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MARY LOU FINLEY INTERVIEW
KING IN THE WILDERNESS
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MARY LOU FINLEY
Staff Member, SCLC
Interviewed by Trey Ellis
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Total Running Time: 1 hour 56 minutes

00:00:06:00 TREY ELLIS:

I wanted to first ask you just how did you become involved with the SCLC, the Chicago Movement, and first meeting Doctor King?

00:00:16:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

I came to Chicago right after I graduated from college. I came to be a volunteer on a church program on the West Side of Chicago, and I came partly because I knew that some of the civil rights leaders from the South were coming to that same parish. So I would work the first summer with the children in the neighborhood, which was a wonderful way to kind of connect with the spirit of what the issues really were. I ran a little program for girls eight to ten years old and one for pre-school students, which really connected me with the issues that those families faced. Doctor King came to Chicago for the first time while I was here- Well, he came that summer, Doctor King came that summer and had a march downtown supporting the Chicago organization that was working on the school's issues then. So I didn't meet him personally then, but I do go on the march.

00:01:11:00 But the first time I really met him was in the fall in October. He came up for a big conference that we had with Chicago's civil rights leaders, about three hundred people. We all went up to Lake Geneva for a weekend to begin to talk about how to organize the movement in Chicago collaboratively between Doctor King and the

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Chicago folks. And he made a wonderful speech. Really inspir- a very- he made a very inspiring speech, kind of making it really clear that he was very connected to the issues of poverty in Chicago and wanted to do something seriously about that. So, I found him to be powerfully inspiring, well educated, and he knew what was going on in Chicago, even though it was really new for him.

TREY ELLIS:

Did you have an impression of him when you first met him personally?

00:02:08:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

He was a very sweet, warm person, very cordial, very inviting, and he was very, very supportive of the people who were on the staff. You know, I think that we felt like we were doing- we were doing his work. We were working with him, and I think he really felt that too. And he felt we were with him and that he cared about us and wanted to help us have- do the kind of work that we needed to do.

00:02:32:00 TREY ELLIS:

Can you talk about Al Raby? Who was Al Raby and his relationship to the Chicago Movement?

00:02:39:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Al Raby had been a school teacher and he was a part of Teachers for Integrated Schools. When the Chicago Movement decided to work on the school's issues, they formed a coalition, the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations, and Al Raby was elected as the convener of that organization. So, he was really the important Chicago civil rights leader in that era. And it was he who really invited Doctor King to come to Chicago. He really wanted- he really wanted that support and that help for the Chicago movement. They had done some marvelous things. They had had school boycotts that involved two hundred, three hundred thousand children staying out of school. The community had worked really hard on it. They

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felt like they were having a hard time really making a dent in what was going on. And so, that was the kind of situation that Doctor King liked to work in, when people had been working hard on an issue and they felt like they needed additional support. So, he was very interested in coming to Chicago to join the local coordinating group of civil rights organizations. Chicago was very well organized and that made it possible for him to connect with Chicago in a powerful way. The Chicago civil rights community was well organized, I should say.

00:03:56:00 TREY ELLIS:

And can you talk about this switch to- from De jure segregation to De facto segregation in Chicago and how... Could you just talk about what De facto segregation was?

00:04:10:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Well, the thing that was most obvious when I began to work here was the issue of housing. African Americans were trapped in particular communities and unable to move outside of those without there being serious threats. There had been a number of- people had tried and there had been very much- difficulty in the years preceding the movement. It was also a period when there was a strong immigration coming up from the South, a strong movement of people coming up from the South due to the changes in the Southern cotton fields, and particularly in Mississippi. There were a lot of people from Mississippi that came to Chicago in the nineteen fifties. And so, the housing conditions became very, very crowded. The people- the landlords would take one four room apartment and break it down into four different one room apartments with four families in there. They didn't take care of the buildings, and so the buildings were very dilapidated and falling apart. There were a number of fires that happened in these buildings. You would- I remember looking out windows where I was living on the near West Side and seeing these fires, buildings on fire.

00:05:24:00 So, housing conditions were really abominable, and that was one of the ways that De... That was one of the ways that De facto segregation really manifested itself in

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Chicago, was the housing segregation. And the consequences of housing segregation was not just that black people couldn't move where they wanted to move, but in fact, the places that were available, many of them were in very, very bad condition. Now, there were nice black middle-class neighborhoods as well, but there were many, many people who were forced to live in these very poor conditions. That's one kind of important way that the De facto segregation manifested itself in Chicago.

TREY ELLIS:

Just jumping forward to today, is there still De facto segregation in Chicago?

00:06:12:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Today, De facto segregation in Chicago... well, it's not as bad as it was. There are more opportunities for African Americans to move into other neighborhoods. There are laws and so that if something doesn't work, people can be- the landlords can be sued, the landlords or the real estate agents can be sued if they refuse to show housing to African Americans in certain neighborhoods. So it's not as tight as it used to be. There's still some segregation, so I'm not going to say this problem is fixed. It's not really fixed, but it's not as extreme as it was. One of the things that happened, kind of paralleling the Chicago Freedom Movement, was the case to desegregate public housing. And that's a long story in itself, but one of the outcomes of it was the decision to allow people to move to, what they called Opportunity Neighborhoods with public housing money. And so, there were many families- the organization that grew out of the Chicago Freedom Movement, the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities, ran a program for many, many years where they moved thousands of people to better neighborhoods that were not seg- that were integrated neighborhoods. So, there were many more opportunities for moving out of the most difficult neighborhoods than there had been before, I'll put it that way.

TREY ELLIS:

And the decision to move to Chicago and picking Lawndale as a neighborhood.

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00:07:49:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

After the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the clarity that the Voting Rights Act was coming, Doctor King wanted to turn his attention to the problems in the North. And he was particularly inspired to do that by the Watts Riots of nineteen sixty-five, which brought to the whole country the message that there are problems outside the South that affect the African-American community. So, he was really wanting to do something about this. So, he began to look for different kind of places to go. The people in Rochester wanted him to come there. There were some thought of going to Boston. He had gone to his school there and he knew people in Boston. So, there were various places which he considered going, maybe New York which is kind of a heart of the African-American community in certain ways.

00:08:44:00 But Chicago really called to him because, first of all, the conditions were very bad here and in obvious way. That was one thing. But I think the more important thing was the Chicago civil rights organizations had built a coalition, and that co- so that there was not disputes- so many disputes within the civil rights movement, which there were in some other cities. So that was one thing, there was a coalition and that coalition really wanted him to come. And he liked to go places where he was invited. And so, there was a strong desire to have him in Chicago. And he'd been here the summer before, there was a big rally, he felt like there was going to be a lot of support for him in Chicago. So, he felt like this is a place where people can hear the message that I'm going to bring. So those were some of the factors I think that helped him to choose Chicago.

