- what must be understood. . .

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I’m going to have him start again.

Vivian: . . .O.K., is that Montgomery was the, was the proof of a method and a victory of that method, uh, and, but nothing happened for about a year, now it was in the air, it was buzzing, people said: “Great victory in Montgomery, what does it mean for us? What can we do?” All right? Uh, but they were also saying - we don't have Martin King, we don't have colleges and universities surrounding, all right, what does that mean? Then, then, in Tallahassee, Florida, C.K. Steel started a movement within weeks of that time-, all, right, there were eight or ten other movements across the country C.K. told me because he got calls from them, all right? Uh, then it was on its way, It was off and running now. Every place in the country figured that they could move.

INTERVIEWER: SPECIFICALLY MOVE ON WHAT?

Vivian: All right, now, and of course the main thing to move on was that where the greatest indignities were felt, and that was in public accommodations, and there is no greater indignity beyond the buses themselves you see, where you had to go to the back and people would drive away without you, take your money, or you could be arrested or et cetera – having to get up, all those things. But the next thing was the matter of the lunch counters, because you couldn't eat downtown, your wife, your children, you, all right? Um, uh, you were always watching other people be able to appreciate the natural consequences of a Democratic society, and you were not able to participate. Your money meant nothing. So even though you earned it, what could you do? All right? Uh, you were always behind. Uh, uh, the matter of the bathroom you could not go to. Uh, all these public accommodations was [sic] in the face of everyone, as the thing that, that represented the indignities uh, the deterioration of any sense of- of self-esteem, and self- and it was deteriorating the self-concept. Now. . .

INTERVIEWER: O.K., THAT'S GREAT, LET'S CUT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: That's great.

Vivian: Yes, because I know what you mean, you immediately saw me go. . .[Lapse]

INTERVIEWER: O.K., I'LL MOVE ON A LITTLE BIT NOW TO, UH, BACK FOCUSING ON NASHVILLE 1959, '60 RIGHT ON UP HERE, I'M READY TO 00 INTO [?]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: The center please.

[Lapse]

Vivain: Oh, I didn't know that. Isn't that incredible? And it's [a] tragedy, you know, he [almost certainly referring to Selma Sheriff Jim Clark] really wanted to be a lawyer and a lot of things. Uh, [inaudible] the tragedy of [inaudible], you know, different society, it's got more freedom, Jim Clark may have made it, uh, you know, and become really the kind of person he would really have chosen to be. Uh, the whole system destroyed all of us in many ways. We normally don't see that or don't even think about it but uh, you know. . .

INTERVIEWER: EXACTLY WHAT WHITE PEOPLE LOST.

Vivian: That's exactly right, and he had hopes and ambitions and desires like everybody else, and really Jim was, Jim, Jim uh, Jim was just playing the system like everybody else, he was, you know, and uh, thinking where he could get and being uh, uncertain about himself and where he was going to go, where he was going to get- You know, it's interesting when I said to him, uh, "What do you tell your wife at night?" You know, "What do you tell your children?" You, you know, "What do you tell your children uh, when you go home at night? What do you tell your wife when you go to bed at night?" Boy, that's when he just blew up.

INTERVIEWER: I'LL BET.

Vivian: And he just said, he said uh, you know, "Arrest that man. Arrest that man. Arrest that man." I mean he just blew, see, and see--we're getting at the core you know, that's different than the normal concepts--I mean this guy is really, you know, in many ways, caught in a kind of bind, you know? I mean: how do you tell your children to be decent where obviously they see your indecency, you know? How do you cover what you're doing and how do you make them understand, hm? You know, just like these mothers trying to make this kid

understand, and how do you make your kids understand? They see you on TV, they see you, you know, they know what you've done, you got badges on. Not only that, the same kind of stuff that makes you look bad in front of that TV set is making you look bad in your normal behavior at home anyway, you know what I mean? You know what I mean? I mean, you know, you can't separate the two. You're being corroded and destroyed all the time anyway, and that happens to white people as well. [Background conversation] Pardon me, that wasn't part of your. . .[Pause]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE ARE SET.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., NOW MOVE ON TO WORKSHOPS NOW, REMEMBER WE'RE IN ‘59, ’60, WE'RE RIGHT TN NASHVILLE, JUST NASHVILLE NOW, UH, YOU SAID OVER THE PHONE IN THE INTERVIEW A WHILE BACK THAT SORT 0F NOTHING REALLY, REALLY MOVED IN A BIG WAY ‘TIL REVEREND LAWSON CAME TO TOWN, CAN YOU JUST START WITH THAT, AND EXPLAIN IT JUST BRIEFLY.

Vivian: Sure. Uh, uh, in Nashville, or naturally to the person[s] that it held, about five or six of us together that understood nonviolence, uh, was Reverend Kelly Miller Smith, pastor of First Baptist Church. But it was just holding us together. I had had demonstrations in 1945, but couldn't move anything to Nashville, nor was I trying that hard, I was just trying to hold onto my job as editor. Kelly Miller Smith was the natural leader with people and yet, and all he could do is hold us together. What to do, how to do something was the problem, how to get it under way. When Jim Lawson came to the city, he began to organize students, all right? And most important to that, for both students and who were ministers, was that we had workshops, and the workshops on nonviolence made the difference. We began to, first, understand the theory, understand the philosophy behind it, the great religious imperatives that were important in terms of understanding people. Then finally, the tactics, then finally the techniques, how to in fact uh, uh, begin to take the blows--cigarettes put out on you, uh, the fact that you were being spit on--and still, still respond with some sense of dignity and with a loving concept of what you were about, uh, to be hit and to be knocked down, and uh, to understand that in terms of struggle, and in terms of reaching conscience, in terms of, of gaining the greater goals for which are sought. Now we actually done that, I mean we actually beat people to the ground, we actually poured coffee on people, we actually uh, uh, uh, uh did the various things to people, kicked chairs out from under them, all right? Uh, came on them in a crowded situation, so they could begin to get used to it: how did they respond? So they could begin to understand- respond, not in terms of verbiage but in terms of actuality. You see, it's in the action that ethics [sic] is tested. And this is one of the great learnings of nonviolent movement.

INTERVIEWER: O.K. . . . [Overlap, inaudible]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: AND ROLL SOUND. SPEED.

INTERVIEWER: O.K. UM. . .

