An Interview with

JOHN R. SALTER, JR.

with

REV. EDWIN KING

January 6, 1981

Interviewed by

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JONES: This is John Jones with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and I'm about to interview Mr. John Salter. We're at the Archives building in Jackson on State Street, and today is Tuesday, January 6, 1981. I wanted to start off if we could, John, with some information on your early background, when and where you were born, your parents.

SALTER: I was born in the East in 1934, but for the most part grew up in Northern Arizona at the mountain town of Flagstaff. I would call that essentially my home town. My mother is from a reasonably conservative western business family. My father, essentially a full-blooded Abnaki, Micmac and Penobscot from Maine and Quebec. So I come out of several different kinds of things.

JONES: Where did your parents meet if your father was an Indian and your mother came out of this conservative background?

SALTER: My mother was living in Chicago having moved there after she got her journalism degree from the University of Wisconsin. As I say, she's from the West originally. At Chicago she was working for the Quaker Oats Company in public relations. My father had gone to

Chicago from the far Northeast to study at the Art Institute of Chicago. They met in Chicago at a settlement house called the Chicago Commons Association, which was a large, private social service agency similar to Hull House. That's where they met. They were married for close to fifty years until my father died of a stroke two years ago.

JONES: Why did they move to Arizona?

SALTER: My father was Chairman of the Art Department at Northern Arizona University at Flagstaff, professor and chairman. I believe he was the first Indian hired on the faculty of Northern Arizona University. Both parents had been very active in matters of social concern. My father was a very staunch Roman Catholic, and my mother an equally strong Anglican, high church Episcopalian. Both took their social justice very very seriously, and were always involved in good causes. I certainly grew up in that tradition.

JONES: So you had that liberal influence at home?

SALTER: Yes, and it was very strong. My mother was something of a maverick in her family. Her people were conservative people, but in most cases were people of good will. There were some interesting people in her family that held differing, other points of view. My mother

had a Swiss grandfather. Her basic family stock was Scotch and some Irish, but she did have a Swiss grandfather who was a primary leader of the Populist Party in Kansas, and a founder of the Knights of Labor and many other things. I think she drew heavily from him. When I went to college, to university in Arizona, during the latter part of the 1950s, I myself did a great deal of volunteer work in human rights and civil liberties. I did a great deal of volunteer work for the copper miners' union, the Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers union. So in many respects I'd gotten my feet wet before I arrived in the great state of Mississippi.

JONES: Were there blacks in Arizona that you worked for?

SALTER: The primary issues in Flagstaff when I grew up really did not relate to blacks but involved much anti-Indian prejudice and discrimination, particularly regarding the Navajo Indians. But there were also large numbers of Chicanos, Mexican-American people, who were not well-treated. Interestingly enough, in Flagstaff, which is a lumberwoods town, there were a good number of black people principally from Louisiana and Mississippi who'd come into Northern Arizona during the '30s to work in the lumberwoods. Flagstaff, I think, could still be described as an extremely conservative town, in a very

conservative state. On the other hand, it wasn't and isn't characterized by an overriding orthodoxy. Many of the restaurants in Flagstaff have refused to serve Indians, Mexicans or blacks. Some even carried signs that said, "No Indians or dogs allowed." But on the other hand there were other restaurants that did. So you had kind of a pluralistic situation there. There was a good deal of white violence against non-white people. I can recall a little, kind of elderly white man who shot two black people down one Sunday morning in a southside Flagstaff street. No one could ever get a handle on exactly why he did. It seemed to be the ultimate manifestation of a deep-seated prejudice. He was not even arrested, and these were two unarmed people. Things like that happened with dreary frequency in this northern Arizona town. My parents played an active role in helping to develop a coalition in the early 1950s that involved Woodrow Crane, a black man from Rankin County, Mississippi, who was president of the local NAACP; Wilson Riles, a black school principal who is presently state superintendent of public instruction in California; my parents recall a Cuban lady who was a very strong Catholic - Ralph Juarez, who worked as business agent for the Lumber and Sawmill

Workers' Union; a number of Hopi and Navajo Indian people. So you had an interesting coalition that involved people of good will from many different ethnic and cultural settings, but all living together there and all working to at least knock some of the rougher edges of racism out of Flagstaff. And they succeeded, though it still has a way to go.

JONES: Yes. Arizona could still produce someone like Barry Goldwater, certainly the paragon of American conservatism in the 1960s, you know, instead of a place like Mississippi, or Texas. Was there a real united conservative movement in Arizona, someone your parents could point out to you as the enemy?

SALTER: It became stronger as the 1940s passed into the 1950s. Arizona, from the World War I period on, has worn what many people call a copper collar, that is it has been pretty much in the grip of the copper mining companies, Phelps-Dodge, Kennecott and the others. At the same time, to that has been added a large-scale cotton farming effort. I think more cotton is now raised in Arizona than in Mississippi.

JONES: I didn't know that.

SALTER: And massive lettuce farms. Things like this began to develop as irrigation was carried into the desert

areas. After World War II, runaway Northern and Eastern industries came into the state seeking cheap labor and tax breaks and things of this sort. Mississippi is well aware of that. So the state grew more and more conservative; and yet again it cannot be described as a closed society. I think there were several reasons for it, one: organized labor had been fairly strong in Arizona from the very beginning. In fact, Arizona was considered so radical that William Howard Taft, who was President in 1912, didn't want to let it into the Union. So you had in some areas a strong labor tradition, especially in the hard-rock, copper mining industry areas. Then at the same time Indian people own a great deal of tribal land, particularly in the northern part of the state. Mexican people have been in Arizona long before the Anglos came, and had some land holdings, and also drew a great deal of spiritual support from Mexico. Then there were always people going in and out of the state. A lot of people came into the state and a lot went out. We had a great deal of back and forth migration. Lumber workers might work in the Arizona woods one season and in Washington the next. There were snowbird miners who worked in Montana in the summer and came to the Arizona mines in

the winter. All of this led to new people, new ideas coming in. It was a very conservative state, and it still is, and some of the conservatives are relatives of mine on my mother's side. But I couldn't describe Arizona as a closed society. On the other hand, very few of us ever considered going out of the state to go to college. Most Arizonans tended to stay in the state to go to school. It was never a sealed-off kind of situation. There were diverse elements. And you had the right to organize in the state, which didn't exist here, or universally. There were always lots of tough little local situations, particularly around labor issues. But basically the First Amendment existed in Arizona, and you did have the right to organize and to fight like hell after you got organized. There was that basic right. Not everybody respected it, but most people and even most conservatives did.

JONES: And your parents were involved in certain of those organizations.

SALTER: Oh, yes, very much so. My father had been born in abject poverty, and was eventually adopted and partially raised by a prominent New England liberal, William McIntire Salter. Salter was a founder of the Ethical Culture Society in the United States, active

in the American Civil Liberties Union, one of sixty of so - although a white man - to issue the call to organization of the NAACP in 1909. He was a leader in the Indian Rights Association. That adoption was not a particularly happy one. My father received far more sympathetic help from Salter's brother-in-law, the philosopher William James. He was a very good person, and a good friend of my father's. My father grew up to some extent in the Salter situation. But there were those traditions of social conscience there too.

JONES: Was there ever a point in your life as a community organizer where your parents maybe contacted you and said, "Whoa, you've gone too far, this is much too dangerous, this is not what we were talking about!"

SALTER: I always had a feeling that there were points when they were on the verge of doing that. This was particularly true during the heights of the Jackson Movement in Mississippi, and also some other things in other parts of the South later. Yet they never communicated that to me. I think they were very much concerned. I also knew that from both sides of the family I drew a very solid kind of stubbornness. My father did think when I was in Mississippi that I should get bodyguards. We did take certain precautions. I should say that I did

not grow up a pacifist at all. I don't believe in violence as a means of solving problems. I do believe in violence as a means of protecting oneself, one's home and one's family. I should probably also add, and this may come as a surprise to my conservative critics, that I have been for most of my life a life member of the National Rifle Association of America.

JONES: Yes.

SALTER: But my parents - their letters certainly communicated concern, but they never suggested that I get out of this. They never did. I think that there were points where they must have been close to trying to encourage me to get the hell out of it all, but they never did. I grew up, I might add, in a tradition where my brothers and myself were all encouraged to find our own way, to do what we felt we needed to do.

JONES: I thought it was fascinating reading through your personal correspondence the other day the letter you got from your parents with regard to the mounting of the mass demonstrations in Jackson. I thought it was particularly interesting because I think for most of the white people who joined the Movement in the early 1960s, the very early 1960s, Ed King is a good example, they had to forfeit the love and best wishes of their family.

SALTER: No, I had firm backing. As I say, I think they probably were concerned. I know they were. Other relatives, including one who lives nearby, I think were certainly sympathetic with what I was doing, but for understandable reasons didn't feel that - in this particular case - feel that he could come over and see me. My mother's brother was for many years the Southern vice President of Union Carbide out of Birmingham. Our meetings were usually handled in a pretty cautious way.

JONES: Yes. I remember you told that story about your connections with your uncle at the Freedom Summer Reviewed program in Jackson last year, and I want to ask you a question or two about that later. Let me ask you this first: When did you first learn about the racial situation in Mississippi?

SALTER: Well, I knew the racial situation was not a good one, but then everybody, or almost everybody, knew that whether they conceded it openly or not. The truth is, though, that I hadn't been South at all as far as the Deep South is concerned. I had been in Texas a good bit. I knew Oklahoma very well. I guess I'd skipped across a few parts of Arkansas. But the Deep South itself was something I knew only through reading Faulkner,

Eudora Welty, visiting with my father who I think had spent about six months in Brookhaven. I'm not even sure what he was doing there. It was a long time ago. I just picked up various kinds of things. I knew it wasn't a good situation. I knew that black Southerners who I'd met, for example, in the Army, felt that it was going to be ages before things changed. White Southerners that I met in various capacities either did not want to talk about the situation or were themselves refugees from it and were saying essentially what the blacks I'd met were saying. I can't say that there was any great familiarity with the Deep South situation. Arizona had those ingredients in it. There's no question about that; and New Mexico and Texas. But even the parts of Texas that I was in were basically central and West Texas and not so much East Texas. In the spring of 1961 I was teaching at my first college teaching job up in Superior, Wisconsin, which is about as far north as you can get and still be in the United States. I was just in the process of marrying my wife, Eldri, and we've been married ever since. She is a Lutheran minister's daughter, originally from Moose Lake, Minnesota, who grew up for the most part in Minneapolis. Ethnically she is Swedish, Norweigan and

Lapp, L-A-P-P. We used to joke her about where she kept her reindeer. We were married in the spring of 1961. About that time I can recall reading a write-up, I think in Newsweek, about the Tougaloo library sit-in, which had occurred either in March or April of 1961. The name I think registered, and I tucked it away. Much was beginning to happen around the United States by that time. The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee had organized. There had been sit-ins. There had been some of this activity in the Southwest. Here we were up in Wisconsin, and we began to think about going South and spending some time in the Deep South, possibly as a teacher. We talked a little bit about this, and then we talked more about it during the Freedom Rides. We began to see pictures of beaten and bloody people in Alabama, and began to hear of the mass arrests in Mississippi. We still didn't really know how to get down there. With all due respect to my mother's brother, the Southern Vice President of Union Carbide, I didn't feel much like writing him and asking him, and I didn't think he would know probably. So I ended up writing to a man named Glen Smiley, who was executive secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a pacifist group for

which I've always had a high respect even though I am not myself really a pacifist in the purest sense. I'd had some contact with Smiley about some other things, foreign policy things, and so I wrote to him and said, "We are interested in going South. What would you suggest?" I knew he'd worked with Dr. King in Montgomery during the Montgomery bus boycott, and I was very much aware that Glen Smiley himself was a Southerner, a white Southerner from Alabama. In any case, Smiley wrote back and said, "There are two schools where it gets just as rough as it can ever get. One is as rough as the other. Why don't you write them both." One was Claflin College in Orangeburg, South Carolina, and the other one was Tougaloo. So I sat down and wrote them both. I told Eldri - and who knows what mysterious force works in all this - but I told Eldri I thought it would be Tougaloo. I told her that even before I sent the letters off. And as I recall, Claflin was interested but not sure whether they had an opening - Claflin was a black college too - and Tougaloo wrote and hired me sight unseen. So we came to Mississippi late in the summer of 1961. We went from Wisconsin to Arizona where we visited for a while, and then started South. After we had passed the Dallas-Fort Worth area, which would be the eastern outpost of our part of the

country, the eastern boundary of the Southwest, then from that time on I was in territory through which I'd never traveled. After a while we were in Marshall, Texas, then crossed into Shreveport, Louisiana. The foliage grew heavier, the mist rose from the ground like ghosts, and it was really very interesting. Crossing into Louisiana, an old white man whose son was playing a guitar at a gas station told me the latest Kennedy joke, which was "How can Kennedy expect to get a man on the moon when he can't even get a busload of niggers across Mississippi?" Other than that he was a cordial and nice old man, and his son was not bad with a guitar. Then we crossed into Mississippi at Vicksburg. It was on the old bridge. It was midnight. By this time we were really beginning to wonder what in the hell we'd gotten ourselves into. East Texas had been unreal, Louisiana had been more unreal than that, and here we were crossing into Mississippi on a bridge that seemed to me to be almost rickety. When we got to the end of the bridge, in the car lights two armed men stepped out. Now Arizona had border guards in those days whose purposes were many, I suppose. This seemed to be basically the same thing, except the official purpose was to collect toll for

crossing the bridge. But I had the feeling that we were crossing into another world, into another country, and that certainly proved to be the case. I will never forget that initial entrance into Mississippi; archaic border guards dressed somewhat haphazardly in uniforms, and it was midnight. They stopped us and collected the toll and looked us over very carefully.