00:09:36:00 And frankly, I think it's kind of a miracle that he chose Chicago, because Chicago was, in some sense, a hub of black culture. You know, the *Ebony* and *Jet Magazines* were published out of here, so the things that happened in the black community in Chicago tend to radiate out to the country faster than if you've been Rochester, New York, for instance. So, in some sense, I don't know that he was thinking about that, but that's what I mean about, "I think it was a miracle." He had his reasons for coming, but because it's such a powerful black community and has been for a long

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time that it was a very good choice in that way because there was a lot of power that could come out of the strength of the black community here.

TREY ELLIS:
And why Lawndale?

00:10:16:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Well... Doctor King understood, like many people of the times, that if you really care about working on behalf of the people, you can make a strong statement about that by being willing to live with them. You might remember- some of you might remember, this was a few years after the Peace Corps was founded. It was right about the time that Peace Corps was founded, actually. And the idea with the Peace Corps was that you go live with the villagers, and you live like they live, and that that's how you can relate to them and begin to understand their issues and their concerns and figure out how to work with them to bring about change. The church was kind of ahead of the Peace Corps in that. For instance, the East Harlem Protestant parish had a group of ministers who moved into East Harlem and began to work with people in the communities. That was a group out of Union Theological Seminary in New York. And so, there was a kind of tradition already, of if you really want to understand how to be an organizer, how to work with the community, you need to move there, and live with people.

00:11:24:00 So, I think Doctor King was influenced, particularly by the religious version of that, that you- that's the right thing to do. It's to put yourself with the people that you care about and learn from them what's needed. And that it also opens doors between you and them, that you living like they are. It's kind of like, the Peace Corps had that same idea, that we're not going to be like United Nations workers swooping into some small country, and living in a big hotel someplace, and telling people what to do. The Peace Corps was about being with the people and having respect for the local knowledge. And that social gospel version of Christianity also came out of that same perspective. And a lot of the organizing in the South that the Student Non-

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violent Coordinating Committee did, was very much based on that same philosophy. You live with the people. You work with them. You're close to them. If they're eating beans, you eat beans. That's what you do, you know, you stay with them, and that's part of how you build a kind of sense of trust.

00:12:22:00 And so, I think that people who didn't understand that perspective kind of had a hard time understanding why he wanted to move into these communities. But, to some of us, it was totally obvious. That was the right thing to do, if you really cared, and you wanted to open the door between you and the people that you were trying to work with. So, I think it made sense to me, totally, that that's what he wanted to do. And, you know, I had done that myself. After I got out of Stanford, and I came to Chicago, and moved into this project house on the near West Side. It was definitely an old slum building. And we had mice in the kitchen, and cockroaches in the bathtub. And, okay. You know? That's what we're doing here. And we all thought that was the right thing to do, it was a house for student volunteers who wanted to work in the community, and that we understood that. And he wanted to be part of that.

00:13:11:00 Why Lawndale? Well, we were- our church that we were organizing out of was on the West Side. It was very close to Lawndale. It was in East Garfield Park. It was not that far- I don't know, like ten minutes, maybe, from the apartment that Doctor King got. So, in some sense, it made sense for him to be on the West Side because the staff was already on the West Side. And that was because Bevel had come earlier and taken a job with the West Side Christian Parish. And, so- which was one of those social gospel Christianity groups that was trying to do work in the community. So, Bevel was already located, himself, on the West Side, so the church we found was on the West Side. So, it just kind of- on one level, it made sense. On the other hand, it was also- the West Side, because it was a newer black community, it didn't have the level of infrastructure and organization that the South Side had.

00:14:01:00 And so, it felt like it was a community more in need, and that that was also where he would have wanted to be, which was the community that was most in need. And I think that fit what the situation was, in the east- in the West Side, at that point, and in Lawndale, in particular. And I want to say, those communities were very needy, they

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also had a lot of nice houses with middle class people in them. It was a kind of mixture of people who are desperately poor, and people who had some- had made a nice place for themselves in those communities. That isn't so much the case anymore. The communities are more- the poor people who are- the people who are in poverty-stricken are more isolated there than they were back in those days.

00:14:45:00 TREY ELLIS:

Can you talk about, you know, your experience? Just kind of walk us through- you're a young person arriving at Lawndale, buying furniture, you know, can you paint that picture a little bit?

00:14:55:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Okay. Okay. Well, this is a story that actually- the story about Doctor King's movement to Lawndale involves- I was involved in that, but also a young woman named Diana, Diana Smith, who also worked in the office with me who was from Lawndale, and so, when it came time to find an apartment for Doctor King, Diana went out with one of Doctor King's associates, Bernard Lee, to look for the apartment. And Diana knew the neighborhood, so she knew how to find the kind of place that she thought Doctor King was talking about, which was one that was really the kind of- had the same kind of problems that other people in the neighborhood had to live with. So, they got an apartment and then one morning... So, we worked on- we worked on furnishing the apartment for Doctor King, and really- the church we worked for had a second-hand store, so we got things moved in from the second-hand store. We did buy new beds. I remember buying the beds from Sears and Roebuck. Andy Young said it was okay to buy new beds, and so we did that. Everything else was second hand.

00:16:03:00 So, we were- Diana and I were going to go over there one morning from where we were staying at, a project house on the near West Side. We were going to go over there and clean it up because it was quite a mess. So, Diana went over first and then she called me back at the project house where we were living and she said, "Forget

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about the mops and buckets. You can just come on over here anyway." So, I took the bus over, and we found out that the landlord had found out that Martin Luther King was moving into this apartment and he had sent a crew of ten people in there to paint the whole thing, and to put new linoleum on the floor, and kind of clean the whole place up. So at least we didn't have to do that. And as I say, there was stories going around in those days saying, "Well, all we have to do to clean up the whole West Side is move Martin Luther King from one apartment to the next. These landlords know what to do. They just aren't willing to put in the energy unless there's something special, like Martin Luther King moving in." So, we worked with that.

00:17:03:00 Finally, this was... He moved- he came in January. Doctor King decided in the fall to move in, but the whole process took until January when he finally decided- when he finally was able to move into this apartment, let me say that. Doctor King decided to- was ready to move into this apartment by January of nineteen sixty-six. So finally, he and Andrew Young spent the first night there one night in January, and Diana and I had equipped this apartment with blankets and dishes from the project house, the group house that we were living in as sort of student volunteers. And so- but I got worried, it was a very cold night, and I got really worried that there weren't going to be enough blankets. And so, I called up Andrew Young and said, "Do you think you have enough blankets? Would you like me to bring some more blankets over?" And he said, "Yes. You could bring some more blankets." And he said, "Furthermore," he said, "Doctor King would really like some barbecued ribs." He said, "Doctor King likes ribs when he's starting a movement." And so, he said, "And you can bring some for you and your friend, Bill, too." I had recruited my friend Bill, who was an activist in the movement, to help with this because I didn't have a car. But he had a car, so we were going to do this together.