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: OH, I’M SORRY. I DIDN’T GET ROLLING THERE. . .[Overlap]

INTERVIEWER: WHAT I'M GOING TO GET, START TO GO INTO NOW IS SOMETHING I'VE ALWAYS BEEN CURIOUS ABOUT LOOKING BACK ON THIS, UH, HOW DID STUDENTS, AS STUDENTS, GET INVOLVED IN THE WORKSHOPS? DID JIM DECIDE ONE DAY HE'S GOING TO INVOLVE STUDENTS? I MEAN PREVTOUSLY TT HAD BEEN MORE OF AN ADULT MOVEMENT, IT IS NOW 60'S AND YOUNG PEOPLE, ARE COMING TNTO THE WORKSHOPS. DID THEY COME ON THEIR OWN, OR DID JIM LAWSON RECRUIT THEM OR. . .

Vivian: Well, uh, the idea was to reach students, uh, and that became the most important single factor for, for moving ahead in Nashville. We began to recruit students.

INTERVIEWER: WHOSE IDEA WAS THAT?

Vivian: Uh, the uh, uh, the SCLC group, the six ministers, with Jim Lawson. Jim Lawson had come in from FOR, Fellowship Organization for Reconciliation, uh, was on their staff, regional director, came in and started working with us. The reason he came in, because of us, and because it was a college town, he saw that very clearly. And all of us began to recruit students, so uh, I had a, a very close relationship to [the] American Baptist Theological Seminary because I had been a student there and I was an editor of the publishing house at the National Baptist Convention Publishing House, so I was recruiting students at the, at the seminary. Uh, uh, uh, Jim was recruiting students at Fisk where he had a very close uh, thing. Uh, Kelly Miller Smith, because of his ministerial thing, was working through doctors and other people in the city and working on places like Meharry [Medical College] and et cetera. Uh, uh, Tennessee and I, probably all of us were working on it, but a person like Bernard Lafayette was indispensable int that. Uh, uh. . .

INTERVIEWER: O.K., LET ME, LET ME JUST BREAK IT DOWN A LITTLE BIT, UH, PEOPLE LIKE DIANE AND JOHN LEWIS AND BERNARD LAFAYETTE, MENTIONING, STARTING WITH, WITH THEIR NAMES, WHAT, WHAT WERE THEY LIKE WHEN THEY FIRST CAME TO YOU AS STUDENTS? WHAT WERE THEY, WHAT WERE THEY LOOKING FOR WHEN THEY WALKED IN THESE WORKSHOPS?

Vivian: The idea was to find out, uh, what was the meaning of everything that was going on, what did it mean'? How could 1-t be made to work, all right, uh, nonviolent direct action. Uh, uh, because that of course, is what they were recruited around, uh, the understandings of nonviolent direct action.

INTERVIEWER: I’M SORRY, BUT WHAT DO YOU THINK BROUGHT THEM TO YOU ALL?

Vivian: Oh, you see, I think it has to be seen that, that every black person, with rare exception, has one agenda, and that's how to get rid of racism, uh, because that's the central problem of our lives. Now, if there is some means whereby that that can be done, then uh, let's take a look at it, let's find out what's in it, how do you do it? Uh, is it possible? Will it be effective? If so, how effective? All right? What do you have to do then? And, uh, those are the kinds of questions that we all wanted to answer. Uh, and if one could answer those in the positive uh, it would probably- it would win many of us, uh

INTERVIEWER: BACK TO DIANE AND JOHN LEWIS AND BERNARD. . .

Vivian: Yes, well, they were, Diane was at this university at the time.

INTERVIEWER: I’M SORRY, LET'S START AGAIN, GIVE ME, YOU'D BETTER GIVE ME COMPLETE NAMES.

Vivian: O.K. Uh, uh, for instance, Diane Nash was uh, at this university at the time, had come in from Chicago, was over-awed by what she saw in, in the south, could not believe that segregation was that bad, kept thinking in terms of -it, so that she had a very acute sense of what to do about it, all right?

INTERVIEWER: AND JOHN LEWIS. . .

Vivian: John Lewis had co- exactly the opposite from a Diane Nash, John Lewis had come in from a little town in the back woods of Alabama, uh, who had seen uh, the racism in all of its forms, and uh, wanted to do something about it. You had a very articulate person on one hand, from a northern city and a, and a person who was trying very hard to articulate all of his feelings and understandings, and the other coming out of the, some of the worst kinds of racism in the south - uh, and then from a small city, a small town uh, uh, but all of them with the one agenda, right? You would see a Jo- a Jim Bevel, right, uh, who was from both north and south and interesting, Cleveland, Mississippi and Cleveland, Ohio, all right? Now those were his two centers of concern, had seen both sides of it, had time to think it through and seen his brothers in, brothers uh, in Cleveland, Ohio free from some of the segregation he knew in the south uh, watched his father suffer under it right there, this fine mind, all of these people philosophically and theologically oriented--that has to be understood, you see what I mean?--who were looking for meaning. . .

INTERVIEWER: STOP. O.K. GREAT, LET'S CUT.

[Pause]

Vivian: I know, and I, I'm trying to sit there so I don't take too much of your space but. . .

INTERVIEWER: NO, NO, IT'S, I'M JUST AMAZED HOW FAST YOUR, THE, YOUR MIND TS JUST SKIMMING ALONG (?). O.K., I JUST WANT YOU TO GIVE TO ME FIRST THE REACTION TO THE- HEARING ABOUT THE GREENSVILLE [SIC] SIT-INS, GREENSBORO SIT-INS?

Vivian: We were in line all ready for, uh, uh, standing in line to be refused at a lunch counter in a department store in Nashville, when the news came. Uh, we began to call other people. We were already involved in a ten point nonviolent process for opening the lunch counters, when we heard that they had already moved uh, we were astonished, but grateful, thankful, wondered how they would work out uh, as well as how we would work out.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., GREAT.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE'D BETTER, UH, CHANGE. THAT'S GREAT. O.K., LET'S BEGIN. THIS IS ROOM TONE AT THE END OF SOUND ROLL 4002, CAMERA ROLL 388, AN AVERAGE ROOM TONE.

INTERVIEWER: IN THE SIT-INS IN MID FEBRUARY, 1960, HOW DID ACTUALLY CARRYING THEM OUT SUCCESSFULLY THE FIRST WEEK CHANGE THE WHOLE, MOVEMENT? THAT FIRST ACTION, UH, I WANT YOU TO GIVE ME A LITTLE FEELING LIKE YOU'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT IT FOR A LONG TIME AND PLANNING AND PREPARING THE DISCIPLINE, NOW YOU'VE GONE OUT AND FOR OVER A WEEK IT'S HAPPENED. SO TELL ME WHAT EFFECT THE ACTUAL SIT-INS HAD THE FIRST WEEK?