JONES: You didn't tell them where you were going, did you?

SALTER: We didn't tell them where we were going, no. As I recall, the feeling I had was the less said the better. And then we crossed into Mississippi.

JONES: Do you remember the date?

SALTER: It would be just about the very end of August, 1961. I believe someone told me the next day that it was the hottest day of the year.

JONES: How old were you?

SALTER: Twenty-six, twenty-seven. Twenty-seven, I guess.

JONES: Did you know the extent of the repression that you found here?

SALTER: No, I was not prepared for that. I think my feeling was - well, first, I think we would have come anyway, even if we'd known the worst. But we didn't know the worst. I think my feeling was that it was a Southern version of Arizona, that is a very conservative place

with all kinds of right-wing groups, you know, going around talking about Communists and all that. A very bad racial situation, but I think I tended to think of it in terms of being pretty much a Southern version of Arizona: conservative and racist. But I didn't dream, for example, that Mississippi had created basically a police state, that it was essentially a closed society, and that well - I won't use the term fascist. I don't like to use that word because I think it has been over-used as much as has Communist. I might add that in all the time I lived in Arizona I never met a Communist for all the screaming and yelling about Communism. I don't believe there was one in the state. And in the time I was in Mississippi I never encountered a bona fide Communist. But what I wasn't prepared for was the basic police state organization that had developed, particularly stimulated by the Citizens Council and the Sovereignty Commission. I wasn't prepared for the existence of a state orthodoxy. I just wasn't prepared for that kind of thing. I'd never encountered that before in my life. There were people in Arizona who were out to impose orthodoxy, but there were a lot of other people who pushed it away. Here I found a situation virtually all of the black people were caught

up in a fear ethos for very good reasons, and a large number of white people were also caught up in a fear ethos. Basically the state had been captured by the Citizens Council and comparable movements, had developed a secret police: the Sovereignty Commission, and the papers with very few exceptions echoed the orthodoxy, and where the borders in many respects seemed almost sealed as far as new ideas coming in. I just wasn't prepared for this. I learned for example that Time magazine and the Wall Street Journal were being viewed as subversive publications. And yet, even then I didn't get the feeling of a system that was so deeply rooted and monolithic that it was beyond change. There were also many indications of white people of quiet good will. While this may not have been enough and it wasn't, it indicated that the orthodoxy, even though it appeared to be completely pervasive, was still not something that had seeped into everybody's life. As I learned more about the history of the state I could understand how much of this had come to pass. I probably also ought to add that the first adult book that I ever read was Gone With The Wind when I was in the third grade. I could understand how this had come to pass. There seemed little question in my mind, then

and now, that Ross Barnett, for example, was very much a product of his time and place, that he believed, and perhaps still does, in all of that. I remember Claude Sitton, one of the more capable New York Times reporters, telling Medgar Evers and myself - this was after he'd been around here for awhile - that he felt George Wallace of Alabama was a racial opportunist, but we all agreed, Medgar, myself and Sitton, that Barnett honestly believed everything he was saying. That was a frightening kind of sincerity, but it was sincerity. I still have not completely figured out Mississippi, even after all these years of thinking about it, but I think I have a reasonable handle on what happened here. Just jumping perhaps ahead of things I would have to say too that, while I know the things that have to be fought for and the things that have to be fought against, it's still I think difficult to make moral judgments about other people in situations as extraordinary as these were.

JONES: You're willing to give Barnett and Captain Ray and Allen Thompson and others an even break?

SALTER: Oh, yes. People are human beings, and it's hard to - you know, you can oppose what you perceive as negative historical forces and fight for the positive forces.

I really don't feel like saying, "Well, this was an evil person." I'll say somebody is a good person if they were good. I find it difficult to become too personally condemnatory about anyone who developed in this setting. I know the power of history. Well, we can perhaps return to this.

JONES: Yes.

SALTER: There are no people who aren't held to a large extent by the skeleton hand of the past. This was an awful situation, and still has a ways to go. Well, I just recall reading a statement by a well-known criminal lawyer of yore in the United States, Clarence Darrow, who said he never looked at a soul in prison without thinking that he himself could very easily have gone that path had his personal history, his family history, had the cards just fallen in a different way. So I have never felt, here or in Arizona or in anyplace during my years as a community organizer and advocate, I have never felt like pursuing a personal and judgmental kind of tack. If they've done nice things then I'll say they've done nice things. If they've done negative things I might say that too, but I'm not going to write them off as being inherently evil. They may be wrong, they may be mixed-up, but they are still human beings.

JONES: That's really something for you to say that, you who have been the victim of institutionalized violence. That's really having the courage to live by what you preach, so to speak. Had you done organizing before you came to Mississippi? Tell me something about the training for a community organizer.

SALTER: I teach it. In the last number of years I've taught classes in community organizing and community development and things of this sort. Actually, it's something that you really have to learn by doing it. It is the hardest, most tedious work there is. As I indicated, I think, I got started early in Arizona around 1955 after I got out of the Army and started school. I did a lot of volunteer work in organized labor, which in some quarters was viewed as being very subversive, and is still perceived by some as being that. I was certainly involved in the student rights situations. We organized all of the student dormitories at Arizona State University out of my room. That's where we started. We organized all of the dormitories, and even got the backing of fraternities and sororities, in our push to upgrade the quality of food at Arizona State University, and force the University to hire paid desk clerks to take messages in the dormitories. That was in 1958.

A couple of years after that I organized a large-scale movement on the Arizona campuses that was directed against compulsory ROTC even though I was a veteran and had no personal stake in the thing. I didn't like the idea of compulsory ROTC. I'd never been against ROTC too much itself, but I just didn't feel people should be forced to do it. We didn't get that thrown out at that point, that victory came years later. Those were some of the things: early student rights kinds of things, volunteer work with the copper miners, things of that sort. So all of that served as a kind of, I'd say training ground for my arrival here in Mississippi. I'd already been called Communist quite a great deal. The truth is, I think to state it very candidly, I've always been personally very much opposed to the theory and practice of Communism. I've never perceived it as being the answer to the problems of the American people, and I'm not sure it's the answer to the problems of any people. I was fortunate as I developed as a young person in gathering from my parents, and I think from my own good sense, that there were several important dimensions to people, individually and collectively. The material dimension: people need a decent wage, enough to eat, health care, the right

to a decent home. People also need to be free. Neither one of those is worth a damn without the other; free to think and say their thoughts, free to organize, free to read what they want to read, to write what they want to write. And also, again, one parent being a very good Anglican and one a very good Catholic, I always grew up with a very strong sense of the primary importance of a good relationship with the Creator. The Creation leads to a whole spiritual dimension. Also, I was influenced very much in the late 1950s by some of the old time IWWs, the Wobblies.

JONES: Yes, Wobblies.

SALTER: I met a lot of these guys. The Wobbly movement, which scared the hell out of the American corporations and the government, was a very indigenous revolutionary movement that developed in the western frontier around the turn of the century, and certainly left its mark on American history before it was brutally repressed by the federal government and then later after the Communists came along, undermined by them. But the Wobblies, who've been described as a cross between Henry David Thoreau and Wyatt Earp, were free radicals in the best tradition of indigenous America. The chairman of the IWW was a Cherokee Indian, Frank Little, who was later lynched in Montana. William Haywood,

one of its primary leaders, had been a miner and cowboy and prospector in Utah and Idaho. The Wobbly movement very much recognized the importance of freedom as well as material well-being; free radicals in that sense. Also, the Wobblies had a good respect for Jesus Christ, whom they used to refer to as "Jerusalem Slim," or "Fellow Worker Jesus." I was much influenced by some of those old timers that I met in Arizona and New Mexico, and also to some extent in Utah and the state of Washington. In many respects, we organized and ran the Jackson Movement very much as if it were a Wobbly kind of campaign.

JONES: And did you believe in the promise of social movements even though most every social movement throughout history failed and broke in blood or deceit?

SALTER: Well, the Wobblies were just hammered out of existence. I knew - by the time I got here I wasn't worried about people calling me Communist. It used to make me mad. The last big fistfight I ever got into was in Arizona when I was twenty-six. A man called me a Communist in a bar and we had a hell of a fight, which neither of us won, I guess. He went off to his doctor and I went off to mine. But after that I began to remember more and more the old Micmac Indian saying, that when

you go fishing for trout you have to expect to be bitten by mosquitos. And so when I got to Mississippi and was called a Communist - it used to make me mad, rile me up - I was used to that sort of thing. I also knew that you have to take a long-range view of things. I knew, for example, that the whole American Labor Movement was built on the shambles of many many earlier efforts, that all of these things built it up in an accumulated kind of way. You have to shoot as high as you can, and you have to move as fast as you can, hit it as hard as you possibly can hit it, but even then it can take a long time. I knew what had happened to the American Labor Movement, that again and again it had reached high for a variety of reasons, and had still never come close really to attaining the visionary ideal. I wasn't particularly surprised when the government moved as the 1960s unfolded to try to inhibit the Civil Rights Movement. I wasn't surprised when people were co-opted. I found it sad. I fought against those things, but it didn't surprise me. Probably we could conclude the 1960s for that reason, my wife and I, without having tumbled into a pot of bitterness. You know, you just keep at it. The save the world business is a tough damn business. It takes a long time. In the

Mississippi of 1961 it was clear that there were certainly no visible signs that things were on the brink of change. The state was very tightly controlled. The NAACP units, such as they were, were made up certainly of many brave people but were not engaged in social action or any kind of organizing. Medgar Evers was not really a community organizer. He was a very courageous, very committed kind of a lone operator. He almost had to be in this setting where repression, sharp repression in the latter 1950s in Mississippi had shattered most of the existing NAACP units and reduced the others to basically token groups. SNCC, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, had just come into the state about the time we got here, and that was still a very embryonic kind of thing. Only a faith in people and the power of the Creator and all the Angels and Saints and Guardian Spirits and whatnot could carry any of us to a point where we felt this would change. We knew somehow that it would, and worked in that direction. If you looked at the thing empirically there was every reason to believe, on the face of it, that Mississippi not only had no intention of changing, but simply never would. I mean wherever we went there were police. The local press preached a poisonous kind of hate. You could read about victories as close as Memphis, New

Orleans, but nothing seemed to be happening here except swift repression, legal and extralegal, and economic reprisals. Yet you kept at it.