00:18:19:00 So, Diana had already told me the best place to get ribs on Roosevelt Road, so I knew exactly where to get Doctor King's ribs. So, we went and picked up those- picked up some ribs, got the blankets, and went over to see Doctor King in his apartment. We sat down on the floor and eating. We had- for some furniture. There was a big couch that Doctor King sat on, but I don't remember any other furniture

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actually in the living room. I remember sitting on the floor. And as we were sitting there having our dinner together, the four of us, the doorbell rang. And it turned out that there was a- we opened the door and there was a young man there who wanted to come in, so Doctor King said, "Come on in." So, this young man said- the first thing he said when he came in the door was, "Are you really Martin Luther King?" Doctor King thought that was pretty funny. And he assured him that he was, in fact, Martin Luther King and they had a very lovely kind of conversation with Doctor King really saying, "We want you to join the movement."

00:19:21:00 And so, finally, the young man left. And pretty soon later, there was another knock on the door. We opened the door again and here was the same young man, but there was like a whole train of them going down the stairs. And so, they all- we invited them all in. Doctor said, "Invite them all in." And the same young man, he came back and said, he said, "Well, I went back and told my buddies that Martin Luther King moved in here, but nobody believed me. So, everybody else wanted to come and see you too." So, we had a wonderful conversation. Doctor King was really wanting, again, to get them interested in the movement. And it wasn't a very long conversation, but it was a very sweet moment. I just felt- it was amazing that I happened to be there when this actually happened. And what I realized later was that those young men came back a number of times to see Doctor King in that apartment. One time, they came late at night. There was something that had happened that was really upsetting, and they said, "We don't know about this nonviolent stuff. We're trying to think, we don't know about this." Doctor King stayed up until four o'clock in the morning telling them- doing basically a nonviolence workshop for them, until finally at four o'clock they said, "Okay. We're not sure about nonviolence in general, but we can at least go with nonviolence as something... Really, we would say as a strategy. We'll try it out, basically."

00:20:41:00 And so, we recruited a lot of those young men, a lot of the- some of the staff people, James Orange, Jimmy Wilson, Jimmy Collier, were working with those young guys from the neighborhood. And we recruited them to be marshals for the marches that we had, which are the peace-keepers. The marshals walk along the edge of the march

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to make sure that there isn't any problem, or to protect people one way or the other, keep people- and they did a fantastic job and kept a nonviolent discipline through that whole time. So, it was- that evening, that first night he was there I realized was the beginning of a whole complicated relationship actually that Doctor King had with these young people in the neighborhood. I felt it was really an honor to actually witness the beginning of that, of that relationship and to witness that moment.

00:21:29:00 TREY ELLIS:

Were the kids, were they gang-affiliated kids, or were they just regular kids from the neighborhood? What was your feeling about these kids?

00:21:36:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Well, at the time I didn't really know, but... we were- This apartment was located two blocks from the headquarters of the Vice Lords on the West Side, which was the main gang in that community. When we were working on this book fairly recently, I managed to interview somebody who was involved in that group. And what he said was, "They called us a gang, but we thought of ourselves as protectors of the neighborhood." And I think that he- We kind of decided that he was probably one of those young men that came. He said, "I was a pee wee. I was eleven or twelve then." He became one of the leaders of this Vice Lord Nation later on. But he said, "We had many... well, respectful arguments," he put it, "with Doctor King," and came to visit him a lot of times. And the Vice Lords at that point were getting ready to- they wanted to open some businesses in the community. They were trying to transform themselves from a kind of a youth organization to some other kind of organization- more economic organization in the community.

00:22:48:00 They did succeed in doing those things, but this man that I spoke with who was one of their leaders said, "Doctor King said," he said, "he told us we need to get an education. He said, you're not going to be able to run those businesses if you can't read and write." He said, "It really made an impression on me and I stayed in school. You know?" So, he had that kind of impact, too, on some of the younger folks. It was

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really- the relationship with the young people was really important to him. You know, nineteen sixty-five was the summer of the Watts Riot, and Doctor King once said that "riots are the voice of the unheard." And he really wanted the young people in Chicago to realize that there were other ways to bring change to their communities. And so that's why he was very determined to try to connect with them and to help them see that nonviolence could be a way to work with the issues that were troubling their neighborhoods and were really distressing themselves and their lives. So, this was no accident that he was really open to those people that particular evening that I happened to be there. It was really a very important thing to him.

00:24:01:00 TREY ELLIS:
Can you talk a little bit about some of the strategy sessions that his group- King's associates would have, and when he goes to sleep and...

00:24:11:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:
Okay. Okay. Sometimes we had staff meetings in Doctor King's apartment, and we could barely fit in there. There would be, like, twenty young people all sitting on the floor, kind of crammed together like when you go to a young people's party and you have to, like, walk over everybody to get anywhere. It was kind of like that. But we liked being there in the evenings. It was better than being in a cold church late at night when we need to have meetings. So, one time we were having a meeting there with Doctor King and trying to figure out, you know, what we were going to do next and how we were going to solve some of the problems we were running up against in the organizing efforts. And finally, Doctor King said he was tired and he was going to go to bed, so he left and went into the other room to go to bed in this apartment. And we kept talking. We're meeting, and we got into some kind of wrangle that we can't quite remember exactly what it was about, but we had a lot of disagreements. So, we had a major disagreement that we couldn't really resolve. Somebody said, "We have to go get Doctor King." So, somebody went and got him out of bed, and he came out in his pajamas and his robe, and he sat down with us.

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00:25:16:00 And Doctor King was very good at listening to people, listening to this side and then listening to that side, and then trying to figure out how to make something work that would deal with the issues that all the different people in the group were raising. He was excellent at that. And he really came up with some kind of conclusion that we could all work with and go forward with. And I have to say also that there was a huge amount of respect for Doctor King. And so, you know, if he said, "This is the way to go," people would say, "Okay. That's what we're going to do." So that was another element in the whole thing. But his capacity to listen carefully and to actually integrate other people's ideas was one of his real strengths that I think people who know him mostly from his speeches wouldn't necessarily guess. But part of the reason all that was so powerful was that he had been listening a lot, and he knew from what he had heard what the issues were in the community.

TREY ELLIS:
Wow.

00:26:15:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:
So, yeah. It was a... There were- It was a small staff. There were twenty-five to thirty of us. I could never count it exactly because some people were volunteers and then they got put on the staff, and then they- so then there were new volunteers showing up, so who was exactly staff. But there was kind of a functioning group of like twenty-five to thirty people who were working together on all this. So it was kind of like, does the teacher know everybody in the class? Yeah, the teacher knows everybody in the class. You know, we were his class, basically, you know.

00:26:45:00 TREY ELLIS:
And in terms of- you know, we think of the SCLC and the public face of marching. What other- but, you know, there's a lot more that goes to nonviolent direct action than that, so can you talk a little bit about what else you guys were doing and planning besides marching?