Vivian: Uh, we had uh, been working uh, planning, had our workshops, had recruited a number of students, those students were going back into their dormitories, the ministers were going into their churches uh, now, the thing that was important is uh, as part of all that uh, we began to have meetings with the merchants downtown, perfect nonviolent movement, going through the process, all right? As we began to hear from them both negative and positively, we began to find within that group those who were adamant and who, who might not be under a different set of circumstances. Uh, and we began to then stand in to see where we'd be refused and uh, because that's a part of it, you had to be refused. Now, as we were refused, more and more people began to understand something can be

done about this, and something should be. Remember, this is all backed up by the movement that was going on everywhere uh, uh, the Montgomery experience, all right?

INTERVIEWER: [INAUDIBLE] THE FIRST WEEK?

Vivian: O.K., oh, we've had the first week, all right, and, and uh, then uh, then as, as it exploded and they put people in jail, that’s when things really moved, right? Because people came forward to uh, put up their houses as bail uh, a mass meeting started on a large scale, people flooded and filled uh, the churches, whatever church we would be in, largely First Baptist but any number of the others of those six ministers that were originally in things, uh, uh, and the movement was in full swing. Uh, the city made all the mistakes that people normally make uh, in a nonviolent movement uh, uh, they uh, uh, arrested Jim Lawson and didn't really have a reason for it uh, and uh, as Jim, as they were taking Jim out uh, uh, with his arm behind his back uh, the sign at First Baptist said uh, uh, “Forgive them, Father.” And they'd taken Jim out of a workshop that afternoon, the board said: “Forgive them Father.” Uh, the news uh, was carrying the message very, very clearly in terms of the pictures. Uh, uh, they, they arrested our young people for demonstrating and then had them out in the snow shoveling, and the day they went in [to jail] they did not have coats on cause it was not cold enough. Uh, the next day or two when they had them out shoveling snow, they were without coats and uh the- and the city was angry. Uh, uh, all of that fed into a movement, all the mistakes that were made. Uh, uh . . .

INTERVIEWER: O.K., LET'S CUT RIGHT THERE FOR A SECOND, O.K., LET'S CUT. NOW, WE'VE, WE'VE GOT TO PRETTY MUCH SIT RIGHT IN NASHVILLE [Overlap]

Vivian: O.K., all right, that’s all right, just want to be certain.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., I'M READY WHEN YOU ARE. O.K., I’M GOING TO BACK UP JUST A TINY BIT LIKE WHEN THE KIDS, THE STUDENTS FIRST GET ARRESTED UH, TWO THREE SENTENCES, WHAT ABOUT THE WHOLE THING ABOUT GOING TO JAIL? I MEAN, THESE ARE KIDS FROM GOOD HOMES, THEY'RE NOT, YOU KNOW, IT'S A TREMENDOUS STTGMA AND DANGER TO BE TN JAIL. WHAT WAS TITE REACTION OF THE, FIRST THE STUDENTS BEING JAILED FOR THE FIRST TTME, AND THEN THEIR PARENTS?

Vivian: In fact uh, uh, uh jail was quite a different thing for everyone. Uh, the idea of going to jail was itself uh, uh, difficult for many people to handle, for had it not always been used as the way to stop people from doing anything, and uh, but we’d already interpreted--you see--jail as quite a different experience. Instead of being a stigma, it became a badge of courage. Uh, it became, uh, the means whereby that you could be liberated and free, or that one had to pass through the jails uh, into a promised land, that the society had to be turned upside down, to be turned right side up, the new definition. Now, parents, of course, of these students, everywhere, had different reactions. Uh, uh, many of the parents were afraid uh, many of the parents, uh, thought that their children's lives would be destroyed forever because of what would be on their record uh, many telephone calls were coming from everywhere uh, pressure was on, on the colleges, in particular, on, on the presidents, and the vice-presidents and staff and et cetera. Uh, there was pressure everywhere. Uh, but students made up their minds what they were going to do. It was a great point of their own development and decision-making for their lives. Now once we began to win that, all the parents were really happy and thankful that their children were involved. Now a few children were taken

out of school and brought home, there’s no doubt about that either, but that was such a small group.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., GREAT, CUT. I WANT TO GO BACK A LITTLE BIT, JUST S0, THAT SORT OF FIRST, FIRST WEEK OF ACTUALLY DOING THE SIT-INS, UM, ONE REPORTER OF *THE [NASHVILLE] TENNESSEEN* DESCRIBED THE SCENE AT WOOLWORTHS AS A SLOW, BUILDUP OF HATE BY THE CROWD AT HEADQUARTERS, CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE ATMOSPHERE OF THE OPPOSTTION?

Vivian: Sure. Uh, the students were prepared in Nashville to go in and sit in the lunch counters. They came down uh, the street grouped together, they came in, they waited in line for their chance to sit at the counters. Uh, they began to sit on the counters, as they began to sit on the counters, people began to leave or stiffen. Occasionally, someone would smile because--they, you know, they really were shocked but, but thankful. Uh, you had all of this, but by-and-large it was a buildup of the opposition, a buildup of, of, of disdain, but not knowing what to do. And the normal southern thing was simply to attack. And it was to beat any black. Uh, and more and more blacks came in and sat down at the counters. The waiters, waitresses didn't know what to do, the management didn't know what to do, right? Uh, uh, they uh, uh, eventually closed the lunch counters at first, trying to avoid it. Uh, we came back day after day, but then the opposition began to get ready for us too. The young thuggis types in town, the Klan types in the city, all right, began to also come into the lunch counters where we would be uh, and uh, then that's when uh, our training proved to be most helpful, because they began to attack, put out cigarettes on people uh, uh, jerk people off of, off of, off of their stools and beat them and et cetera, pour things on people, right? Uh, our students were ready and they sat there and uh, they were prepared for it. Of course, that brought on the police when we were not defeated by it, then the police came in, naturally the police were on the other side.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., LET'S CUT FOR A SECOND, UH, WAIT A SECOND, WHERE AM I? UM, I'M READY TO GO LET’S ROLL.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: O.K., MARK. O.K., IT’S ALL YOURS.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., WE, WE LEFT OFF WITH THE POLTCE BEING BROUGHT INTO THE SIT-IN THING. GIVE ME, STARTING FROM THAT POINT WHEN THE POLTCE GET INVOLVED IN THE SIT-TNS, WHICH IS AFTER ALL, A COUPLE WEEKS INTO THE THING, HOW DID THE POLICE REACT, AND THEN, HOW DID THE CTTY AND THE STORE OWNERS REACT TO THE SIT-INS?