JONES: Right. You just brought up many things I want to talk about. This is kind of where your book picks up, October of 1961. I did want to ask you about your role when you accepted the position as adult advisor to the NAACP Youth Council, and also something about the atmosphere at Tougaloo about mounting a movement directed toward effecting massive social change in Mississippi. Were the students ready for that? Was the faculty ready for that?

SALTER: The answer would be no in both cases. The Tougaloo College NAACP chapter had engaged in the library sit-in, and also in the early fall of 1961 in a move against the segregated state fair. But frankly, I'd say by late fall of 1961 the Tougaloo College NAACP chapter was functionally non-existent. The West Jackson Youth Council was functionally non-existent, the NAACP Youth Council over in west Jackson. The one at Campbell College had pretty well fallen apart. The North Jackson NAACP Youth Council, which consisted pretty much at that time of the Virden Addition in north Jackson, had about a dozen members. Now that was the group that asked me in the fall of 1961 to become his adult advisor. Not

much was happening at Tougaloo at all. Speakers were coming in and out. Dr. King came in and out. Most of the Tougaloo students were not involved. Most of the faculty, virtually all of the faculty, were not involved in a direct kind of sense. On the other hand, it should be pointed out that Dr. Borinski played, always played a very significant role in getting people together, and sewing the seeds of discontent, in his very kindly and professional way. I say that with much affection. The president of Tougaloo, Dr. A. D. Beittel, was certainly behind things. But not much was going on there. I'd say most of the Tougaloo students were quite uninvolved, and most of the faculty were uninvolved. Around Jackson the various youth councils, the NAACP youth councils, had pretty well fallen apart, if indeed they had ever been very substantial. The one group that was trying to do something was this North Jackson Youth Council. That had some people in it who were Tougaloo students, and also some high school students. This was the group which included Colia Liddell, now Colia Liddell Lafayette - a good person you might want to interview.

JONES: Yes. Is she here in Jackson?

SALTER: Lives here in Jackson, yes. I have her address. I'll

see if I can't do that for you. Colia came up to me after that American Government class I was teaching and began to draw me into the thing. So we started, myself as advisor to the North Jackson Youth Council. We built up to a group that had rougly 500 members all over the city in a little more than a year. We developed from nine or ten scared kids and as an advisor I was kind of scared too - to a group that numbered about 500. We absorbed what was left of the other youth councils. This is the group then that launched the boycott.

JONES: Yes.

SALTER: We always had in the North Jackson Youth Council Tougaloo students, and a few very courageous Jackson State students because at that time that was a repressive institution. Dr. Reddix was a very conservative person. And we took in the remnants of the West Jackson Youth Council and so on. So the North Jackson Youth Council became the youth council for the Jackson area. It grew very substantially. At the same time, though, about a year after all that began, around the time the boycott was really getting underway, Tougaloo College students decided they should rejuvenate their old Tougaloo College NAACP chapter, and so they did that and asked

my wife Eldri to become its advisor. So Eldri was advisor to the Tougaloo NAACP chapter and I was advisor to the North Jackson Youth Council. By that time we were moving toward the point where we were perceived as the Jackson Movement, where we reached out to bring the very few CORE people into it, SNCC people, any person of good will. We were not organizationally conscious in that sense. Medgar had to be, because he worked for the NAACP, was paid by the national office. We will talk more about the tragic bind he was in.

JONES: Yes.

SALTER: But he had to sell membership cards and things like that. He was aware that we stopped doing that after a certain point. We concentrated on bringing people in and developing indigenous leadership. We focused initially then on the boycott.

JONES: The great majority of your recruits while you were organizing for the boycott were high school students, were they not?

SALTER: Yes.

JONES: Were high school students the only ones at that time who were hot-headed enough, that daring, to get involved in something that dangerous: a boycott?

SALTER: I believe that's a good way to put it. The college

students - there were certainly some college students who were in it right from the beginning: Dorie Ladner, for example, at Tougaloo, and Robert Honeysucker, who I think now teaches there, played an active role. So there was always a sprinkling of college students, you know, who were much with it; Colia epitomized that. But on the other hand, the high school students had reached the point where they perceived the injustices very clearly, and they also saw the vision very clearly. They just didn't feel very inhibited. They were not thinking too much about careers. There were the normal concerns, of course, and we always respected these, that something they did could bring Citizens Council wrath on their parents. You may have noticed in the book that we picked the initial pickets very carefully, always. We certainly weren't out to get people killed, nor parents fired from their jobs. But the high school students were basically firebrands, and they were the backbone of the boycott and the backbone of the mass marches. When our Youth Council really began to feather and flower out in November and December of 1962, I think we had some members who were nine and ten years old and some who were twenty-six and twenty-seven. It just covered an enormous range. But far and away the heaviest

membership would be high school students.

JONES: And did you ever get any pressure from the NAACP crying, "These are just kids!"

SALTER: No, Medgar understood what it was all about. The tragedy of Medgar Evers' existence was that he was always torn between the grass roots people with whom he so closely identified and to whom he was so deeply committed and loyal - that's where his instincts led him - while at the same time the national office of the NAACP was stodgy, inhibited by federal pressure, very much inhibited, and inhibited by fiscal concerns. You know, they were very very stodgily middle-class. These people were always minimizing the role of the students, and always trying to use Medgar as a control mechanism on the Mississippi scene. He, in turn, did not let that happen. He had to move adroitly and skillfully in Jackson to avoid playing the role that the national office wanted him to play, that is as a control mechanism. So Medgar knew everything we were doing. I always kept him posted. We had a very good relationship. He always knew what we were doing. He had to walk a tightrope, and we can appreciate that. He was always intensely loyal to the grass roots people. He was a man who'd been through a great deal and in no way was a hater. He was just not a hater

at all. He used to have, from a segregationist standpoint, a very disconcerting habit. He'd come up to somebody like police captain, and later deputy chief, J. L. Ray - sort of Jackson's Bull Connor.

JONES: J. L. Ray?

SALTER: J. L. Ray. And Captain Ray was not the grimmest person in the world. He had a human side, but he was still very much a repressive trooper in the regime's machine. Medgar would go up to Ray and stick out his hand and say, "How are you, Captain Ray?" and before Ray knew, Ray being a person of basic good instincts, Ray would stick out his hand, and thus Ray would be shaking the hand of a black man. This was very disconcerting for Ray and for another police official, Pierce, M. B. Pierce.

JONES: Chief of Detectives.

SALTER: Chief of Detectives, yes. I understood from other sources that they used to comment on how bothered they were when Medgar Evers would come up and do that and before they knew what they were doing they'd be shaking his hand. But he was that kind of person. Medgar was a very committed person. He fought hard for causes. He was very much committed to the grass roots people of Mississippi, and always envisioned a genuinely

integrated society. He'd gone through all of this without picking up any discernable emotions of hate.

JONES: Yes. I read in your correspondence something really interesting about Medgar Evers that you wrote to someone: that the age of mass demonstrations and movement commitment on a grand scale was not really for Medgar Evers because he was really a trailblazer, a lone wolf, as you describe him, out in the wilds of Mississippi making connections in the most perilous of circumstances.

SALTER: Yes. And his martyrdom was the end of one era and the beginning of another. His very martyrdom brought Mississippi to the attention of the world. This is one of the major contributions of the Jackson Movement, that it brought the Mississippi situation to full attention of the country and the world. After Medgar's death it was no longer an isolated, lonely backwater.

JONES: I wanted to ask you something about his death. People have told me that he spoke very eloquently about his imminent death and the possibility of his being assassinated. Did you ever hear him express that? Their thought was that it was not a fear of his, but he was quite open about the reality of doing what he was doing and its consequences.

SALTER: Offhand, I can't remember Medgar being that grimly

fatalistic. He had nine firearms. He wasn't an aggressive practitioner of violence, but he certainly believed in the right to keep and bear arms to protect one's self, one's family and one's home. He took all possible precautions against getting killed. I think, though, that he knew - you know, he took the job in 1954 as field secretary of the NAACP in Mississippi - I think he knew certainly, as did his wife Myrlie, what could ultimately happen. We all knew that. Anyone who became involved in the movement certainly ran the risk of getting killed. But Medgar certainly did not dwell on that. He certainly was very discouraged and very tired in his final days before his death. I think it is possible, and I have heard this, that he had a kind of premonition. But even though he was aware of all the risks he was running, as everyone, I think, was, I never had the impression that he dwelled on it, the inevitability of death. Medgar was making plans - we used to talk about it in the spring of 1963, right there in our home we talked about his entering the University of Mississippi Law School in the fall of 1964. He planned really to do that. There are also some indications that at the very end of his life he was giving serious consideration to breaking with the

national NAACP because, I would say, of the very poor role it played in the Jackson situation.

JONES: Right.

SALTER: But I never had the impression that he dwelt on that, on death. He was always cheerful, and I never had the impression that it was a forced cheerfulness. I think he was naturally a cheerful, optimistic person. He was certainly saddened by the atrocities that he encountered, many of which he investigated and made reports on, but I always had the impression that he was someone whose eyes were on the sun, who liked life, who was devoted to his family.

JONES: What was the source of his fatigue and depression at the end of his life?

SALTER: Well, I think it was that he was very much aware of the undermining that was being carried out by the national NAACP. The national NAACP, as Medgar explained it to me after we really got to know one another, after I'd been around for a while - we got on well, we shared many common values - the national NAACP, according to Medgar - and I heard something of this from someone else not too much later - had made a basic arrangement with the federal government back in the 1950s with respect to Mississippi. Eisenhower was president then. The

arrangement was basically that the campaign in Mississippi would be pursued in the courts, and that there would be no grass roots, direct action kinds of things. This had been tried when parents got themselves together right after the 1954 Supreme Court decision, parents in Yazoo City and some other places, and pressed for the integration of the schools, black parents, and these movements were destroyed by the Citizens Council's physical and economic reprisals. In any event, according to Medgar, around 1956 or 1957, in that period of time, the national NAACP and the Eisenhower administration reached an agreement to the effect that nothing would occur in Mississippi direct action, grass roots-wise, until every other Southern state had been pretty well taken care of, and that the NAACP would pursue a legalistic course of action in Mississippi. We would not become involved in demonstrations and that kind of thing. Remember Montgomery had already occurred in 1955-1956, and so there was a harbinger of what could occur. Also, SCLC was also talking about more and more of a program of direct action in the late 1950s. So an agreement of some kind existed between the federal government and the national NAACP, as Medgar recounted it to me. And I heard this from at least one other source later. It

involved the national NAACP not becoming involved in grass roots direct action kinds of things in Mississippi. Now, this was a misreading, of course, of the whole situation. For one thing, legalistic processes didn't work in this state at that point; political action was meaningless because people couldn't register to vote, they couldn't pay poll tax. At the same time, Mississippi, not exclusively because this gives Mississippi too much credit or too much something or other, but to a large extent Mississippi was the bulwark of the Southern resistance. Now, there were some other bulwark areas too. This wasn't the only Southern state that practiced some awful horrors. Eastern North Carolina was a poisonous area; Southwest Georgia; Southwest Alabama; Northern Louisiana; places like that were terrible, although Mississippi was a state-wide situation. I think it was certainly clear to Medgar, I would say by the very early 1960s if indeed it wasn't clear before that, that Mississippi was not going to change through court action, and that barriers could fall in Memphis, they could fall in Tuscaloosa, they could fall everywhere, but unless they fell in Mississippi it would have no effect on Mississippi. But there was that agreement apparently between the federal government and

the national NAACP. Also, the national NAACP was just plain afraid of direct action. These were basically middle-class, genteel kinds of people. Roy Wilkins didn't come off, you know, as a Wobbly agitator. He's a very courtly, very dignified kind of person, to whom the ideas of direct action were very alien from a social class standpoint. Gloster Current, the national director of branches of the NAACP, was very much a Machiavellian, and that's a very kind word to characterize him. And also the national NAACP was fiscally very very conservative, didn't like to spend money. One of the oddest comments I ever heard made in this state came from Gloster Current, national director of branches, who was down in Jackson trying to pour cold water all over the Jackson Movement, and I recall that he made a comment in a mass meeting to the effect that, in all the years since there'd been NAACP groups in Mississippi, they had given less in all those years to the national office than the national office had given in one day of giving bail bond money to the Jackson Movement. That was a pretty cynical comment, but I think it indicated where they were at. Medgar saw all of those forces at work as a paid staff representative of the NAACP, the Mississippi field secretary that was unfortunately not paid by

Mississippi people. He was paid by the national office, and they tried to use that to exert control over him. They could never quite pull it off. He was shrewd, shrewd enough to survive years of being Mississippi field secretary in this setting, and at the same time shrewd enough to maneuver his way out of the clutches of the New York City folks. But if he was, and he was, tired and discouraged in the last days of his life it was because of what they were doing to the Jackson Movement. They had cut off bail bond, attempted to split the leadership and to reduce the movement to essentially a non-direct action kind of movement. He knew what was going on, yes. The federal government was very much involved in encouraging the national NAACP to put cold water on it. The federal government itself was moving very adroitly to try to undermine things. The choice of the Kennedy brothers was J. P. Coleman for governor, and the Kennedys, we heard on good authority, were afraid that anything in Mississippi might lead to a situation where they would feel obligated to send federal troops down here, which they saw as being disastrous not only to the Coleman election but to President Kennedy's Southern support generally. Hence, the easiest thing to do then was to prevent any kind of grass roots upheaval in Mississippi.