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00:27:01:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Okay. So, we were- we had a lot of workshops with James Bevel, who was the project director in Chicago, who was really teaching us nonviolence. Some people had experience in the South, maybe about half the staff, but about the rest of the staff where relatively new to all this. And when, when we- one of the things in a nonviolent campaign, the first thing you need to do- the first step as we now teach it, is information gathering. So, one of the things that we did, we had a retreat at the beginning of the year with about a hundred staff people from various organizations, figuring out how we could work together and what different issues people were concerned about. So, there was very much a focus on coalition building. And we had such a good time together on this retreat that we decided that we were going to meet twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday mornings from nine to twelve for a number of weeks to try and continue to learn together.

00:28:08:00 And one of the things that we did in those meetings was to bring in people who could explain how the housing system worked in Chicago, how the political machine worked in Chicago, what was going on with the young people and the gangs, so that we were gathering information about how Chicago operates. That was really important, as I say, partly because we were young and just didn't know a lot of those things, and we were not all from Chicago, since so many of them came from the movement in the South, and I came from California. So, those were really instructive. And I was particularly- I remembered one in particular that explained how the whole housing system worked, that the banks and the savings and loans would not loan money in black neighborhoods. And there was actually a Federal Housing Authority, an FHA ruling, that said that they were not able to do that. The FHA would not insure loans in neighborhoods that were of some racial quality that they defined in a vague way, but it was clear that it meant in black neighborhoods, among other things. So, nobody could get loans for their housing.

00:29:24:00 And so, some of the people then bought on contracts with what turned out to be, in many cases, really unscrupulous folks who were real estate dealers who were not

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honest with them. So, that was one thing that happened. And even it meant that the people who owned the apartment buildings couldn't get loans either, so it made it harder for them to keep the apartments up. And so, there was like a whole system behind it. This was not like one landlord that doesn't care. There was a whole system that was keeping in place these poor housing conditions that we were seeing in the community. That was shocking for me as a young person to come to understand. So, part of what we were doing was, first of all, just beginning to understand what was going on in the neighborhood. And what we ended up coming up with an analysis that talked about slums as an exploited community, and one of the young people who we were working with from the neighborhood, when we were trying to say, well, what is a "slum?" She said, "It's a community where all the resources go out and nothing comes back in."

00:30:37:00 And we were thinking about that like the rent that people paid. You know, the landlords mostly were absentee landlords. They didn't live in the neighborhood. Whatever that rent money was went somewhere else. It wasn't poured back into the buildings. It wasn't poured back into the stores in the neighborhood, and so that was an important form of the analysis that we came up with. In those days, some people called it a form of internal colonialism. You know, this was the mid-sixties. We were dealing with- all the African countries were moving out of their colonial status and becoming independent, so the nature of colonialism was really something that was on everyone's mind as a way to understand how systems work in ways that oppressed people.

00:31:17:00 So, as we began to see how the system was put together, we had to think about how to- what kind of strategies you could use to deal with such a system. Now, the marches, that's one thing, and I'll talk about the marches in a little bit. But with these landlords what we decided to do was organize tenant unions, and to ask the tenants to go on rent strike and not pay their rent until the- and not pay their rent until the landlord fixed up the building in some kind of way. There were various kinds of problems, I mean, sometimes the toilets didn't work, sometimes the electricity didn't work, sometimes- there was a huge problem with peeling paint, which in those days

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the paint had lead in it. And because the lead-based paints had a sort of sweet taste to them, a lot of the children, the small children, the little kind of toddlers, would eat these paint chips that fell off the wall and that was causing enormous problems with lead poisoning among children. So, it was a really- it was not just uncomfortable, it was really a dangerous situation for families, so going on rent strike until the landlord fixed the building was an important thing. Now, that was a kind of scary thing for people, but we managed to get a lot of people to agree to do this. At one point, we had like forty-five buildings on rent strike of one landlord who owned buildings on the West Side. And eventually, that landlord decided, okay, he would negotiate.

00:32:59:00 It was interesting to me that it was, like- okay, on the tenth of July, we had- Martin Luther King gave a big speech and we had a big rally in Soldier Field with, I don't know, maybe thirty thousand people, and we marched to city hall. That's a part of this story that's more publicly known. But it was three days after that that these landlords called up and said, "Okay, what do you want?" And I don't think that's an accident that that was three days after that, they saw six thousand- what is it- twenty-five thousand people marching to city hall, that they didn't really want those twenty-five thousand people marching on them. And so that really added to the rent strike as part of the reason why they were willing to settle.

00:33:39:00 And we worked with a labor lawyer who helped us design a collective bargaining agreement between landlords and tenants where the tenants had some rights, and so that if the toilet's not working, you can call a plumber, get the toilet fixed, and then deduct the amount of money that you spent on the plumber from your rent. So, in the meantime, the tenants also agreed to make some more efforts to keep the building clean and take care of their garbage and things like that. So, it was a thought of as kind of a mutual responsibility toward one another where both sides could benefit from that kind of agreement. So that was one really important thing that came out of this time.

00:34:17:00 And, okay, so you were asking me about strategies. We didn't ever have... Well, let's see... We mostly did not have marches around the tenant issues, but there was one

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time that we had a very small kind of picket line and that happened in this way. There was once- In one of these buildings, there was a two-year-old child who fell down over a broke- okay, let me start over. In one of these buildings, there was a two-year-old child, and there was a broken railing on the back porch. This child fell off of the porch and died. And that was really a stunning moment for all of us. And we all know what two-year-olds are like, you know. Two-year-olds are wonderful, adorable, they have a lot of energy, and no good sense, so, you know, that's kind of the children that are going to be real vulnerable in that kind of situation. And so, because of that, we actually found where this particular landlord lived out in a nearby suburb and we picketed his house on a Sunday afternoon with about twenty-five or thirty of us. And it was quite a startling moment, because the landlord hadn't told his family that he was- where he was making all his money, and his children were quite upset when they realized that- the conditions of the buildings that he was making his money off of. And none of his neighbors were also upset. So, it also began to also put another kind of pressure on him. So, there were some times when a strategy of a small march could be useful in the tenant union movement, but mostly we used the rent strike as a strategy there.

00:36:06:00 So I'm sure you've probably heard from Jesse Jackson and the Operation Breadbasket operation, but one of the things that the movement did to address poverty issues was the Operation Breadbasket project. And in that case, the strategies that they used were boycotts of the stores that refused to hire African Americans except as janitors or something, which was often the case in those days. And so, boycotts was another kind of strategy that we used, or "selective buying campaigns" is the name we preferred for those. So that's another kind of nonviolent strategy. So, nonviolence got all kinds of strategies besides marches. That's just the most publicly visible. But for people who are actually going to organize nonviolent campaigns, it's really important to realize the wide range of possibilities, which people don't often realize, so- don't always realize. So, those are some of the other kinds of strategies.

00:37:07:00 TREY ELLIS:

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So, talk about education or unemployment, you know, as another pillar of some strategies to address?