Vivian: Uh, the uh, uh, the police knew who they were working for. The police knew that they represented the city, they represented the merchants, they represented the thugs more than they represented us, yet uh--and here again is the importance of nonviolence--uh, is that uh, they were reached uh, they did not want to appear too demanding, too brutal, Uh, they wanted to stop us, but when we would not stop, then they had to begin to work on the thugs, because the thugs will bring out the worst of segregation in a racist society, that it even shames the people who are themselves racists and who keep the system going. And they were caught in that dilemma and they were waiting for their orders from the businessmen, the businessmen were caught, they did not quite know what to do. Uh, and they thought, however, that they could beat us down--if the police and the thugs both moved on us, things would change. Uh, the police left, the way the police did it was by being passive and allow us to be beaten, right? And then they would come in at the end and uh, push the others back and arrest us, all right? Uh, so that it was the victim being arrested. Uh, and they figured that would stop it, but that only intensified it, because the whole city could

see, black and white, but uh, whites were passive, though they didn't like it. Uh, uh, blacks, on the other hand, were not passive at all, but very active in relationship to what was happening. As a result, they came to our support and the mass meetings grew larger and larger, the support became, more meaningful, more people came forward to mortgage their homes to pay for uh, uh, bail and, and et cetera.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., CONTINUING ALONG WITH THAT THOUGHT, WHAT ABOUT THE CITY FATHERS, MOST ALL OF THEIH EXCEPT FOR I GUESS [INAUDIBLE] ON, ON THE COUNCIL ARE WHITE. WHAT'S THEIR REACTION AS A BODY, TO THE SIT-INS?

Vivian: Uh, they see their image, the, the, the City Council itself, the city fathers themselves, see their image being destroyed, they don't quite know how to handle this, They have within their midst Attorney [Z. Alexander] Looby, who was also president of NAACP, uh, who was uh, uh, one of, probably one of the only lawyers in Nashville uh, regardless of color uh, with a doctorate in law uh, Looby was a, a very forceful uh, spokesman uh you had, however, also uh, two or three other outstanding lawyers. The, when the cases came to court uh, that's when our, our group of lawyers came to the front uh, and uh, uh two or three others beside Looby were as outstanding and far- and very, very effective. Uh, [Enicks?], Attorney [Enicks?] was very effective in delineating the problem in the cl- uh, in the, in the uh, uh, courtroom. Uh, uh. . .

INTERVIEWER: WHAT ABOUT THE CITY FATHERS AS A WHOLE, HOW DID THEY REACT TO THE STT-INS?

Vivian: And uh, and, well, and see what they were doing was stan- The city fathers themselves had to see their relationship to the businessmen. Businessmen saw their relationship to profits. And, and, and the people, black people in that city, were beginning to respond all over, what to do, the boycotts start--right?--so that- to force the businessmen to deal with the issue. And uh, uh, and as on of the businessmen put it uh, says, “Nobody came downtown.” Uh, says uh, uh blacks wouldn't come downtown, whites were afraid to come downtown, so the only people downtown were green people and there weren't many of them, all right? As a result, they began to lose money and they began to ask for a change. Uh, remember though, we were meeting with them, we were talking with them.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., STOP RIGHT THERE, O.K.

Vivian: We were interpreting them, meeting with them, sharing with them, trying to get them to understand, think for themselves, or react without our presence. [Tone] They were constantly negotiating with them, right?

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WAS THE BASIS OF THE TRUTH, TRUCE TO. . .[LAPSE] THAT TRUCE THAT TOOK PIACE PRETTY MUCH MOST OF MARCH WHERE, WHERE. . .

Vivian: Trying to remember myself now.

INTERVIEWER: WE WERE JUST LOOKING. . .

Vivian: [Tone]. . .in such ways that you would, that people, and this is one of Diane's points all the time, right? But that people will not know what power they have.

INTERVIEWER: SHE WAS VERY GOOD ON THAT, WE ASKED HER [INAUDIBLE].

Vivian: Sure, that's her main point. Right, that’s her main point, and she’s right. She’s right.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: O.K., we’re real close here. This is test, test, test, test. This is camera roll 390, sound roll 4004, C.T. Vivian, Blackside, Eyes on the Prize.

[Overlap, miscellaneous]

INTERVIEWER: O.K., I’M GOING TO ASK YOU ONE QUICK QUESTION JUST SORT OF AN IMPRESSION UH, WHEN YOU FIRST MET THIS BUNCH OF STUDENTS BACK IN THESE WORKSHOPS BEFORE THE SIT-INS REALLY BROKE OUT. UH, WHAT WAS YOUR IMPRESSION OF, OF THEM AS A GROUP? WHAT WERE THEY LIKE? WHAT DID YOU TIIINK, YOU'RE, YOU'RE A MTNTSTER, YOU'RE OLDER THAN THEY ARE AT THAT POINT, WHAT DID YOU THTNK OF ALL THESE STUDENTS COMTNG IN?

Vivian: See, I was a minister and I was a little older and I was editing, but on the other hand, I had just been out of seminary two, two years myself, all right? So I had an immediate contact with student life. I was uh, in fact, really still related to the seminary in many ways. Uh, so that uh, uh, I was not separate from either, I was really, uh, right in the middle uh, a relation uh, relating to both uh, in fact uh, uh. . .

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WERE THEY LIKE THOUGH, AS A GROUP?

Vivian: As a group uh, well, let me just give you reflections. One, a very curious group, uh, the kind of people that would be committed if they were going to be- first impressions when I first saw them, right? Uh, people that there were no doubts about, wanted to do something about the system of segregation and racism, and would if they believed they could. Uh, quick-thinkers, quite active people, all of them, all right, uh, uh, with rare exception, and those helped uh, uh, modify uh, uh, uh, the situation, [Overlap].

INTERVIEWER: O.K., NO NOT A CUT, I WANT TO GO RIGHT NOW, JUMP AHEAD A LITTLE BIT TO THE EASTER BOYCOTT. WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF, OF THE BOYCOTT AS A WHOLE? WAS IT JUST TO DESEGREGATE THOSE SIX STORES OR WAS IT JUST TO CLEAR SEGREGATION OUT OF ALL DOWNTOWN NASHVILLE OR--TALK ABOUT THE EASTER BOYCOTT.