JONES: That's quite an insight.

SALTER: I might add that I am not an admirer of the Kennedys.

JONES: Yes, we'll talk more about the Kennedys. Let me ask you something else about Medgar.

SALTER: Fine.

JONES: I interviewed Reverend R. L. T. Smith, and Reverend Smith told me that on the night of Medgar's murder that Byron De La Beckwith was in the audience there at the church during the mass meeting. Do you recall any of the particulars of the night?

SALTER: Yes. For one thing, Beckwith - the night that Lena Horne, the black singer, appeared in early June at the Masonic Temple, Beckwith was there with two people, some friends of his. Byron Beckwith was somebody that we did not know. There were all kinds of strange white people floating around. Some were people who'd come down from the North in an ostensibly helpful capacity, some were local reporters, reporters from all over, all kinds of people. I have a very vague recollection of this group of three white men who came into the Masnoic Temple that evening in early June, some days before Medgar was killed, and sat down and were there for most of the program, and then left. This was Beckwith and two people with him. Now, Mrs. Doris Allison, who was

the very sensible and very hard-driving president of the Jackson branch of the NAACP, has told me that on the night that Medgar was killed Byron Beckwith was driving in the area. She recognized him later after he was arrested. He was driving in the area around the church where Medgar had his last mass meeting. But I don't believe that he was in the audience. According to Mrs. Allison he was driving around.

JONES: Did Medgar talk to the audience the night of his murder?

SALTER: Yes. The national office people had asked him to sell NAACP tee shirts, and he gave a little talk on the civil rights situation. But at that point the movement was in great disarray, and he was himself very much caught between conflicting forces.

JONES: Were you there?

SALTER: Yes, I was. The primary point of his speech, as I recall, was to go through the motions without much enthusiasm of selling tee shirts for the national NAACP. He was carrying a load of those when he got out of his car and was shot in the back. I believe that Reverend Smith's recollection may just be a little faulty. On the other hand, Mrs. Allison does feel that Beckwith was in the area of the church. That may be what Reverend Smith remembers.

JONES: Right. At the beginning of the boycott around Christmas of 1962 Medgar gave you full support in the recruiting of high school students for the demonstrations and the spreading around of leaflets for the boycott?

SALTER: He did. It was clear - way back in there we had expected bond money from the NAACP and we didn't get it. I mentioned that in the book. As a consequence we had to go to other groups to get the bail money, and it was months before the national NAACP even recognized that there was an effective boycott in Jackson. I think initially Medgar wasn't too hopeful that the boycott would turn into much. He wanted it to, but there had been little efforts at boycotts before, one or two efforts; you know, a bunch of leaflets would be handed out and a speech would be made, and then things would go basically down the tube after that. They were never long-lived kinds of things. I don't think he really expected much to come out of this boycott. I think he thought it was a good try, but I think he, even he had begun to question whether the black people of the Jackson area could get together and stick together at that point. I think he saw that happening down the road. I think really that most people didn't think the boycott would work out. We did. We did. We had talked to

a lot of grass roots people; the Youth Council members had done a pretty thorough survey in their own way in the fall of 1962 as we began to check into the viability of a boycott. What happened is that the other side was its own worst enemy. When my wife and I and about four students picketed on Capitol Street, about the first time there had ever been a civil rights picket, we were arrested by between fifty and 100 police. They blocked traffic all over. It was the coldest day of the year. If the other side had been shrewd they would've just let us picket. We couldn't have picketed for more than forty-five minutes. It was just as cold as it could be. They moved in and arrested us with that horde of police. And then, to keep adding gravy to the thing, Mayor Thompson went on television to denounce us all as outside agitators; he was going to sue us all for $1,000,000. My wife was shown being arrested with her sign: "Negro Shoppers, Don't Buy on Capitol Street." It was prominently displayed. The whole thing got off to a roaring start. We had all the leaflets there, and we started feeding them into the community. Well, I remember how happy Medgar was when he arrived at our house at Tougaloo College right after I got out of jail. He was bringing a copy of the Jackson Daily News which said, "Allen Says

Won't Tolerate Pickets," or something like that, "Will sue for $1,000,000." Medgar was just ecstatic, and at that point I think he sensed that it was going to work out. Black patronage on Capitol Street had been heavy and now dropped way way down very quickly.

JONES: Before Christmas of 1962?

SALTER: Yes. Almost immediately. And then leaflets were going out all over in a clandestine kind of way. Certainly by January, January of 1963, Medgar felt that the boycott was working. But I can't fault him for his original pessimism. He had worked for years in this state, even before he became NAACP field secretary, trying to get people together, and nothing ever came together simply because the system was so damn divisive and oppressive. He wasn't an organizer in that way, but he was certainly an excellent individual advocate kind of person. But I remember how very pleased he was when he came rushing into our house to greet us after we got out of jail with a copy of the Jackson Daily News. That was the first time that there had been mass publicity on any civil rights thing in Jackson. The Freedom Riders had been an outside force. This was an indigenous, grass rootsy kind of thing. And Thompson was such a help, Mayor Thompson. The more he talked the deeper he

entrenched the boycott. Later they grew shrewder and didn't say that much, but in that initial springtime we should have given Allen Thompson a fifth of condolence scotch.

JONES: Right. Well the boycott was about the most radical step the NAACP was willing to take; that was as radical as they got in attempting to affect social change.

SALTER: They didn't even want that, the national office, they didn't want that to go on in Jackson. I have a feeling that they tried to encourage Medgar to stamp out the boycott, but I can't say that for certain. What I do know is that they gave us absolutely no help, and wouldn't even talk about it in any of their publications. And then, damn it, when they wrote up their official history of what happened in Jackson, they said that the boycott started in mid-May. It actually had started months before. It was a very effective boycott, devastatingly effective early on, and we worked like hell. But certainly by February and March of 1963 Medgar felt that the boycott was a major thing. He always helped it and always supported it. I say only that I think at the very beginning he was pessimistic about whether people could stick together. But they certainly did. He watched it grow. He was certainly loyal and committed.

It was, however, about the only thing we could do. Political action was out of the question. If people can't register to vote, you know, political action is a pretty difficult thing to make into anything meaningful. We didn't have the bail bond for mass demonstrations at that point. So what we did was ask people to do what they could do best. We weren't asking fear-filled people to go out into the street and demonstrate, we didn't have the money to do it anyway, but we were just asking them to do nothing at all. This again would be a good IWW activity. It just grew tremendously. We knew by the spring of 1963 that we'd reached out and grasped history. We knew this was going to turn into something. We couldn't foresee the tortuous kinds of internal machinations that became so pronounced in June. I was not surprised when Medgar was killed. You know, I've always responded to announcements that somebody has died or been killed, at least to the bearer of the news, almost poker-faced. That doesn't mean that I'm not torn up inside. I am not one to weep and wail in any visible fashion. It's just my manner. I certainly was not surprised when he was killed. I was not surprised when Ed King and I were almost killed. Nothing that happened here surprised me.

JONES: But at that time the movement had moved into a new phase.

SALTER: Yes.

JONES: Your early bail bond, was that paid by the NAACP?

SALTER: No, that was paid by the Southern Conference Educational Fund, SCEF, and the Gandhi Society for Human Rights, and a radical lawyer in New York named Victor Rabinowitz with a small family foundation. The national NAACP didn't put up a dime. Then we had a couple more pickets, and we were able through Medgar's help to get black property owners to put up bonds for Charles Bracy and Dorie Ladner. In the spring we had more pickets and we put together the same outside money combinations of CORE, SCEF, Rabinowitz and so on. Picketing was $500 apiece. If anybody had been caught distributing one of the leaflets, I think it was a $100 fine for distributing civil rights literature or something.

JONES: Even for juveniles?

SALTER: Yes, $500 was the bond. And then later, during the mass arrests, they let some of the kids out on their own recognizance. The kids wanted to stay in, that was a movement tactic. That was Medgar's understanding of it too. The national NAACP wanted them out, so they got them out of jail. The whole thing was a kaleidoscopic and bizarre kind of experience trying to deal with the national

NAACP, because it said one thing and would really do another thing. It was not honest with us. So while the Jackson Movement was slowly developing the boycott into the resolution I made on the twelfth of May to the state NAACP Board of Directors, and out of that resolution came a letter that Mrs. Allison, Medgar and myself signed that sort of threw down the gauntlet to the power structure. As we went through all of those phases the internal situation became infinitely more complex, you know, week by week and day by day. So there was not only the struggle to mobilize people at the grass roots, a struggle which came along very smoothly and with surprising ease as we moved into the period of mass demonstrations, as we moved into all of that - of course, you had the fight with the segregationists in a direct kind of way, you know, all the legal intricacies, outwitting the police, outmaneuvering Captain Ray, how to get pickets downtown before you were stopped - but we then had the whole internal thing we had to try to deal with. It was certainly very very complex. I've never had a drinking problem at all. I'm fortunate in that regard. I like to drink Scotch, and some other things. During the whole Jackson Movement I never touched a drop of liquor. I simply didn't because I felt that every faculty I had

had to be operating in the clearest possible kind of way. I didn't want to be caught relaxing into a pleasant haze through the efforts of Johnny Walker Red and then suddenly have a phone ring and a crisis be upon me. As I recall, I never touched a drop during most of the time the movement was underway.

JONES: That's interesting, because there were a lot of accusations made not specifically about the Jackson Movement but about the civil rights workers who came down a year later who would drink and were sexually promiscuous and that they were hedonistic in the extreme.

SALTER: Yes. The movement seemed to me to be really pretty sedate, almost puritanical. It's possible, certainly as more young people from other parts of the country came into the Southern Movement, you know, they may have brought some different ways of doing things with them; although I think these ways of doing things was going on at Ole Miss, Mississippi State. I'm not sure if there is a new mortality or if it is just perceived. But, for the most part, thinking of the people we were most in touch with, this movement seemed almost puritanical. Medgar took an occasional drink, but drank very very rarely. I drank virtually nothing. I don't recall Ed King ever having much to drink. One thing, of course,

liquor was technically illegal.

JONES: And taxed.

SALTER: Yes, and taxed at the same time. We couldn't afford to be put in a position where they could get us on something. I think our reasons for going very slow on anything like liquor were simply that you had to always be prepared to deal quickly with a crisis at any time of the day or night. You were just in no position to impair yourself. You had an assignment, and you had to always be ready to jump out of bed at a moment's notice. There were certainly times when I could've done with a good drink.

JONES: Needed a belt. Let me take a different tack here because we are going to be talking specifically about the Jackson Movement for about the last hour that you're able to spend with us. How was the theory of nonviolent resistance that was demonstrated by the SNCC movement in the Delta adapted here in Jackson? Did you believe in it strongly?