00:37:17:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Well, the Chicago Movement led by the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations starting around nineteen sixty-three, so it was really kind of a couple of years, two and a half years before Doctor King came to Chicago, was really focused on the school situation. And what was happening in the schools was the schools for African Americans were becoming very overcrowded, because, again, there were so many people moving into these neighborhoods, often from the South. And what was happening is the schools- most- in the black schools were on double shifts, so the children were going to school for a half a day from seven o'clock in the morning until noon, and then noon until four o'clock or something. So, they were not getting a full day's education. Meanwhile, often a few blocks away from some of those schools were white schools, schools with white students with empty classrooms. And so, some of the parents said, "Well, why can't we send our children over to those schools that have plenty of room instead of having our children on double shifts? This doesn't make any sense." Well, the school district wasn't going to go for that. And so, it was really- that movement grew out of that whole segregated school situation. That's another example, by the way, of the De facto segregation in the North. And that was a very strong movement.

00:38:30:00 At one point, there were- they had a school boycott where- over- I think it was one was two hundred seventy-five thousand children were out, one four hundred thousand children were, out for a day. And the people in the community organized Freedom Schools for the children to go talk about black history or some other kinds of things that they weren't getting in school, so the children, there was a place for them to go. But it was making a very strong statement that that many parents in Chicago understood this problem and wanted to do something about it, so that was a very powerful moment in the Chicago civil rights movement overall. And in a sense, I think that's one of the things that would inspire Doctor King to come to Chicago,

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because he saw that the people of Chicago were ready, you know, they're ready to do things. And that really- you want to be working with a community that's ready to be on the move, and Chicago had shown that they really were.

00:39:23:00 The schools also had- the schools campaign also had marches one summer. Dick Gregory lead marches every day from Buckingham fountain in downtown Chicago to city hall. And apparently, Dick Gregory the comedian was quite a figure in Chicago. Apparently, one person told me that he was still doing his comedian acts in San Francisco at the Hungry Eye, and he was flying into Chicago to lead this march and then going back to San Francisco to do his thing every day. That's a story that was told to me. So, there was a committed group of people who kept raising that issue in a very dramatic way. So that kind of strategy can also be used. Sometimes marching every day is useful. Sometimes you just wear out everybody, and you have to kind of think a little bit more about how to pull your strength together. But that's- sometimes that's- the determination that that indicates is a powerful statement to the powers that be. So, education remained an issue, although while Martin Luther King was here, we didn't work so much on that issue. The Chicago movement had been asking for the removal of the school superintendent whose name was Ben Willis. And actually, about the time that Doctor King got here, Ben Willis retired. He did quit. You know, they had all those marches asking him to quit, and, of course, it didn't happen during the marches. But as soon as no one was paying any attention, he said, "Oh, I think I'll retire."

00:40:59:00 So that's one of the things that sometimes happens in social movements as we've learned over the years, as we've studied more how this works, is that sometimes you think you haven't won, but then not very long after that there's a kind of quiet victory that nobody pays a lot of attention to because no one in the power structure will say, "Oh, well all those marches caused Ben Willis to retire." Nobody's going to ever tell you that as activists. They never tell you, even when you win, they'll be some other way of explaining how it happened. And so that's one of the things we now teach about social movements is that people need to understand when there has been a success, because it doesn't always come immediately. And when it comes, the people

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in power often take credit for it. And so, you, you have to- it's just important for the movement people to know that the movement played an important role in bringing about that success, so people don't get too discouraged.

00:41:52:00 TREY ELLIS:
Can you define De facto segregation, why that was the next step...?

MARY LOU FINLEY:
For Doctor King?

TREY ELLIS:
For Doctor King.

00:41:59:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:
Segregation in the South was really obvious and visible. There were signs, white and colored over water fountains, over rooms- waiting rooms in the bus station. There were many other rules where there weren't signs like black people could not try on shoes in a shoe store, for instance. You had to buy your children shoes not being able to try them on the children. That kind of segregation and different set of rules for African-Americans and white people, that was very obvious in the South and that was the kind of thing that the Southern movement was able to fight.

00:42:43:00 In the North, things were more subtle. There was no sign in a real estate office that said, "We don't serve black people here." They just didn't serve black people. So that's what the De facto segregation was. Even though it looked like it was integrated, in fact, the reality of it was it was not. The schools where the black children were going, I was describing schools where black children were on double shifts going half a day to school because the school rooms were not adequate for the number of children there while there were empty classrooms in the white schools. The school did not say, "This is a black school and this is a white school," although people talked about it like that in Chicago. It was not a sign over the door, it was just

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the way things were put together. That's the way the school district operated. It was kind of operating procedures, not laws. And so that's a kind of- that's what we mean by De facto segregation. It was segregation in fact, but not in law, you know. We had an open housing law in Chicago, so apparently, the law was in favor of no discrimination in housing, but the reality was not. There was discrimination every place you turn. So again, that's another example of how- what we call De facto segregation really was a set of practices, which were subtle. And it allowed Mayor Daley to say, "Well, we don't have any discrimination here because you got this law in the books." But in fact, the reality was there was segregation everywhere.

00:44:18:00 TREY ELLIS:

I'd like to talk a little bit about James Bevel and what kind of character he was, what his role was. People talk about his creativity, his eccentricities a little bit.

00:44:28:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Yeah. Okay. Well, I was asked to be the secretary to James Bevel, and- I was asked by the church. I asked to be reassigned after the summer camp part of our project was over, and they said, "Well, how'd you like to be the secretary to James Bevel?" And I said, "That sounds really interesting." So, so I got to know him well. And, I mean, I really was very excited to be a part of the teaching that he did about nonviolence. I feel like I learned an immense amount from him, and Bevel was an amazing thinker. He really could analyze social structures, social conditions, and put it together into some kind of package that would help other people understand it more clearly. And so, you know, that whole idea of all these trainings that I spoke about earlier, that was Bevel's idea. And he was a big part of it in terms of weaving together the pieces that all these other people- people brought us stories about housing, about the political machine, about the education, about the employment issues, they brought us individual stories, and Bevel was the one that helped weave it all together into a tapestry that we could say, this is what a slum looks like, and we have to intervene somehow in this unjust system.

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00:45:42:00 So, Bevel definitely was an eccentric character. He really... what can I say about him? Bevel was brilliant, and he was a brilliant strategist. And he would think up things that other people wouldn't- that wouldn't occur to other people. He was very excited about the tenant union idea. Apparently, when this came to him one night, he went over to one of the houses where the staff people were living, and we woke everybody up in the middle of the night, and said, "I've got something to talk to you about." And he said, "We're going to organize tenant unions." He also said, "Greta's going to have another baby," which wasn't true, but he was kind of a jokester in that sort of way, you know. But he would get excited about something. That's why he would go wake people up in the middle of the night and say, "tenant unions," you know. And before people had organized tenants, but they had been tenant councils. And the union idea, to call it a union, meant that we were claiming some power and having power that would be a counterweight to the landlord's power. So it was a different concept. It was taking the old idea of tenant councils another step forward. And that was the moment that he kind of got that idea.