Vivian: We saw the Easter boycott as a chance to get over many ideas of nonviolence and to be most effective for the entire city and help create a reconciliation of all the forces in the city. Uh, number one, uh, we never really talked about boycott. With us it was an economic withdrawal, theologically understood, that those resources that God gave you could not be used to perpetuate an evil. So to put them in the hands of merchants who were perpetuating the evil of racism, would be against God, a misuse of that which was given, number one. Number two, it gave everyone a chance in that city, black and white, to show where they were in regard to our economic withdrawal, and to our desire to be a full part of the city. Uh, it allowed, it stopped uh, many people from buying. Easter was a most important time for buying. All blacks had to have a full brand new outfit at Easter no matter how poor you were, all right? You may start three months ahead of time paying for that Easter outfit and you may be paying for it for three months later. Now it sounds like a lot of money, but not then, right, because uh, the, the difference in white and black income was so great and the little money you had for extras was so great that you could be paying for six months. Uh, just like at Christmas again, it would be the same thing. Now Easter was a time, cause Easter was the time of the cross, Easter was the time of sacrifice, so we interpreted it that way, right?

Easter was a time then that people found they did not need new suits, new clothes, new shoes, new anything. There was plenty of things. This one woman said, “I looked in my closet and found I had fourteen pair of shoes, and I said, ‘I am so glad for the movement ‘cause I don't need to buy anything.” All right? And I remember a number of men saying that for the first time they were solvent after Easter. Uh, uh, that uh, uh, people began to understand and we began to put things in economic terms and Vivian Henderson, who was an economist at Fisk University at the time, would give weekly reports on what was happening downtown. Uh, it was destroying the economy downtown. What they'd counted on, they could no longer count on. Money they had spent for Easter, they could no longer count on getting back. Uh, uh, many of the places that overcharged blacks began to realize it wasn't going to work anymore. Everybody then in that city began to realize that there needed to be a reconciliation--the merchants because of the money lost, people in that city because it was being interpreted in terms of the cross and it was a religious city, with all those, public [?] houses and churches and et cetera. Uh, uh, so that, so that everyone was affected from their base of values, and that made the difference, you see. As, and as they were affected there, they began to interpret the movement not simply as uh, as, as a group of blacks who were dissatisfied, right? But in terms of the evil in the society, and, and how badly fractured we were as a city, and what could happen then in terms of a vision of the possibility of a true Democratic city that could fulfill their understandings of the Athens of the South that was worthy of a Parthenon.

INTERVIEWER: O,K., CUT.

Vivian: A little long, but I had to put a little. . .

INTERVIEWER: WHOA. [Pause] [Miscellaneous] O.K., WE’RE GOING TO ROLL AGAIN. JUST ONE VERY BRIEF QUESTION ON THE BOYCOTT, Uh, A LOT OF PEOPLE SAY THE BOYCOTT GENERATED A LOT OF FEAR IN THE CITY, THAT YOU KNOW, THE MOVEMENT WAS REALLY CALLING THE SHOTS. HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND TO THAT?

Vivian: Uh, the demonstrations uh, created in many white people, a fear of what was possible if blacks united the first time that it happened. Uh, naturally because of their own racism, they were afraid of anything that blacks did because they were oppressors, they were always afraid of the oppressed, all right, which created a dynamic in the city. But you see, here's where nonviolence saves us again, because no matter what they said, the oppressed were moving against the oppression with nothing in their hands with which to destroy, but something in their heart for a now relationship, right? So, because there was nothing in our hands, they could not then react to us in the ways that the old south normally did. They either had to accept this new loving black man and woman, or in fact, reject themselves. Now, they were caught in that kind of dilemma. Uh, black people on the other hand, had found a method whereby they could rejoice and yet not have any attempt to destroy the other, but only open up the society fully to everyone.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., LET ME MOVE ON TO SOMETITING SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT. WHAT ABOUT MEMBERS OF THE WHITE COMMUNITY WHO CAME OVER TO YOUR STDE?

Vivian: Uh, in, in fact, this was the winning thing. Now we have to see, is that, and I suppose it's best symbolized [by] those white persons who began to come to us. The first ones were rudely and badly treated, uh, uh, then those in power began to come our way. The best symbol of it is a white student from Peabody and Vanderbilt uh, uh, who came to our side, worked at one of the churches ‘cause he was a seminarian, right? Uh, and what happened to him--he was

immediately taken away from being with students, uh, placed back in a room to play films only. Uh, uh, and when I say “students,” I meant uh, he was working at any given church in the city, they wouldn't let him have contact with white stu- white uh, uh, parishioners anymore. Uh, then he was completely pushed out. Uh, uh. . .

INTERVIEWER: TO WHITE SOCIETY. . .

Vivian: . . .of, of white society. Uh. . .

INTERVIEWER: I'M SORRY, COULD YOU GO BACK, JUST. . .[Overlap]

Vivian: Yes, I know what you mean ‘cause I did that before. Uh, uh, uh, an excellent example of what I’m talking about is a person I remember very well, who marched in that first march with us uh, to City Hall. Uh, he was a seminarian at Vanderbilt. He had his assignment at one of the local churches, one of the large southern Baptist churches in the city, they immediately took him away from any contact with white uh, parishioners and with young white people in particular, and had him showing films in a back room, uh, where he would not be seen uh, would have no contact, and then eventually, he was dismissed and pushed out and pushed out away from any contact with the white community. Uh, uh, then, then you had others like uh, a young man who joined us on the line picketing, who was beaten by the thugs. Uh, those who joined us--white--were particularly picked out for misuse. Uh, because it was proof that this myth of solidarity was broken, that it was not a monolithic structure, that all white people didn't, didn't hate black people, uh, that we could live together and did.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., LET ME JUST STOP RIGHT HERE.

Vivian: Yes, I know, ‘cause I'm really. . .

INTERVIEWER: LET'S CUT. UH, FIND MY PLACE [Overlap]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WE HAVE ABOUT, UH, A MINUTE, UH, MINUTE AND A HALF LEFT.

INTERVIEWER: A MINUTE AND A HALF, O.K., [Miscellaneous] O.K. I'M READY TO ROLL.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SO ARE WE.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., ATTORNEY LOOBY’S HOUSE IS BOMBED. UH, WHAT DTD THE BOMBING MEAN--OF HIS HOUSE--MEAN TO BLACKS AT THAT TIME, NOT NECESSARILY MOVEMENT PEOPLE BUT JUST THE WHOLE COMMUNITY? HOW DID THEY VIEW THE BOMBING?

Vivian: I suppose that, uh, because of everything that happened before, see, a movement builds, because of everything that happened before, everybody in that city was now united, all right?