SALTER: In the first place, I have always been wary of people who preached aggressive violence. I've always been wary of the guy who talked too much about violence. There're a couple of reasons for that: one, he might be a damn fool, however well-meaning. He might be some kind of

police spy. We've heard many stories about what occurred in the late 1960s when some of the biggest advocates of violence were with the FBI or the police station or something. I mean personally I have always been in kind of a quandary on violence. I'm not a pacifist at all. The Indian side of me, that's half of me, certainly includes people who were not pacifists. They fought courageously against the incursions into their land by the Europeans. No one ever called the Penobscots and the Micmacs cowards. And I'm even also a little bit Mohawk, an Iroquois tribe. Several different ways I could trace my lineage back to Revolutionary War soldiers, and I know that the English king wasn't thrown out of here by a quiet request. But, aside from all of that, in this setting it was very clear to me, and always has been, that tactical nonviolence made good sense. For one thing, the other side was just waiting for the chance to really lay us out. If we had given them the opportunity, they would've cheerfully had a Sharpeville massacre. I think they were very ready for that. Now, I'm sure there were some policemen who weren't at that point. Recently I've heard some interesting accounts of white Jackson police refusing to have anything to do with using dogs on black kids because they said, "We

have kids of our own." This was during the Jackson Movement, but I only heard about this very recently. But I think there were always people on the other side, police, sheriff's deputies, others, who would've liked the opportunity to just pull triggers and cut down some of these, as they perceived them, niggers and reds. So it made good sense to not give them the opportunity. Okay, secondly, I think there was a recognition on the part of most of us that violence really settled no basic issues in any kind of a deep way. And that began to get into the more Gandhian aspects of things. I didn't feel that by practicing nonviolence that we were converting the souls of our antagonists. I never felt that and I still don't. There may have been individual instances where this occurred. But by and large I've never agreed with Martin King and people like that to the effect that nonviolence converted the enemy, but I think it made damn good sense to be nonviolent, I mean tactically nonviolent. I don't think that by letting the police club us we somehow reached whomever was clubbing us. I just really don't think we did. I'm not a Gandhian. When my home was fired into at Tougaloo College and we had comparable things happen we stood armed guard and quitely let the other side know that we

were armed. This used to upset some people, mostly from outside Mississippi, who wanted to view the movement as being full of goodness and light, you know, out to convert the other side through Gandhian nonviolence. And then there were other people whom I recall complimented me on the splendidly nonviolent example I set at the Woolworth sit-in. I just sat there and was beaten around for several hours. My retort there was that there were too goddamn many to fight. I was functioning in a nonviolent way, but I didn't feel particularly nonviolent in the Woolworth sit-in.

JONES: And you were the outstanding example of nonviolent resistance as the man hit you in the head and face.

SALTER: Yes, but I didn't hate these people.

JONES: Were you not raging inside?

SALTER: No, I was probably scared as hell, and also somewhat numbed to be very honest about it. I didn't feel that I was converting any of the people by letting them beat me up. My instincts certainly were, to some extent, to be able to turn around and shoot these people. There was that side of me. I don't recall really feeling hate. The whole fear thing is worth talking about.

JONES: Oh, yes, please.

SALTER: It's always seemed to me that there were three reactions.

Well, first, anyone who was involved in civil rights in Mississippi or in comparable places and who wasn't scared, I would say, was essentially a damn fool. It made good sense to be afraid. Now the question was how do you react to the fear? You can't react to it by retreating, that's not a good reaction. You could not react to fear by proceeding ahead recklessly. That would be another reaction to fear. We reacted to our fear by moving simply, steadily, and truly, through these situations. On the Indian side of our family the head of the family was a wildcat, and in the case of our Canadian relatives, a lynx. So the totem of our family would be a cat; a cat moves in a circuitous kind of way. It can move very quickly when it needs to, but it also knows when to watch and wait, you know, and observe in a stealthy kind of fashion. Certainly in the Mississippi of that time, and in a lot of these other situations, one: it was sensible to be afraid; secondly: it was important not to retreat, not to plunge ahead in a reckless, wild way, but instead to move as though you were moving through an everglades, very steadily using our eyes, ears, and whatever ESP we have in operation. So we reacted then to fear by what I would call, for the most part, a steady forward type of movement, but

occasionally pausing to scout the turf, the terrain, sometimes getting behind a bush and watching, sometimes moving very quickly, full ahead. Anyone who was down here then who says he wasn't afraid, he's either a liar or something. Medgar was afraid. Everybody was!

JONES: Right. Why don't we take a break right now and I'll go get us some cokes. What about that?

SALTER: Okay. Why don't you guys go and I'll puff my pipe and catch up on my nicotine.

JONES: Okay.

SALTER: Fine.

(Break)

JONES: We were talking about fear and hatred and rage and all the emotions an early civil rights worker must have experienced in this state. In your book you say that the only time you felt real hatred and full of rage was the time you and Ed King were involved in an automobile wreck - when was that?

SALTER: That was on the eighteenth of June, in 1963. Yes, I think I really felt hate, but it was not just because of the wreck, it was a culmination of things: Medgar was dead, the movement was in disarray, hundreds of people had been injured, and I did feel hate. I got over that in a hurry. That sense of hate did not linger beyond a certain point. The emotion I felt as I lay in

the wreck and watching the whites cheering and jeering was, well, it just kind of brought up everything that had been building up unconsciously. I'm not a Freudian and I'm not a Marxist, so I don't get into these theoretical things too much. I think there was a kind of natural anger that was building up within me, and I think that was the final thing, to see those people laughing. I thought Ed King was dead! I thought I was very close to dying. Medgar was dead. I could look out and they were cheering and jeering as though it was a very festive occasion. If they had been poor whites I would have felt more sympathy. These were well-educated, well-dressed people. I think I've always been sympathetic to the plight of the poor white. I've just written an article for Sojourner's, a leading Christian social action magazine, which they are going to publish later this winter or spring, which in many respects defends the poor white. I take the position in that article that you can't deal with the problem of the Ku Klux Klan by trying to ban it. It may be one thing to punish criminal acts, but you can't ban ideas. We've got to get into the reasons poor white people feel this way. You've got to deal with the economic thing. So I've always had a lot of basic sympathy for

the poor white, and I don't believe I've ever used terms like "cracker," or "redneck," in all of this. The people around our car cheering and jeering were well-dressed people. I thought at that point, "Well, you bastards, you know exactly what's going on here, and you should know better." But they had grown up in that same, I would say mental prison, that everyone else had. I got over that in a hurry. In the book I mention it because it was certainly a significant emotional kind of thing, but in a matter of a few days it had subsided.

JONES: Tell me specifically where that happened.

SALTER: It happened at Stillwood and North West Street.

JONES: I know exactly where that is.

SALTER: We had a hamburger at McDonald's right up the street there the other day.

JONES: Yes. You were traveling north?

SALTER: Yes, we were traveling north. I wanted to go back to something we said earlier.

JONES: Fine.

SALTER: I think the most significant thing in all of this was - it gets back to the matter of fear - that Mississippi black people were able to overcome a life-time of fear conditioning, to move out first in the boycott efforts, and in many cases out into the streets themselves,

risking their lives and their physical well-being and everything. This is a tremendous kind of awakening. This became evident in the Delta when I went up there in the spring of 1963 and saw the situation in Greenwood, and it was certainly massively evident in Jackson following Medgar's murder. The real heroes are the Mississippi black people and the extraordinary mavericks like Ed King and his wife Jennette and Jim Silver and Claude Ramsay and people like that who were raised in this kind of atmosphere and somehow, somehow, perhaps by the grace of God or whatever, were able to break out of it and go. It's all of this that got into motion black people cracking the barriers of fear. The non-black mavericks like Ed and Ramsay, and others like Hodding Carter up in Greenville, and Hazel Smith - I think in some quarters it has become fashionable to become critical of both Hodding Carters and also Mrs. Smith, but these are people who functioned in courageous ways at a time when it wasn't very popular to do that; and Ira Harkey on the Gulf Coast. These are all the real heroes of the thing. I had grown up outside of Mississippi. I had grown up in a family where on my mother's side people are extremely wealthy and well-established. My father was certainly very sure who he was. Both of my parents were well-educated,

cosmopolitan people. I grew up being damn sure of who I was. If somebody called me a Communist I was quick to fight. If somebody scurrilously used the term "half-breed," I was quick to fight. I didn't grow up with all of these other kinds of things trying to push me down. I grew up in another kind of setting, and so psychologically it was much easier for me to play the kind of agitator role that I played here and that I've played nearly all my life. I've been a community organizer ever since I was twenty-one. I have been a professor, but I've always been a community organizer and kind of a shirt-tail radical in a peculiar kind of way. But I didn't have to overcome a lifetime of fear conditioning. I didn't have to deal with the problem of relatives who were just going to cut me out. You know, they might be really upset, and a lot of my mother's relatives kind of tippy-toed around me when I was there. They all bought copies of my book, and not all of them like my book, but they have always respected me. I grew up in a tough Southwestern town where I was big enough to get into a good physical scap if I felt I needed to. So I think what I'm saying is that the people who were born and raised here in this awful atmosphere who were in various ways able to break through that I would say would be the real heroes of the thing.

Change came about because of the grass roots upheaval. I don't think it was because of courts and laws. Again, this would be the Wobbly part of me talking about the wariness of government. Where I grew up we distrusted the federal government, we distrusted the Eastern seaboard. I still distrust the federal government and I still distrust the Eastern seaboard, and I'm wary of courts. In some ways I guess I still could be described as a damned old states righter. It seems to me that social change always comes about as a result of grass roots people, galvanized initially by the radicals who sort of ride point, who are way out scouting. I'm talking now about real radicals. I'm not talking about totalitarians who call themselves radicals. I'm talking about people who believe in liberty as much as they believe in material well-being. These are the people who scout and so forth, and they carry their messages back and sow their seeds of discontent. Jesus Christ was a great agitator, Moses was, and so on. Lots of people were. But eventually the grass roots begin to move. A good organizer doesn't attempt to maintain firm control of the situation. He has faith in the people, that they can make their own basic decisions. An organizer can lay out alternatives, but the people

have to make the choices. And then eventually the courts, the government, will begin to feel those things. I made a speech in New York in February of 1964 that upset a lot of people because it said that the Civil Rights Act which was coming was not going to be a cure-all at all, it would work only if grass roots communities remained organized and organized more to make those laws work; that the mere passage of laws wasn't going to change a goddamn thing.

JONES: It seems so obvious now. . .

SALTER: It seems so obvious to many people. They said, "Well, the passage of the coming Civil Rights Law" - and that happened in June of 1964 - "would pretty well take care of things." It never does. The Labor Movement found itself crippled when it surrendered too much of its autonomy to the government during the Roosevelt period. I mean, I grew up taught by my father particularly that Franklin Roosevelt was a great man. I don't doubt it. My mother's father used to refer to Franklin Roosevelt as "that dirty son of a bitch who never earned an honest dollar in his life." My parents thought Roosevelt was a good man, so I grew up thinking highly of F.D.R. and the New Deal. But I learned in retrospect that the Labor Movement gave up a good deal of its sovereignty to the government and never quite regained that movement,

that freedom of movement. To some extent I'm afraid this happened with the Civil Rights Movement. But on the fear thing too, I remember this rather elderly nurse, black lady, who wasn't sure if she should go out and demonstrate - this was following Medgar's death. She wasn't sure if she should, and we talked about it. An organizer has to have a lot of time to talk with individuals, and even more than that to listen, which is the hardest thing for many people to do. But I talked and I listened to her pretty extensively, and she decided to go out and join the demonstration that was taking place. Well I saw her a couple of days later, and her face glowed. They arrested the lady along with a lot of other people, hauled her off to the fairgrounds concentration camp. She was out a couple of days later and her face was glowing, and she said, "This is the biggest thing I've ever done. I'm free! I'm free!" She had broken that barrier of fear. After those processes began to start working, then gradually something was set in motion which allowed many white people to start speaking out. We all realized that a great many white Southerners had not shared the Citizens Council commitment. And I don't think it was hypocrisy. I don't think they enthusiastically supported the Council until

it began to slip and fall and then they turned against it. I think these were people who were people of good will. They weren't the people who got it going. Black Southerners, and their too-few non-black allies, cracked the thing, and in the process freed many people besides themselves.