00:47:08:00 So, he was coming up with things like that all the time. And, you know, he was kind of- I remember one time he said, oh, he wanted to recruit three thousand young people to close down the Dan Ryan, you know, we're going to wake up Chicago. Well, that part of it didn't happen exactly like that, but he could think up things like that. He could help people feel like we were going to move forward. One of the things Bevel said was, "We're going to end slums in Chicago in eighteen months." Well, that didn't exactly turn out to be the case, but it gave us all a lot of optimism. And because, you know, Bevel had been a leader in the Selma campaign, and so SCLC had moved into Selma and within a matter of months or so, the voting rights campaign reached its climax and the voting rights bill was being passed. So, the young people who'd been working in the South, including Bevel, had that sense that if we just push hard on these things, things will start to change. And we did have the Civil Rights Act in sixty-four and the Voting Rights Act in sixty-five, so sixty-six let's end slums in Chicago.

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00:48:12:00 You know, so, and I- sometimes I think of that now. It's what I call the twenty-two-year-old syndrome. That's how old I was then, so maybe that's why I call it that. But when you're twenty-two, if someone told you it was going to take ten years, it feels like an eternity. But if someone says, we can fix this in eighteen months, okay, we'll do that, you know. So, you need that optimism to go forward. And so, while Bevel was a little over optimistic, you could say from a historical perspective on the other hand, that optimism helped to fuel people's enthusiasm and willingness to continue to do the work. So, maybe that captured a little bit of his qualities that really were important in the movement, even if a bit, as I say, overly optimistic in that way.

00:48:55:00 TREY ELLIS:
Well, people talk about how eccentric- how eccentric was he- did he, you know- besides being optimistic, how was he unusual in that?

00:49:04:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:
Oh, my. Well... I think of Bevel as a risk taker, and, you know, he was the one who came up with the idea of using the children for the Birmingham Campaign. That he would go- he would go beyond what other people thought was reasonable, you know, I'm trying- and he was often powerfully right. And certainly, he was in the Birmingham campaign. The effects of the children's campaign had an enormous impact on the country as people saw the children being hit with fire hoses and attacked by police dogs and what not. That's part of what changed the country, so he was very powerful in that way.

00:49:55:00 I'm just trying to think of ways in which he was a risk taker in Chicago. I would just say, you know, he was not afraid to work with the gangs. We're going to be able to bring truce- we actually brokered truces between some of these major gangs that had been fighting each other for a long time. We had to march right in- we had a conference for gangs at the Palmer House downtown -that was not Palmer House. We had a conference for the gangs at Blackstone Sheridan, Sheridan Blackstone downtown Chicago with like about a hundred fifty people from eighteen different

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gangs, declaring a truce and deciding they want to work in the movement. So, he was like- he'll move in where everybody- angels fear to tread, you know, Bevel's going to be there.

00:50:38:00 TREY ELLIS:

You talked about this a little bit about the, you know, as the militant movement- as, you know, sort of this counterweight to the- certainly there was SNCC and then sort of the radicalization after the riots, how that sort of butted up against nonviolence and SCLC. How did that play out in Chicago, and did you see that from King's point of view? Were you part of any conversations where he was talking about this schism, this coming schism.

00:51:08:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Well, it was after the march in which Martin Luther King was hit in the head with a rock, and a lot of other people were hit in the head with rocks as well. And there were firecrackers thrown at people and it felt like a dangerous situation to be in. maybe not as bad as the South, but dangerous. And it was after that that the group of young people, young guys who were affiliated with the, quote, "gangs," came to see Doctor King and said, "We don't know about this nonviolence. I mean, you know, the people are going to throw all this stuff at us, and we're not going to do anything?" And that's when he did his workshop with them from eleven o'clock at night until four o'clock in the morning, really trying to convince them to stay with nonviolence, which they did. So that was really a turbulent moment in terms of whether or not the movement would remain nonviolent. Another kind of thing that was beginning to- well, there were a couple of things. Okay, one of the stories that I like to tell from that era had to do with the women and *Ebony Magazine*. And *Ebony Magazine* did one of its usual things, which was like the most beautiful negro women in America issue, as it was called in those days. And all the women on the cover were light-skinned and had short- had hair that was straightened.

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00:52:52:00 And so, by this time, most of the black women on the SCLC staff had decided to cut their hair and have naturals, and they were- that was a statement of black pride, I mean, so the black pride aspect of this was coming in- was present in Martin Luther King's staff. And so those women decided, we got to do something about this. So, there were like half a dozen of them. And so, they marched downtown to see John Johnson, who was the publisher of *Ebony Magazine*, and he graciously agreed to meet with them. They said- they wanted him to take the magazine off the street. And he said, "Well, that's not how it's done." And so- but what he did do was send his fashion editor out to do an article on natural hair, and he came out and interviewed the staff, the women on the West Side and put some nice pictures of them in *Ebony Magazine*. And he- actually, they put one of the women, Diana, who was my friend and worked in the office with me, on the cover of *Ebony Magazine* two months later. "The new natural look."

00:53:53:00 And so, in that sense, the black pride issue was part of the nonviolent movement as well as the sort of black nationalist movement that came later, which I think isn't very well understood. I love that story, because it was the women sort of taking action about it. It was kind of an odd story because it ended up as the fashion section of the magazine. It's like, okay, that's as far as we could get it, but at least there was a woman with natural hair on the cover. And they're wonderful stories. We researched this a little bit a few years ago, and that there were people who wrote into *Ebony* the next month and said, "I saw that picture on the cover of *Ebony*, and I took it to my hairdresser and said I want my hair just like this." So that helped to sort of open up that whole black pride for women issue around the country by having that on the cover of the magazine. So, in that sense, there was an intermingling of what we usually say to think about as a black nationalist, black pride, and the civil rights movement, so that's one piece of this story.

00:55:01:00 The other... toward the end of my time- I worked with the movement for a year, and toward the end of that year, the black pride was rising. And there was some question about whether it was appropriate for white people to stay working with the movement. And it was at that point that I decided that it was time for me to do

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something else, and I went back to graduate school and tried to do some study around all these things. But, I mean, I remember one of my black friends, the woman who was a close friend, saying to me, "We need to know we can do this ourselves." And, you know, I really respected that. And even though she was a good friend, and I felt stra- I was sorry to be... not going to be there anymore in some ways, I understood why. I understood that. Doctor King, on the other hand, would never have asked white people to leave. And if anybody raised those questions around him, he would say- he would start talking about Viola Liuzzo and some of the white people who had died in the Southern movement on behalf of black civil rights. And he said, "Our white allies have been very important to use all along, and that we respect them, and we honor them, and we want them to stay with us." So, he himself- but some of the younger folks who were my friends and my age, that was really an issue with. So that became part of that transition.

00:56:39:00 One of the things that the young people- the young folks who I will say, the gang young folks who were working with Doctor King on the West Side said, "We don't know about all these white people you've got running around with you. We don't trust white people." And Doctor King did his little speech about how there's been white people in the movement all along and how important it had been and what not. And they said, "Okay, we'll trust the ones you say are okay." And so, for a while, when things were really tense on the West Side, he said, "Tell all the white people to wear their "end the slum armbands" when they're walking around, and then we'll know who yours are, and we won't bother them," you know, so kind of working with those issues was challenging all along.