INTERVIEWER: SO LET'S START AGAIN, LET'S TALK ABOUT THE BOMBING, SAY “BOMBING” THIS TIME.

Vivian: O.K., sure. Uh, one morning uh, uh, we were, students and ministers who were leading the movement, having a meeting at a Methodist church, Reverend Anderson's church right off of Fisk University campus. And uh, we heard uh, uh, uh, we had heard this huge bomb blast before we came, and uh, we began to think through what that meant. And uh, uh, when we left we left deciding to have a demonstration because we felt as though, that the, that the bombing of, of

Looby’s home could set off a great deal of violence in the city on one hand. On the other hand, it should have reached the conscience of the city fathers and made them realize something had to be done in that city. Uh, it was, it was such an outrageous act that it would, that it would, it could be very useful to a nonviolent movement then to move, O.K.? It was a uniting of the city, but the outcome would be decided by how in fact we channeled that energy, right? And we then had the first major march of the movement, okay? And uh, uh, and evidence is that we started at city limits. . .

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: I’M SORRY WE HAVE TO, HAVE TO RELOAD. [Overlap]

Vivian: Yes. In fact, march of the movement, and you could let it go at that, right. ‘Cause you got that march of the movement in there didn't you? Right.

[Tone]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THIS IS CAMERA ROLL 391, SOUND ROLL 4005. THIS IS C.T. VIVIAN, BLACKSIDE, EYES ON THE PRIZE.

INTERVIEWER: IT'S BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT BUT YOU DON'T HAVE A SENSE OF [Inaudible], WHAT WAS IT LIKE, AND SO REALLY THE QUESTION IS JUST. . .

Vivian: Yes, I’m with you, and when it was what, and when it wasn't what. . . [Overlap]

INTERVIEWER: RIGHT. THE, THE MARCH THAT TOOK PLACE IN RESPONSE TO, TO THE BOMBING, A LOT OF PEOPLE SAID WAS A CRUCIAL TURNING POINT AND ALL WE HAVE IS PICTURES, SO DESCRIBE AS VIVIDLY AS YOU CAN, WHAT WAS THAT MARCH LIKE?

Vivian: The march in Nashville, Tennessee was a turning point of everything that we had worked toward and would in fact make the difference in all negotiations . . .

INTERVIEWER: LET'S JUST START OVER. . .

Vivian: O.K., uh, the, the march in Nashville, Tennessee, was by the way, the first march of the movement ever, and it was a turning point. It was what in many ways, we’d been leading to without knowing it. It was- it would decide a good deal of all the negotiations that followed it. Uh, we began at, at Tennessee A&I, for we had left uh, the church where we’d been thinking that morning together and we scattered out all over the city, mainly to the schools, to talk to students, uh, to put the messages on the loudspeaker system as Bernard Lafayette did so well at Tennessee A&I. And Tennessee A&I was the out uh, reaches of the city. It was city limits. And it was on uh, Jefferson, the main uh, street of black uh, of black uh, Nashville. And, and right after the lunch hour., people began to gather, and we started the march there and we began to march down that street and students came out from the lunch rooms and they came out from being on, on the campus grounds, and they joined and they came out of buildings and dormitories among the way right there at the beginning, and down the street we went. Uh, and uh, and that group of people who had been leaders of the movement were up front, so that everyone knew them and the symbols of it, they knew that this was serious and they joined, and we started down and by the time we got to uh, what was a uh, a, a very important corner for everyone to gather uh, uh, people had begin to join us in small numbers. When we got to 18th and Jefferson, which is uh, uh, the corner it was called, that's when Fisk University uh, students joined us. They were waiting and they fell right in behind with those that were there. Uh, when, the, the, the next block

was 17th and Jefferson, and students from Pearl High School had walked over about four blocks and had come up because they normally out across to 17th Street and they joined in behind that. And the Pearl High School students uh, uh, uh, were, were enthusiastic as everyone else, but there was a certain silence, a certain seriousness, but the camaraderie and the sense of purpose is what pervaded everything that was going on and we marched down the street and pretty soon you could hear the beat and uh then that was taken over by cars coming and joining us along the way, as people came out of houses or people were in cars. And uh, I remember seeing uh, a, a man get out and join us and his wife drove the car on by. Uh, uh, there were, and then cars began to join us as we came down, moving very slowly so they could be with us as we moved. We filled Jefferson Avenue, it's a long, long way down Jefferson. And the more, and at first there was uh, uh, after a while there was a certain bit of singing, and as we came closer to town, it was merely the silence [sic] of the feet. A good deal of, of right off of downtown had been cleared away for urban renewal and that sort of thing uh, and you could see across an expanse, and here we came. And I remember uh, what, uh, one of the things that stood out in my mind as we walked by a place where there were workers out for the noon hour, white workers, and they had never seen anything like this. And here was, uh, all of four thousand people marching down the street, and all you could hear was their feet as we silently moved and the, and they didn’t know what to do and they moved back against the wall and they simply stood up, uh, against the wall, just looking. Uh, there was a fear there uh, there was an awe uh, there uh, and they did not know what to do, but they knew that this was not to be stopped, this was not to be played with or to be joked with. And that sense pervaded--everybody was there. We marched on and, and made a, a cross to City Hall, and uh, we started up the steps at City Hall and we gathered on a, a plaza in front of the building. Uh, it was very clear.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: WAIT A SECOND. I GOT A LITTLE SHIFT TO DO ON THIS. O.K. “PLAZA.”

Vivian: Uh, we gathered on the plaza in, in front of, was a part of City Hall itself. Uh, the Mayor knew now that he would have to speak to us. We all gathered there and uh, the leadership came up front, people came up behind them. Kelly Miller Smith was there uh, uh, uh, uh, Andrew White was there uh, who was one of the editors and one of our leaders in uh, in the movement uh, uh, among the ministers. Ministers were there, and students were there, people gathered all out in front. There were some four thousand people there: the first march of the movement. It uh, we didn't know what it was going, how it was going to come out. The Mayor came down, he was standing there and then uh, uh, I gave him a short speech. . .

INTERVIEWER: WHAT’D YOU SAY?

Vivian: Uh, I don't remember the words now, and I, you know, the idea was that, “We have come hero before you,” all right? “We are outraged that this could happen in our city, uh, we are tired of the fact that segregation and racism has ruled our lives uh, we do not think it's necessary, either.” [Background] “Uh, we do not feel it's necessary either for us to live this way or for you to be oppressors of this sort.” All right?

INTERVIEWER: WHAT DID DIANE SAY?