JONES: Let me ask you this: It's apparent now that from the violent days of 1963, 1964 to the desegregation of the schools in 1970 that Mississippi underwent massive social changes the like of which history has rarely seen. My question is do you think that the movement was successful in terms of the way you and others who were on the forefront of the organizing in the early days defined it, in terms of what you saw as the goal of the effort when you were in Jackson?

SALTER: That can't be expressed in a yes or no.

JONES: Right.

SALTER: In the first place, people who say this brought about no change at all are damned fools. This was a terror-ridden city back fifteen and twenty years ago, full of terror, full of fear. Much of that, not all of it, is gone. That's certainly a tremendous victory. The right to organize exists. That didn't exist back in those days. We didn't have a right to organize at all as far

as the other side was concerned; we had a God-given right to do it, but they weren't respecting that. So the right to organize certainly exists. The right to organize exists. The atmosphere of extreme terror is certainly very substantially gone. There're certainly pockets of fear I'm sure. I was over in Neshoba County last spring and saw KKK signs in the middle of the road.

JONES: Yes, Ed King and I saw those on our trips to Philadelphia.

SALTER: Yes. But the kind of atmosphere where a state senator at Liberty could shoot down an unarmed black farmer who was active on behalf of voter registration, I mean that's all gone I believe. The whole desegregation thing is, I think, very important. Anytime there could be a big screaming hoorah like the Woolworth store thing because a few people had gone in on a racially-integrated basis to get service, you know, it does indicate how sick that dimension was. You know, the mobs that gathered on the entrance of Meredith to Ole Miss, well, all that's pretty much over. Young people are growing up now knowing one another as people. You see a Mississippi highway patrolman on the highway and it's no longer heavy fear; you know, it's just the normal, "Am I going too fast?" kind of thing. It's not "Does he have my license plate number? Am I going to get taken

to Brandon and get beaten up?" That's pretty much over. There's probably still instances of police repression, but probably none from the state level, and probably relatively few on the local level. Where I think the unmet piece is, of course, is in the whole area of economics. This is still a wretchedly poor state for most people, black, Chinese, Choctaw, white. And the United States is still full of poor people from one end to the other. I believe around 50,000,000 to 60,000,000 Americans live in pretty abject poverty. Those figures come from the United State Catholic Conference, which has hardly been accused of being a Bolshevik study group. It's in this area now that I think the basic challenges lie. People can't be really free as long as they're economically held back. I get schizy on what to do now. I'm not a Marxist. On the other hand, I think that the capitalistic system is going to have to undergo some very substantial changes. I suppose I could be described as a kind of a old timey socialist, maybe more of a populist. I like the idea of a strong labor movement, with a lot of power resting in those places. I want to see the small farmer and the small businessman survive. I'm very wary of the huge corporations, big Eastern corporations, some of

them English, who I don't like at all. I think from an economic standpoint Mississippi's problems are somewhat worse than problems faced in other parts of the country but are part of the whole national economic inequities. I certainly don't feel that establishing a massive federal government and centralizing everything in Washington, D.C. is going to be any great answer. It could take care of some of the poverty problems, but it would raise some heavy damn problems in the area of liberty. We have to find situations which enhance liberty and material well-being. So I think the Civil Rights Movement, to a large extent, was successful. Terror is essentially gone. The right to organize exists. Voter registration is heavy. This is certainly a freer atmosphere than it has ever been since the inception of the state. The economic thing, you know - that piece of it hasn't been met yet.

JONES: And that was part of the way that you defined the objectives of the movement in 1963?

SALTER: Yes. We started moving into that as we got into fair hiring practices on Capitol Street. Now it has to go much deeper than that. And those answers aren't going to be easy to come up with. There are no patent medicines we can use to quickly work that out, though we have to

deal quickly in order to get anything done. We can't waste time. So again, the answer isn't yes, it was a success, or, no, it wasn't. To a large extent it was a success, but some failures came in other areas. Undoubtedly there is some overt racism still floating around; yet I think that, however slowly, racism is dying. I think it is dying very slowly, but it is dying. Some of the worst situations that I have ever seen from the standpoint of race relations didn't occur in Mississippi. I did four years of community organizing in Chicago, and I think these big Northern and Eastern cities are probably beyond any kind of hope. People have to continue to try to do things there, but there you find yourself concentrating on trying to establish a sense of community where there's absolutely no sense of community at all. It's a very dangerous kind of interpersonal alienation and devaluation. In a place like Mississippi I think there's a lot of hope, tremendous hope. It's in a far healthier state than is Chicago or Gary, Indiana or places like that. So, you just have to keep going. Again, the save the world business is a long and damned hard kind of thing and it probably stretches on forever. If I thought too much about that I would get too tired too fast.

JONES: But a radical transformation of society was not what you were after in the Jackson Movement of 1963--where as by 1966 when civil rights forces like SNCC began to radicalize and kick whites out, the movement had come to define itself as a force for the reformation of American life as we know it.

SALTER: Right.

JONES: I was always surprised at how minimal your requests were: black guards at school crossings, one or two black policemen, store clerks. . .

SALTER: That's right; fair treatment, equal hiring. Of course all these desegregation things were perceived as being very very radical. I really do feel that the other side was honestly convinced that we were subversives and traitors. Well, we were subversives to the Mississippi orthodoxy, and we were radical, relatively speaking, in the context of the setting and the times. I've always been somewhat of a democratic/socialist/populist type person all my life. I really have no use for the big corporations. But there are certainly many historical figures in Mississippi who had no use for the big corporations either. I think you're right. I don't think we saw the movement as something that was going to transform society in the United States. I think we felt

though that it was going to be an important tributary in what I would call the whole save the world business. But we weren't drawing on that extensively. None of us were high-falutin theoreticians at all. I've never been personally interested in European ideologies. I think we did feel that to reach fruition the movement was going to have to deal very effectively with the economic challenges. This was certainly becoming clear in 1964 and 1965 all over the South and all over the country. It was becoming clear, too, that whoever controlled the economic factors did in the end have a whip hand over all the political dimension. That piece of the whole thing still remains.

JONES: Let me ask you this now because Ed will soon be here and I want to give you a chance to smoke your pipe awhile before we get going. You and Ed were in the hospital how long after your wreck on June 18?

SALTER: He was in longer than I was. The doctors wanted to keep me in there but I insisted on getting out. I may have been in there three or four days. They didn't want to let me out that quickly. I wanted to get out and see what was going on.

JONES: Your book ends there in the hospital as the rain falls outside. Where did your experience take you up until

you left the state in September of 1963? Did you stay active?

SALTER: Yes, oh yes. Well, I got out of the hospital. Ed was still in there. It was clear that the Jackson Movement had been torn asunder. Medgar was dead. Basically there had been, to use a harsh but descriptive term, a sellout. The Youth Council was in disarray. Whatever remained of it was very small, and what there was of it was converted by the NAACP and Charles Evers into the Medgar Evers Memorial Youth Choir. That was later on. Most of the Youth Council kids went into other movements, CORE and SNCC and groups like that. I was around for a good part of that summer, and then went to Arizona briefly and then came back. I then went into full-time civil rights work with the Southern Conference Educational Fund, working pretty much in Eastern North Carolina. And I got back here from time to time as the years passed. The Jackson Movement - well, I think there should be some kind of assessment of what it led up to, what it added up to.

JONES: Yes.

SALTER: Certainly on the negative side, the collapse of the Jackson Movement saw a situation where things became pretty demoralized in Jackson itself. I don't think

there was ever again a really viable ongoing movement in Mississippi's capital. Secondly, as a result of what was going on in Jackson, biracial committees were being established in Greenville, Meridian and Gulfport, and maybe some other places. These were very radical steps: biracial committees. Those dried up following the collapse of the Jackson Movement, with the exception of the one in Greenville. So that was certainly a setback. The Youth Council was basically destroyed. The Medgar Evers Memorial Choir part could hardly be called the Youth Council. That was just simply a captive remnant. On the plus side though, I think we had many things going for us. The Jackson Movement was the first and most massive upheaval in the history of Mississippi. It was characterized by the mass upsurge of people, particularly after Medgar's murder. This shattered the power structure I think very significantly. There's no question about that. If we had won in Jackson, I mean won in a very visible kind of way, I think it would have affected what went on in the rest of the state, and the changes would've come faster. But what did occur in Jackson certainly shattered the economic establishment. The boycott raised bloody hell with the Capitol Street merchants. It scared the hell out of the politicians.

It scared a lot of these people all over the state, constructively scared them. I'd say the Jackson Movement was certainly a major force in securing passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Many of the Woolworth pictures were shown to senators and representatives in Washington. So I'd say the Jackson Movement made a major contribution in enhancing the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. It certainly stimulated other movements around the South, and it very much stimulated other movements in Mississippi. Biracial committees may have dried up, but grass roots people in Mississippi took the lessons from Jackson - particularly the examples of courage, high courage by grass roots people in Jackson - and began to do things in their own time. I mean, Medgar's funeral saw black people come from all over Mississippi to participate for the first time in their lives in one, and in some cases two demonstrations that day. There was the long march from the Masonic Temple to Collins Funeral Home, and then the very nonviolent but unscheduled demonstration that occurred following Medgar's funeral. Certainly it directed major national attention on Mississippi vis-a-vis the rest of the country and the rest of the world. This was no longer an isolated backwater after that. So, on balance, the Jackson Movement was a

major step in that direction. It was the first massive grass roots organization in the state, the first massive upheaval, and, damn it, it jiggled the hell out of the power structure. There were relatives on my mother's side of the family who were well acquainted with key economic power structure people in the state who told me in the months following - some of these relatives - that this had very very fundamentally shaken the big economic wheels. So on balance this was a major piece of what eventually happened. You know, it can't be assessed as a defeat. It was a big step up the mountain.

JONES: Why did you leave Tougaloo and Mississippi?

SALTER: Well, I went into full-time civil rights work. I got tired of the teaching thing. I like to teach, but there were other things to be reckoned with. SCEF offered an interesting position as field secretary or field representative. And so I did that. I did a lot of work in various parts of the South until we left in 1967.

JONES: Yes.

SALTER: I worked all over. So while we were in the South - I did take a few months off in the latter part of that and taught at Goddard College in Vermont, and even then I made several trips South. We came back for a year after

that. So we didn't leave the South for good until the summer of 1967.

JONES: But there wasn't any pressure from the administration at Tougaloo for you to leave?

SALTER: No. Dr. Beittel was firmly behind everything we did. He is a very fine person. There were faculty people there who were afraid of the movement. Dr. Beittel, I'd say, and Dean A. A. Branch, the vice president and dean, were very much behind the movement. There's no question about that. I had taught at Superior, and then came here and taught for a couple of years, but basically my thing in Mississippi was community organizing. By the end of the summer of 1963 that was so much in my blood that when SCEF offered this position I was delighted to take it. I asked Beittel if it would pose problems for the school if I broke my contract, and I think he felt that they could find someone to teach a part of it. I think he could understand how, after everything had happened, I would want to go into this full force on a total basis.

JONES: Did you ever consider working for the NAACP?

SALTER: Never. Never.

JONES: Not even after Medgar's death and the position was open? Maybe just to grill them a little bit?

SALTER: No, not at all. I would've stood no chance of getting that even if I'd applied for it. The national NAACP I think disliked me probably as intensely as the Citizens Council people did. I'm not comparing the two groups, but their perceptions of me - well, they didn't like me at all. There were exceptions. The national counsel for the NAACP, Bob Carter, was certainly a very solid friend and supporter. But Roy Wilkins, Gloster Current and others, the less they saw of me the better. No, I never ever considered having anything formally to do with the NAACP following the Jackson situation. I've always held Dr. Henry in high regard; but he's with the Mississippi State NAACP. During that period they were certainly a committed and courageous group of people. The national office was, frankly, finking on us. I wasn't particularly interested in ever having anything to do with them again, nor have I ever contributed a dime to the national NAACP. There was some irony in all of this because the man who adopted my father, William Salter, was one of the founders of the national NAACP. But I'm not at all impressed by it. My affinities were with the old SNCC. CORE did an excellent job. I hold them in high regard; CORE and SNCC and SCEF. The president of SCEF, the group I worked for, was

Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth. He was also national secretary of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

JONES: Yes, from Birmingham.