00:57:22:00 There was another time when the riot broke out on the near West Side, and they wanted to get- the kids who were involved in the riot in- we were going to have a meeting at the Shiloh Baptist Church, which was like right there where the riot broke out. So, we wanted to... the staff wanted to get the young people from the riot who were rioting to come into the church to the meeting. That was the idea. I don't think that worked, but they said the white people had to leave, so they asked all the white people to leave in an effort to actually work with those young black people. So, there

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was a distrust of white people that was kind of out there in the community, and understandably so because people had had a lot of bad experiences with landlords and store keepers that were not honest and other things like that, so I understood that. So that was a tension that we managed pretty well to keep working with, at least during the year that I was here. And I think, you know, by a year or two later, some of the other programs like the ministry program at the Urban... I can't think of it. There was a program training ministers to work in the inner city after, you know, by a couple of years later, it was decided that it wasn't really appropriate for white ministers to be doing that work. So, you know, we were in a kind of transition zone around those kinds of issues during that particular time.

00:58:44:00 TREY ELLIS:

Was there any change after- you know, the March Against Fear was sort of in the middle of the Chicago movement. Did you notice a change sort of in the movement or in the SCLC before and after when it started up again coming back to Chicago?

00:59:00:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Yes. So, James Meredith's march across Mississippi, the March Against Fear, happened... I think it was late June of nineteen sixty-six. It was right when we were ready to launch the summer campaign for the Chicago movement. And Doctor King really felt like it was really important to go and continue that march, which he did. And he took a number of the staff people from Chicago, the African Americans. I think maybe ten or fifteen. It was- most of the staff left and went on that march with him. So that meant that our schedule for the summer got- we were supposed to have a rally at the end of June, and it got put back to July tenth, so it kind of shortened the summer season in Chicago, because Doctor King and a lot of the staff were occupied with that march. And I think it was really important that that march got finished, and that it was across Mississippi, and that, you know, that was an important moment. But that was the moment when Stokely Carmichael started the cries of "Black Power," and James Orange, who was one of the- had been in the Southern civil rights

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movement and who was working with us in Chicago and whom I knew well, he said- would cry, "freedom." And then I remember something he said, well- and Stokely Carmichael didn't like that. He wanted him to say "Black Power." James Orange said, "Well, can't I just say 'freedom?'" So, there was that kind of tension.

01:00:22:00 I'm trying to think about if that had an impact on Chicago. I mean, I don't really have a sense that it did. It's like we were rolling at that point when we came back, and we were ready for the summer campaign. We were just going to go forge ahead and do it. I do think that it maybe began to affect the black staff so that by six months later when people were saying things to me like "we want to be sure that we can do this ourselves," that was coming out of that sort of energy that was precipitated by that shift with Stokely Carmichael and Black Power. And, you know, Doctor King talked about Black Power himself. And he said, "You know, if we're talking about economic power, if we're talking about educational power or power in government, I'm all for Black Power." So, he tried to really frame the issue of Black Power in a way that fit with nonviolence, so that the two were not seen so much in opposition. I don't think that was convincing to certain people who were in the Black Power movement, but for him those things were very connected, that Black Power was important.

01:01:38:00 And one of the things that was happening in Chicago during that era was the election of more black officials who were not part of the political machine. There were a couple that got elected to the state legislature. That began to grow over time, and eventually resulted in the election of Harold Washington as the first black mayor of Chicago in nineteen eighty-three. So black political power was on the move in Chicago, and black political power connected to the movement, movement people going into politics. So, in that sense- and Doctor King was, although careful, he found ways to be supportive without, you know, he wasn't in an organization that endorsed candidates, so he had to kind of dance around the edge of that. But in terms of being personally supportive to these black people who were running for political office, he was able to do that and kind of stand by their side in ways that showed that he saw that as an important part of the movement.

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01:02:40:00 TREY ELLIS:

I want to talk about the Daley machine versus King. What was King's relationship with Daley before arriving to Chicago and how did it change when he came to Chicago?

01:02:54:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Well, Martin Luther King had given speeches in Chicago for a couple of times in the summer of sixty-five and I believe the summer of sixty-four. So, he'd come to Chicago to work with the civil rights movement several times before he actually came here to start what became the Chicago Freedom Movement. So, all those other times, he was also opposing Mayor Daley, so he'd been in opposition to Mayor Daley for a while. I would say, you know, Mayor Daley was a good democrat and he supported Lyndon Johnson who had supported the Civil Rights Act and had supported the Voting Rights Act. And so, in that sense, Daley was on the same, quote, "you might think the same side" as Martin Luther King. But- so there was a certain overlap, but nonetheless, when King was in Chicago, it was to raise questions about what Mayor Daley and Mayor Daley's machine was doing.

01:03:58:00 TREY ELLIS:

Did you find a resistance? Like, you know, Daley had been working with the black elites and the ministers for a long time.

01:04:06:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Yes. Yes. Many of the black churches in Chicago felt connected to the machine. And the machine doled out lots of favors. You know, there were many, many jobs that were part of the political machine, you know, guards in the jail and groundskeepers for the parks. And so, people who were working with Mayor Daley and were helping turning out the vote for Mayor Daley could get jobs for their constituents that way. And a lot of the ministers were connected that way. There are people in their churches who needed jobs and, you know, it's kind of understandable that they were

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01:05:13:00 connected. They took what- they needed things for their constituents, for their congregations. They needed jobs. However, the price was that you had to be willing to support Mayor Daley. So, it was very awkward for many of them to have Martin Luther King coming to Chicago because all of a sudden, there was a different voice coming out of the African-American community. And they were not- it was disrupting the kind of processes that they were involved in for a long period of time. So, there was a lot of opposition to Doctor King coming from black ministers, for instance, who were closely tied to the machine. And, you know, the story that's told about- there was a reverend, Clay Evans, from Fellowship Baptist Church who did decide to work with Doctor King. He was closely allied with Jesse Jackson when they started Operation Breadbasket. He worked closely with Jesse Jackson on that. And Clay Evans's church, they had- they had been building a new church and as soon as it became clear that he was siding with Doctor King, all the banks cut off the money to build his church, so that church sat there for seven years half built. Until finally, there was some changes in Chicago and they got the money to do this, but that's kind of power that Mayor Daley had. And so not only were the churches getting favors from Mayor Daley, but if they didn't cooperate, they could get into trouble in that kind of way. They'd have a hard time doing what they needed to do. So, there was a lot of opposition because Doctor King's presence here was shaking things up.