Vivian: Uh, then, then following, following, uh that, Diane read a statement. I do not remember the statement but it was read. It was written out and she read

it. Uh, it, but it was a challenge to the mayor as to what he was going to do, and this was what we were doing: I laid out the situation, she challenged the mayor, and the mayor. . .

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: SORRY, I'VE GOT TO HAVE YOU SLIDE OUT A LITTLE BIT THIS WAY.

Vivian: Oh, O.K., this way, is that it?

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YES, THAT'S IT. GO AHEAD.

Vivian: Uh, uh, and, and the mayor was listening. I remember very clearly that the mayor, I felt that the mayor wanted to answer with the normal political talk. The question came: "Are you against the segregation? Are you for what is happening in this city?"

INTERVIEWER: DIANE SAID THAT?

Vivian: Yes, those were the kinds of questions asked. He looked out across that expanse of four thousand people that had covered the street in front of the plaza, as well as the plaza. He looks in the other direction and people in fact were still coming on the plaza, and we did not know that at the time, all right? Uh, and uh, and he said: "No, no. I'm not for it." All right? "I do not think that racism and segregation is right," or one or the other. "I do not think racism is right," I think is what he said. And uh, uh, and uh, we then asked him the question: would he work to end it? You know, uh, or words to the same effect. And uh, uh, he said yes, that he would bri- and he did. And one. . .

INTERVIEWER: LET'S STOP RIGHT THERE. SORRY TO CUT YOU OFF. . .

Vivian: I'm with, no, no, no. . .

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: O.K. THIS IS ROOM TONE FOR THAT HIGH-PITCHED [Inaudible, pause]. . .

Vivian: . . .had a great sense of humor.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., THIS AND THAT, AND IF YOU COULD GIVE ME JUST MAYBE THREE, FOUR SENTENCES, NO MORE.

Vivian: O.K., on. . .

INTERVIEWER: [Inaudible] SPECIFIC. UH, WHAT DID MAYOR WEST'S STATEMENT MEAN AS FAR AS ACTUALLY SOLVING THE PROBLEM SEGREGATING NASHVILLE? DID IT GIVE A LEAD TO THE CITY OR DID IT- WHAT WAS ITS WHOLE EFFECT?

Vivian: I think by the, by the time that we had the march, the bombing and the march uh, that by that time uh, our nonviolence had reached the city. I think the merchants had been reached by the economic withdrawal as well as by our courage. I think people in that city were thinking and knew uh, the fact that we were negotiating and talking with people made the difference. And when Ben said that he would join, that at least caused the city to think, that the City Council were ready for some positive response that would allow them to make that move. When Ben West then worked with them, it gave the new initiative that was needed, and that new initiative allowed City Council to make that move. And within a week, exactly a week to the day, every, all the lunch counters in that city were open.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., LET'S CUT. O.K., JUST A COUPLE MORE QUESTIONS ON THIS. WAS, WAS THE MARCH ALL UH, BLACK STUDENTS?

Vivian: No, but practically all, and there was uh, very few white students, Uh, the uh, only white student I really remember is the one from Vanderbilt I was telling you about that uh, uh, you know, the uh, that's the only one I really remember, There were probably- there were probably three or four others in there though.

INTERVIEWER: CAN YOU GIVE ME JUST UH, UH, MAYBE TWO, THREE SENTENCES ON UH, TO GIVE PEOPLE AN UNDERSTANDING THAT WELL, I THINK WE CAN GO STRAIGHT TO SOMETHING ELSE, NOT EVEN BACKTRACK, UH, I WANT TO MOVE NOW JUST TO UH, SNCC AS AN ORGANIZATION, AND I KNOW THIS IS, THIS IS SORT OF A DIFFICULT THING BECAUSE IT DIDN'T HAPPEN AT [Inaudible], BUT THE QUESTION IS JUST NOW. . .

Vivian: Yes, yes, well it sort of did really, but I know what you're saying, if you put it that way, then I know what you mean [Overlap]. Right, about the student, about the development uh, the student buildup.

INTERVIEWER: RIGHT. O.K. UM, THE QUESTTON IS: HOW DID SNCC START TO EVOLVE FROM YOUR POINT OF VIEW AS A LEADER AND UH, SCLC, UH, HOW DID SNCC BEGIN TO DEVELOP AND WHEN? HOW DID THAT WORK?

Vivian: Uh, students were an important force in the early movement, in fact, it was made up basically of those people who were not depended upon uh, white uh, economic structures--black ministers and black students, right? Um, now the students saw themselves as a very powerful force, the mass that was necessary, and they were. Uh, often time, they wanted to move in ways that we sort of modified because uh, we felt the necessity of the overall movement moving, uh, uh, some students felt a little difficult about, uh, constrained by that. But that wasn't largely in Nashville, that was lar-

INTERVIEWER: WHY DON'T YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT SNCC THOUGH? AS A DIFFERENT MOVEMENT, HOW DID. . .

Vivian: O.K., but, O.K., I'll try to get to that right quick though, all right? Now, well, let me put it another way for you. Uh, in Nashville, there was an excellent relationship but there was still that kind of feeling. Across the country, however, there were many places where ministers were not moving at all, were not really organized, students were doing it all, uh, and/or almost all of it, and uh, uh, and they were often catching a good amount of negative language from leaders, both in civil rights organizations in various smaller towns and places, right? They felt the need to organize themselves and move that- so the movement in Raleigh, in Raleigh uh, because of those that came uh, to that meeting. . .

INTERVIEWER: WHAT MEETTNG?

Vivian: Uh, oh, a meeting, oh sure, uh, a meeting in Raleigh upon which uh, the student movement uh, students came to a meeting in Raleigh to begin to decide what they were going to do as students, right? Now, the. . .

INTERVIEWER: I BET YOU WEREN'T THERE.

Vivian: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: LET’S TALK A LITTLE BIT, I'M SORRY, UM, WHAT'S THE QUICKEST WAY TO DO THIS, UH, HOW, HOW COME THE STUDENTS, UH, DECIDED TO FORM SNCC AND I NEED THE WORD SNCC IN THERE SO PEOPLE KNOW WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.

Vivian: Sure, O.K., I'm with you.

INTERVIEWER: AND WHAT WAS SCLC REACTION TO THIS INDEPENDENT MOVEMENT?

Vivian: Uh, good, I’ll give it to you as quickly as I can.

INTERVIEWER: YOU CAN JUST START TALKING WHEN, WHEN. . .[INAUDIBLE] O.K., LET'S GO.