SALTER: Yes. So SCEF and SCLC were related. A key board member of SCEF was the Reverend C. T. Vivian, who was director of affiliates for SCLC. So I gravitated into the CORE, SNCC, SCLC circles very comfortably. And after that in the years that followed I worked with local NAACP people, but I was always very wary of the national structure.

JONES: Yes. How many CORE workers were in Jackson at the time of the Jackson Movement? I know there was Dave Dennis.

SALTER: Yes, Dave was the primary CORE person initially. Originally there was a very good person who came through by the name of Tom Gaither. He was black. Dave was the permanent CORE person during that period. He trained and worked very closely with George Raymond, who died several years ago of natural causes. I had very high regard for George Raymond and Dave Dennis and Dave's wife Mattie.

JONES: George Raymond joined you at the sit-in at Woolworth's.

SALTER: Right, right. And then one of my good old Tougaloo students, Betty Ann Poole, did a lot of work with CORE. And then years later I was in Chicago organizing and I

found Betty working as a secretary for the Illinois Central Railroad and I hired her to help direct my community organizing. So we were all working together again in a setting which in its own way was a formidable one, and much more hopeless than Mississippi. But Tougaloo in those days was a, I think oasis of freedom is a little maudlin, but it was certainly the one piece of turf in Mississippi where people could meet in interracial groups in relative safety. Beittel was certainly strongly in support of the movement. When we were served that ridiculous injunction: the City of Jackson vs. "John R. Salter, Jr., et al" which enjoined me and many others and also Tougaloo College and its entire board of trustees, Beittel said to hell with it. That didn't panic him. But there is evidence that behind the scenes, the Sovereignty Commission, and I would say very probably the federal government, and certain members of the Tougaloo board of trustees, worked to force Beittel out. He was forced out but remained on in the state as director of the American Friends Service Committee. I've been in touch with him off and on through the years. It's interesting because most of the people who were in that little group, for it was a relatively small group, they've all kept in pretty good

touch with one another. They have a certain bond that can only be forged in combat situations.

JONES: People like Joan Trumpauer.

SALTER: Yes, I've seen Joan as recently as three or four months ago. And many of these people are still very active in activist types of things. I think the Mississippi situation does indicate that change can be secured, and can be secured through peaceful means. It didn't go fast enough and it didn't go far enough, but those steps will be taken in due course. I think there is an enormous amount of hope in places like Mississippi, Eastern North Carolina, Southwest Georgia, all these areas that were so bad, because people are basically organized. Even though individual organizations have fallen apart people know how to do things. People have been co-opted perhaps, some people, often without knowing it, but there are always new people who come up out of the grass roots. This is the amazing hope, the basic hope of humanity. Mississippi may have to decide - the same question exists in Arizona and New Mexico - how much do we really want to be like the rest of the country. Do we want all this industry coming in? Do we want that? Some people say this it's a good thing, other people would say this is a good thing if there are labor unions,

other people might question if we really want it, does Mississippi want to be just like Ohio or Indiana. I would hope it doesn't.

JONES: Me too, God.

SALTER: In some ways, you know, the South could be looked on as a harsh reflection of America, and on the other hand the South has some very extraordinary and unique blessings; some negative, some positive.

JONES: Why don't we take a little break before Ed gets here.

SALTER: Yes.

(Break)

JONES: Ed King has joined us to discuss some of the conditions which surrounded the Jackson Movement. I'll just throw some things out and let you both respond to them. Was there ever a point during the Jackson Movement from the beginning of the boycott around Christmas of 1962 until Medgar Evers death when you felt strongly supported by the national NAACP, that you felt on firm ground, imagined or not?

SALTER: Well, it was clear, as I think I mentioned earlier, that they gave it no backing. There is every reason to believe that they were at best totally disinterested in it, and very likely obliquely opposed to it. They gave it no tangible assistance. They said nothing about it in their

national publications. I might also add that in January of 1963, or very early February, in a meeting of the executive committee of the adult Jackson NAACP branch - I was a member of that executive committee - I recall Medgar making a report on the school desegregation cases which involved his children, and taking the position that the national office had not filed it. He was very angry about that and had written them a very strong letter. They were lagging on that issue too. In the spring of 1963 we had this very good person and this very good contact, Steve Rutledge, a northern student studying at Tougaloo who was white. His father Ed Rutledge was active in what was called the National Civil Rights Clearinghouse. Steve and several of us asked his father to present a fund appeal for the boycott at that gathering, and the father did that, which upset Roy Wilkins, the executive secretary of the NAACP who was present, and who immediately sent us a check for $500. But that's as far as that went. The boycott continued. We're now into April or early May of 1963. Birmingham had occurred, and this put the national NAACP in a position where it had to show more, since direct action groups - especially SCLC - looked so strong and the NAACP so out of it. So they sent down Laplois Ashford, the national youth

secretary, and Willie Ludden, someone to work with him on a regional basis, but they had very little power. They were with us certainly spiritually. They had damn little power, and things didn't begin to change until I drew up a very strong motion to present to the May 12 meeting of the state NAACP board of which I was a member. That was particularly timely because Clarence Mitchell, one of the national office's strongest people, or more powerful people, the legislative rep, was in town to give a talk, and as I described in my book, I came to the offices that Sunday morning and gave him a copy as a courtesy, and he tried to prevent me from introducing the thing. There was a big fight. I presented the thing and it was unanimously backed by the state NAACP board of directors. Then, shortly thereafter, the national office pledged its backing to the Jackson Movement, and issued a public release to that effect. But it turned around immediately to scuttle the movement with the arrival of Roy Wilkins several days after the sit-in had occurred and right after the first big mass march on Farish Street.

KING: John, you were always more optimistic than I was in all of this business of letters and resolutions and so forth. The NAACP had not supported any direct action from the

sit-in to the freedom rides anywhere in the nation. They may have participated in a few, but everything I heard from three or four years before that was that they were strongly against it. I couldn't imagine the NAACP doing these things. John kept moderately trusting these people.

SALTER: No, I think you're wrong. I think you're quite wrong.

KING: Okay. I thought they might do it because of the circumstances. Once Birmingham was there, and once Medgar was committed, then they might pick it up.

SALTER: Okay. No, I had few illusions. . .

KING: Okay, maybe I overstated your optimism.

SALTER: About an organization that has certainly systematically opposed - well, Medgar didn't - but they systematically opposed the work. I was aware of the fact that they supported the freedom rider defense only when the glare of national publicity got on them. They certainly had played games with the boycott, had ignored it. We had gone to every other civil rights group of any size to get our money. They weren't filing the school suit. I mean there was little question in my mind about their stodginess. On the other hand, I felt that once we got them formally and publicly committed, then they would not be able to back out. What surprised me, and

I think surprised all of us, was the callous and cynical reversal that they made right there in the middle of the stream. That surprised me.

KING: Yes, once we'd moved I didn't think they could stop us.

SALTER: Yes, that surprised us all. I'm sure it surprised Medgar. They made a reversal right after the Farish Street march; 500, 600 young black people had been arrested. There'd been a whole week of glorious demonstrations and every other kind of thing. Wilkins came down with two buckets of ice water and started to put it all out. That took some getting used to.

KING: While sending letters out across the nation claiming credit for what was going on in Jackson, sending out appeal letters to every NAACP branch in the nation urging them to send money immediately to New York for Mississippi, and saying how much had been spent. They probably did have to spend a lot. But he ended up spending money to get students bonded out of jail who did not want to come out of jail. He got them out, and insisted that they be gotten out.

SALTER: Yes, the kids wanted to stay in.

KING: And then he turned around and asked other people to send money. I've seen the letters, I've seen the telegrams that went out that the Negro--at that time Negro, not

black--children of Jackson have been put in prison and it's our job to get them out. I thought that was a good example of the kinds of different philosophies in the movement. Other than that school business in the court, and that really was handled by the Legal Defense Fund, which was separate from the NAACP, the historical role of the NAACP has been two-fold: a place where strong, middle-class blacks could push for progress, could reaffirm their identity with each other at the same time, and where they called for progress basically saying, "What's wrong with letting blacks like us vote? What's wrong with letting middle-class, educated children go to school with other middle-class, educated children?" The idea was that if white America ever saw enough of a model, maybe white America would change. The main action that the organization had had for thirty years was defense. They were used to responding in Mississippi when some poor, unfortunate, illiterate person was accused of rape, and was in prison and they needed to come in. They were not at all expecting to come to Mississippi and find grass roots leaders dealing with them as equals, fighting for themselves. So they treated this in somewhat the same way as if these students had been picked up, totally innocent students

being held in jail, needed to be bonded out so send your money.

SALTER: I had mentioned earlier this afternoon that it was Medgar's firm conviction that the national and the federal government had reached an understanding during the Eisenhower administration that there would be no direct action in Mississippi until the rest of the South had been completely taken care of, that everything that would occur would be basically legalistic, legal action type stuff.

KING: Yes.

SALTER: Medgar passed that on to me before 1962 had come. I believe he mentioned this to me when we were at his home for Christmas in 1961.

KING: Yes, he talked to me about things like that.

SALTER: Sure. There were no massive stars in peoples' eyes. I think the surprise came when we realized how quickly they could reverse themselves and start to kill the movement. Now that was indicated not only in the pushing to release the kids, their immediate release, but also in this extraordinary discussion that Medgar and Roy Wilkins had in which Wilkins criticized us for seeking federal troops in Jackson and would not issue a statement. This was after the suppression of the Farish

Street march. Wilkins would not call for federal troops at all, and became very angry about that. This was a conversation between Medgar Evers, myself and Wilkins had in Medgar's office. Finally he said rather lamely that perhaps the national NAACP could call for U.S. marshals. That was where that ended. I don't think they ever called for U.S. marshals either. We do feel that Wilkins and Current were under very heavy pressure by the Kennedy administration for the reasons that we mentioned earlier.

KING: Right. Being a good Southerner I assumed that all the moves were being called in the East, and I didn't like it. You mentioned the Jackson Public School suit with Medgar's children. Funny things happened to that. I don't think that was sloppy legal work. I think they were deliberately not pushing that because the Kennedy administration did not want it pushed. So at that point they had become so controlled by Washington, whoever the government was in Washington, they played ball with all the foundations and the money which the government could turn loose for them. I think it wasn't that they wanted to prevent direct action, they wanted to prevent anything from happening in Mississippi. They could not see school desegregation, even though they

technically supported that, or legal action. They knew that any action in Mississippi would mean trouble, and their fifty year history of helping blacks in trouble just didn't go along with the Gandhian philosophy of you stand up for yourself even if you do suffer. Things had already happened in Mississippi--despite the hard work of the NAACP, Meredith had entered Ole Miss.

JONES: Despite?

KING: Despite. Medgar told me at this time when we were struggling with Wilkins that the NAACP had worked very hard to keep Meredith out of Ole Miss, hand in glove with the Kennedy administration, which was then, apparently, hand in glove with the administration here. Medgar had said that the pressures were so high that Wilkins threatened to fire him from his job if he couldn't prevent Meredith, stop Meredith, because the Kennedy administration didn't want a desegregation crisis in Mississippi. I heard over and over through 1963 from the Kennedy side that year, and then through 1964, "nothing shall happen until the Democratic Party wins the next term, first Kennedy and then Johnson, and then we will come in - we liberals who know best - when it suits the agenda of all the things going on in the country, then we will let the Deeps South change and we'll give you every

support you need. Just trust us!" They did not demonstrate anything that made the people think they were trustworthy. They were nice and honorable. Ninety-nine percent of the people didn't know anything about this. But Medgar said, "Meredith is acting as James Meredith, and nobody controls him." He was told that it was the federal government that was putting pressure on the national NAACP. That time he didn't give in, you know. He didn't take the opposite side anyway. When Wilkins came to Jackson, in my presence Wilkins threatened to fire Evers if he didn't stop the demonstrations in Jackson. He gave him hell, and told him he was looking like Martin Luther King, and talked in the most despicable terms about Martin Luther King than anyone I'd ever heard. He said King was not the kind of model, not the kind of black person America needed to see. Here was Medgar Evers talking about inviting King to Jackson, and Wilkins said, "You're trying to act like that Martin Luther King." I thought it was quite a compliment to both men, but Wilkins thought of that as the greatest insult he could throw at Evers. He threatened to fire Evers, and then walked out and held a press conference that was magnificient. Other than not doing the details of calling for federal action to control the Jackson police

brutality and stop the illegal arrests, he held a press conference where he damned white Mississippians.