Vivian: Students began to organize SNCC at the time that they felt that number one, that they were being, their activity was being modified too much by adults, uh, that were leaders in various communities. And by the fact that they felt that they needed a movement of their own to think through and move as they wanted to move, all right? Uh, SCLC was very helpful in that, Dr. King at the meeting in Raleigh where they were organized, made it very clear that we were not going to stop them, it was a decision for them to make. Uh, other people like Jim Lawson, uh, made the same kind of statement. Uh, students often looked to us because we'd been leaders but they knew that they could move as they choose.

INTERVIEWER: O.K.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: THE LAST FEW WORDS ARE [Inaudible] [Tone]

Side 3L CR #392, SR 4006

[Miscellaneous, overlap]

INTERVIEWER: O.K., I’LL ASK A QUESTION AND THEN IF YOU CAN UH, UH, COME IN ON THE END OF IT. I'LL TRY TO JUST. . .

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: YES, WE’LL DO EXACTLY THAT. WE’VE GOT IT ALL TURNED OUT HERE, GO AHEAD.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., UH, FIRST QUESTION IS: A LOT OF PEOPLE SAY THAT THE [Inaudible] IN JAIL KIND OF CONSOLIDATED THEM AS MEMBERS OF THE MOVEMENT AND I WANT YOU TO MENTION SPECIFIC, SNCC, OTHER PEOPLE, OLDER PEOPLE. HOW DID THEY DO THAT?

Vivian: Parchman Prison uh, was a national action, in the fact that now we were challenging states rights, we were challenging the laws across state lines, uh, and people came from all over the country, and that's the first time people had come from all over the country into a major movement. The treatment, the atmosphere, the police, the nature of the prison--all of that was proof to them of how negative everything was there. Parchman Prison, the guards were all so very poor and backwards and et cetera as well.

INTERVIEWER: O.K., I'M GOING TO CUT YOU RTGHT THERE LET'S CUT. UM, LET'S SEE, GOT PART OF WHAT I WANT, I DIDN’T, I JUST WANT TO STOP BEFORE WE GO INTO TOO MUCH DETAIL UH, DO WE NEED TO MENTTON [Inaudible]? [Overlap, miscellaneous] UH, OKAY, I'M GOING TO ASK ANOTHER UH, QUESTION. I WANT YOU TO MENTION SOMEWHERE IN YOUR ANSWER FREEDOM RIDES, SO WE KNOW WHICH THING WE'RE, WE'RE COMING OUT OF, UH, THE SAME QUESTION IS JUST DESCRIBE THE, THE TRIUMPHANT FEELING FREEDOM

RIDERS HAD COMING OUT OF JAIL, UH, YOU KNOW, AFTER 30, 40 DAYS OR WHATEVER THE SENTENCE WAS. OKAY, LET'S GO.

BLACKSIDE CREW MEMBER: CAN I INTERJECT SOMETHING HERE?

INTERVIEWER: YES.

BLACKSIDE CREW MEMBER: CORRECT ME IF I'M WRONG, BUT IF THERE COULD BE A SENSE IN THE COMING OUT OF JAIL OF, PEOPLE ARE READY TO TAKE ON THE WORLD. . .

Vivian: In fact, that's really what happened. And that's- and I think that's what she's really asking me to say, right?

[Overlap]

Vivian: That's right, that's, that's what I'm going to give you too, all right? Cause that's it, O.K.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: (O.K., we're set.)

INTERVIEWER: O.K., SO DESCRIBE THE FEELING OF IT.

Vivian: The feeling of people coming out of the jail was one of, of that they had triumphed, that they had achieved, that they were now ready, they could go back home, they could be a witness to a new understanding, nonviolence was proven in their, in their respect, it had become a national movement and there was no doubt about it, for common people in many places in the country. And uh, there was a now sense of a, of a new cadre of leaders.

INTERVIEWER: GREAT, CUT. WONDERFUL. UH, ONE QUICK QUESTION--THIS IS THE LAST ONE ON PARCHMAN--SONGS THAT WERE SUNG IN JAIL, DO YOU REMEMBER ANY, AND CAN YOU HUM A FEW BARS?

Vivian: Oh yes, wait a minute, uh, yes. (Hums) See, I'm no good at songs, but, and I, and even titles will diminish me, but wait a minute, and, and I don't sing at all, my wife calls me "No tone." But, but the, but I'm trying to think of the name of this cause if I can get the name I can get close enough that we don't feel badly, uh, uh, "Keep your eyes. . ." Oh, it's perfect for you, all right? Perfect for you, right? And the point is, we made up song. We made up pieces of 'that song in jail, in Jackson Prison- in Jackson Jail, we made up them, and so I can give them to you, all right? All right, oh, this is perfect for you, right? Uh. . .

INTERVIEWER: I TOLD YOU, HE'S DOING THIS SHOW. (Overlap) UH, O.K.

Vivian: Uh, in fact, now, how much time we got? See, I can give you any kind of introduction you want for it because what I'm trying to say is. . .

INTERVIEWER: ALL I WANT YOU TO, TO SAY !S A LITTLE BIT, THAT THERE WERE SONGS SUNG IN PARCHMAN AND. . .

Vivian: O.K., then I'll give you the [short?] introduction.

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: LET'S, I WOULD SUGGEST, IS IT POSSIBLE THIS MAY BE, YES, WHY DON'T YOU LET HIM SING FOR 30, 30 SECONDS.

INTERVIEWER: LONG ENOUGH TO GO WITH THAT, O.K., O.K., SO. . .

Vivian: That's all I can do anyway.

INTERVIEWER: NO, BUT JUST DO AS LONG AS YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE AND WE CAN. . . [Overlap]

Vivian: O.K., all right. [Overlap]

CAMERA CREW MEMBER: O.K. BEGIN MARK.

INTERVIEWER: SO THE FREEDOM RTDERS ARE NOW IN PARCHMAN, DON’T JUST GO INTO THE SONG, JUST TELL ME A LITTLE BIT.

Vivian: Uh, it was the Freedom Rides in Parchman, where we created new songs as well as sang freedom songs. The joy of the place was there as we sang. Uh, guards and so forth did not understand it. I remember making up songs one Sunday morning as we created our own Sunday service in jail. Uh, and uh, uh, “Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on,” was a song that had really a [Inaudible] had given us in Nashville, we brought to the prison. And in the prison uh, like First Century people, we made up songs. Uh, for instance uh, uh, uh, I stayed in jail uh, it's the only thing that we did right is when we started in to fight, and the only thing that we did wrong, when we stayed in the wilderness a day too long. Uh, we made it up and sang it, all right?

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