SALTER: All right. I was at that particular meeting. I don't remember Wilkins ever specifically threatening to fire Evers.

KING: No, I was stunned, and it was because I was a white Mississippi clergyman and they let me stay in the room. I was alone with Medgar and Wilkins.

SALTER: I think it was implied.

KING: No, I was alone when this happened.

SALTER: Okay.

KING: It must have been implied in the earlier conversation with you. I was so embarrassed I wanted to crawl out of the room.

SALTER: It's important to realize that the national NAACP was not monolithic. It's legal staff, headed by Bob Carter, and involving people like Constance Baker Motley, was a very dedicated, hard-driving group of people. I think they were probably a damn sight more committed to creative approaches and litigation than the NAACP Inc. Fund, Legal Defense and Education Fund, was - the Greenberg group. It should be said that once Mrs. Motley assumed the legal responsibility for the Meredith case she pursued it zealously and extremely effectively. She

was paid by the national NAACP office, but Mrs. Motley certainly represented Meredith in his efforts to get into Ole Miss in a splendid and effective fashion. So I think we have to be careful in this. For my money, I would say that Carter was a major supporter of ours in the thing.

KING: Oh, yes, sure. And I knew people on the NAACP board and so on who were.

SALTER: Yes. When that injunction was served us, Carter joined us and took the position that it had to be defied like that - (Snaps fingers) - in other words, to hell with that piece of paper. It's significant that in 1969 Carter and his entire staff resigned en masse from the payroll of the national NAACP. Wilkins, as far as I'm concerned, is certainly not a bad man, but he was a very limited person. He was limited by his own origins, his own social class standing, his close proximity to various federal administrations. I don't believe that he was a Machiavellian. On the other hand, the national director of branches, Mr. Current, was, as I mentioned earlier, a very skillful Machiavellian. All of these things were constantly interacting. The national board of the NAACP split on the direct action thing.

KING: I thought if the whole thing succeeded in Jackson then

the NAACP nationally would move and support direct action everywhere else, if it worked. And I thought things had a momentum.

SALTER: There were people who were leaving the NAACP very quickly. One of the people who had the most rapport with the NAACP youth dimension was Floyd McKissick, the black attorney from Durham, North Carolina. McKissick left the NAACP in the summer of 1963 and became the national chairman and later the national director of CORE. It was clear by that time that the NAACP could not provide more than the legal dimension; though there were always many local exceptions to this. Medgar, I think, did very skillfully, you know, maneuver through that whole morass of entangling nets and everything else. Dr. Henry was very strong. He was also the state board member for SCLC. Wherever you went there were people who were identified with the NAACP who were very solid people. Some were solid all the way. Some were solid up to a point. Then there were others who were quite unsolid.

KING: Yes. But even Henry told me by the fall of 1964 or early winter of 1965 that he had been ordered by Wilkins to have nothing to do with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. That could have nothing to do with

"Can the president of the NAACP also be in politics?" because we've had this bizarre situation in Mississippi where when Aaron appeared on TV you didn't know if it was the head of the Democratic Party of Mississippi, you know, with 300,000 white members, or whether he was speaking as NAACP president. So it wasn't just because Aaron was taking a partisan side in politics, it was that he could not be that far out - this was after the Atlantic City Convention - of the MFDP once the leadership had alienated the leadership in Washington.

JONES: Did the NAACP bear the brunt of the bail bond money for the Jackson Movement?

SALTER: Yes. It provided most of the bail. I'd say virtually all of the bail.

KING: Yes.

SALTER: And most if not all of the legal defense. We always had the Gandhi Society. . .

KING: But only on the edges. They were determined not to let any other organization come in on the defense.

SALTER: Yes. I don't make too much distinction between NAACP and its Inc. Fund. I have always felt there was a close relationship there. But again that was not monolithic either. The President of the Inc. Fund was a good friend of yours, Dr. Chalmers, who was certainly very

much with it. But the general ethos of the national NAACP was certainly one of fiscal conservatism, sensitivity to the inhibitions of the federal government, and a certain amount of personal distaste and fear vis-a-vis mass direct action.

KING: The best thing that happened to the NAACP nationally during that period was the Jackson Movement and the death of Medgar Evers, because suddenly they had credibility where their credibility had been lacking all over the nation, especially in the North. More and more money was going to Dr. King from established types, and more and more loose money was going to SNCC and CORE. Once the NAACP had a martyr, once they had a movement they could refer to, they were reestablished. His death worked both ways. They didn't have to fire him. He was not bringing in SNCC, CORE, Martin Luther King into Jackson - King being the real issue. Evers was no longer a thorn in their side, someone they couldn't control who was doing things that Washington didn't want done, and he was their martyr who they could go to the people with and say "He died doing it!"

SALTER: Well, they raised an enormous amount of money on Medgar's body. They did that for a number of years.

JONES: What about the NAACP influence over lawyers in Jackson

like Carsie Hall, Jack Young, Jess Brown?

SALTER: Very strong, very strong. But not Jess Brown. They had strong influence over Carsie Hall and Jack Young, who were on NAACP payrolls.

KING: That probably was their major source of income.

SALTER: Jess Brown was and is a unique, gutty, courageous maverick. When we got into the first legal defense stages of the boycott, Jack Young was very unhappy about being involved. That was clear. He was very ill at ease. You will recall from the book that he was supposed to be a bail bond liaison and he was no help at all. Fortunately we had Kunstler to fall back on. In those days Kunstler felt that I was much too radical, and then as time passed he felt that I was much too conservative. I haven't changed.

KING: Well, Mr. Hall and Mr. Young for a long time would come when we had people in prison. We would call them at night and they would come, because there were just the three people. But as early as the Freedom Rides, Jack Young talked to me in his office about how appalled he was at the Freedom Rides. He was our attorney. He thought that I, as a white Mississippian who had talked with him earlier - and back at Millsaps days I had met Medgar Evers and that sort of thing - and he was amazed

when I said I thought the Freedom Rides were very important and hoped they would continue.

SALTER: See, we wanted to pursue some creative approaches in legal defense. One of those approaches involved the Kunstler technique of seeking to remove cases from state jurisdiction into federal jurisdiction: the removal technique.

JONES: Right.

SALTER: The NAACP was very much against this technique; particularly the Inc. Fund. I think Bob Carter, the NAACP general counsel, was much more open to that approach. The point is that early on, in the first stages of the boycott, our legal defense was Jess Brown and William Kunstler. It is they who with me and some others drew up the petition to ask Judge Cox to disqualify himself. Their approach was full of all these kinds of things. There was a big damage suit against police chief Rayfield and other members of city government.

KING: This was legal direct action developed by Arthur Kinoy and Bill Kunstler and Jess Brown here. It was the equivalent of direct action in the rest of the movement. It appalled traditional lawyers.

SALTER: The use of subpoenas to bring the mayor and others into court so they'd have to actually sit there.

KING: But it was necessary when you questioned that honest law and order had broken down in the system. If you knew that everywhere from the local judge and city court in Jackson to Judge Cox was a dishonest system, you needed to do something other than go through the mockery of saying that every one of these steps was valid, and wait five years. Since these people did not support direct action, it didn't matter if your demonstration was blocked five years until they could finally get a court order five years later saying you had a right to picket. They never fought the system. Since they were allies of Washington, and trusted and were close to whatever party was in the White House, maybe they were right - you know, not having that alliance I didn't see it that way.

JONES: What about the organizations like CORE and SNCC, was there ever any evidence of ties to the federal government at the time of the Jackson Movement?

SALTER: Not at all.

KING: Not here.

SALTER: Not at all as far as the SNCC people were concerned, and certainly locally the CORE people were equally aware and wary of the federal government. I don't know about the role of all the national CORE people. SNCC was not

sensitive to federal pressure. CORE, in the sense of Dave Dennis and others, certainly was not. It's possible, and this is conjecture, that CORE in the case of some of its national leadership: Marvin Rich and Jim Farmer, may have been maybe more sensitive to federal pressure. In no sense was CORE sensitive to federal pressure in the way that the NAACP was.

KING: There was no comparison. Or SCLC.

SALTER: Right.

KING: I think SCLC might have hesitated a little, but basically SCLC was the other side with SNCC and CORE. SNCC was not insensitive, they just did not let the pressure move them. For several years SNCC did what the government wanted, if they were going to do anything, but it was what they wanted to do. But, the federal government financed the movement.

JONES: Right.

KING: Through liberal foundations persuasions were made to pour in hundreds of thousands of dollars. The Mellon Foundation, which is oil family money, was one of the major sources. It was always clear that strings came with that money. One of them was to slow down on the sit-ins and that kind of direct action, because it was causing too much upset. The pressure was on at the

time of the sit-ins and the Freedom Rides, and the next year direct action was stopped. SNCC had already decided it was time to move in with the people and to stop being an example of college students doing something for college students. The bus rides were doing something for everybody. But the decision was to move even beyond that into voter registration. The Kennedy administration wanted voter registration because, just by chance, in a few places like North Carolina and Georgia and Texas he might get enough black votes to keep the Democratic Party in power - certainly not in Mississippi or Alabama. So, nobody in the leadership wanted the work to be done in the Deep South states. Once SNCC came in, moved into McComb, this was part of the understanding. SNCC moved into the Delta, but there were understandings there. There were big direct action demonstrations in the spring of 1963, and the federal government reneged on its promises to back SNCC. SNCC had already run head on with the federal government in south Georgia where the federal government had basically turned against SNCC openly. It really confused the devil out of people because they thought they were dealing with the brightest and the best and the most liberal in the country. The thing was always that the

money wouldn't flow if you didn't have the people in government recommending to the foundations that the money keep flowing. Now many of us wonder, and some of us think without being able to prove, that some of that money that flowed through foundations was C.I.A. money, to back the civil rights movement. It was just laundered and passed through foundations. The purpose was to have enough money available to us that we did what the money wanted us to do, or at least would cease doing what they objected to. I'm sure they would've preferred not to spend the money and not to have a movement to deal with. I mean that would've been better. But once it was obvious there was going to be a movement, if the sources of over half the money were coming from outside rather than the nickels and dimes people put up, it was very easy for those sources to try to control. When SNCC would not be controlled, I think the eastern establishment was pretty surprised and shocked. And when Medgar Evers would not be controlled here in Jackson, and did not block Meredith, and ultimately when Medgar would not stop things here in the Jackson Movement in the summer of 1963 and said he would go ahead - John and I are not the only ones who know of these threats. We've heard from other blacks that Medgar mentioned it to in

the week before his death that the NAACP was threatening to fire him. One of the last things he talked to me about in our last conversation was that he had made his decision, he thought direct action was the proper route at this moment, and that he was going ahead with it and he felt that Dr. King should be invited to come to Jackson. He said within a week he expected to be fired from his job with the NAACP. The next morning on television the NAACP has a martyr and starts raising money in his name.

SALTER: The NAACP national office didn't even want to let Dr. King sit on the speakers' platform at the Masonic Temple during Medgar's funeral.

KING: They wouldn't!

SALTER: He did sit there, but only because some other people brought him up.

KING: I didn't think he ever got up there, did he?

SALTER: Yes, he finally did.

KING: Well, they tried to prevent it.

SALTER: Yes.

KING: King was not a speaker at the funeral, and they tried to prevent him from even being on the platform. And then in the funeral procession, they deliberately put King way back, and then other people came along and just sort of took him up to the front.

SALTER: Yes. You have, in addition to some of the more organized