01:06:20:00 There was also a theological debate within the Baptist Church. Doctor King stood on the social gospel end of that spectrum and some of the other churches, in fact, Reverend J. H. Jackson, I believe, was a leader of the opposite- He was a Chicago pastor, and a strong Chicago pastor, was a leader of the more traditional version of the Baptist Church. So, this was already a dispute within the Baptist church that was being played out in Chicago as well. So that was kind of another reason why there was tension within the black ministry in Chicago over all this. But there were a number of black ministers who did stand up with Doctor King and that was a powerful moment, I think.

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01:07:02:00 TREY ELLIS:

Do you have any feeling about how Daley's relationship to Johnson and, you know, did King's relationship with Johnson, sort of the triangle between them, was there any kind of feelings about that?

01:07:16:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Well, one of the things that I learned as we were working on our book on the Chicago Freedom Movement was that the law professor, Len Rubinowitz, who wrote a chapter for our book on the Fair Housing Act and Martin Luther King and the impact of the Chicago Freedom Movement, and what he uncovered was that Mayor Daley was very upset about what was going on here and he pressured- he was in touch with Lyndon Johnson and said, "Get this Martin Luther King off my back. He's creating problems for me in Chicago." And so, it made it really difficult for Johnson to come out in support of Doctor King, even though he had done that in the South in relating to the Civil Rights Act and in relation to the Voting Rights Act. But in terms of a Fair Housing Act, which was in Congress in nineteen sixty-six, it was very hard for him to support that because it made it look like he was supporting King as opposed to Daley. And Lyndon Johnson really needed Mayor Daley to bring in the Democratic votes, and so he didn't want to go against Mayor Daley.

01:08:28:00

So what Len Rubinowitz argues in our book is that after that whole thing was over, it was- by nineteen sixty-eight after Doctor King was assassinated- this is a very tragic part of this story- that Lyndon Johnson was able to get the Fair Housing Act through Congress. It actually passed Congress like a week after the assassination. And I think that, that was connected to the Chicago Movement. It's like, okay, there was such tragic sense of Doctor King, the loss of Doctor King. And it's like I'm sure Lyndon Johnson was thinking, "Well, what can we do to show that we care?" And getting the Fair Housing Act passed was one thing. And by that point, you know, the Chicago Freedom Movement was two years before. I don't think people even connected the fact that, that Fair Housing Act got passed because that was associated with Doctor King's work in Chicago two years earlier. So what Len Rubinowitz argues is that

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Johnson couldn't really do it that summer in sixty-six because of the pressure from Mayor Daley, but two years later, he could. And that's how the first Federal Fair Housing [*unclear*] was actually passed in the summer of- in April of nineteen sixty-eight.

01:09:48:00 TREY ELLIS:

I want to pivot to Vietnam and the anti-war movement in Chicago vis-à-vis this housing struggle. When was this kind of overlap and discussions you guys would have as a group about the war versus these other issues... and tension within in the group?

01:10:13:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Well, I remember that there was a Vietnam War teach-in at Stanford in May of nineteen sixty-five, which was right before I graduated and right before I came to Chicago. So that was the beginning. It was during the early years of the teach-in movement when people were- college students in particular were saying, "We need to understand this. What's going on?" So that gives you a little sense of the historical moment that we were in as all the Chicago Movement was taking shape. And it was... so the anti-war movement- coming out of students in particular, the anti-war movement was starting by the summer of sixty-five, so that was just beginning. So, during the year that I was here and worked with Martin Luther King, the staff for instance, were very strongly opposed to the war and were trying to get Doctor King to speak out against it. And I know that he had in some modest ways before that, but we were trying to encourage him. Many of the staff who were- and the people who were close to him and had worked with him in the South more than somebody like me, but there was a strong feeling that we needed to oppose the Vietnam War.

01:11:25:00 In the midst of all of that, Thich Nhat Hanh showed up in Chicago. It was like in May of nineteen sixty-six. We're in the middle of getting ready for doing the tenant unions, getting ready for the summer open housing campaign. And he came to see Doctor King because he wanted to talk to him about the issues in Vietnam, in the

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Vietnam War. I thought it was a very touching moment. I remember him walking down the street, in some street on the West Side of Chicago. I never spoke with him, but I remember his presence there at that time. And I know that Doctor King was already thinking about the Vietnam War issue before he met with Thich Nhat Hanh. But that it was a very touching moment that this Vietnamese priest and peace activist wanted to connect with Martin Luther King, even in the midst of the Chicago confusion of all these other kind of activist things that were happening to call his attention to the Vietnam War issue.

01:12:25:00 So, yes, and I do remember some church rally during that year. It was not a very big rally, so it would have been earlier in the year when Doctor King did come out against the Vietnam War. And I remember the staff really clapping loudly. People were standing around the edges and applauding. So that's a moment that I remember when he came out publicly in a sort of very modest sense, not in the newspapers and not as he did later on with the rallies in nineteen sixty-seven when he spoke in Chicago and then, of course, when he spoke at the Riverside Church in New York in April of nineteen sixty-seven, but he had already come out in a quiet way during the period of nineteen sixty-six.

01:13:09:00 TREY ELLIS:
Can we talk a little bit about Thich Nhat Hanh again and can you tell us who he is? And if he- how was his presence? He must have stuck out in some way.

01:13:19:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:
Thich Nhat Hanh was a Vietnamese Buddhist priest who had been active in the peace movement in Vietnam. And he was, at that point, traveling in the United States. He had a very sweet presence. He was wearing monk's robes, I remember, like orange monk's robes, which definitely made him stand out on the West Side of Chicago. It was a very- he had a very strong presence of silence and... calm, I would say. That he projected an aura of peace around him, which even from a distance, it was possible to perceive. And of course, later on, I read his books and I realized who he

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really was. At that point, it was all new to me. I was young and we were all new getting acquainted with all these things. Before meditation actually came much to the United States, he was one of the first ones to bring it here, but at that moment, it was about peace.

01:14:26:00 TREY ELLIS:

So in the summer of sixty-six, it seems the world is, you know, everything is changing. You have Black Power, anti-war, the Chicago Movement. Can you describe sort of what it was like to live through that summer of sixty-six? Any anecdotes, really specific, or days that you just thought, "Wow, we're really living history."

01:14:47:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Well, that summer of sixty-six did feel like a very turbulent time. And I feel like we were on this kind teetering on optimism and pessimism. On the one hand, we were going to do this movement in Chicago, we were going to try to end housing segregation in Chicago. We understood that non-violence had a lot of power and that we ought to be able to make some difference with that. So there was that kind of optimistic sense really that grew out of the power of the movement in the South, that we could make a difference. On the other hand, sometimes the conditions in Chicago seemed overwhelming. There were so many people, there were so many problems and how are we going to be able to make a dent in all of that? I would say there was a back and forth of teetering between a deep optimism and a deep pessimism around how do we cope with this situation.

01:15:46:00 And I would say in the middle of all that was the rising of the Vietnam War. People had elected Lyndon Johnson in nineteen sixty-four thinking he wouldn't escalate the war as much as Barry Goldwater would have. Yet, he was escalating the war. There was a draft, so that meant young men had to deal with whether or not they were going to be able to be drafted and go into the war. So that was an issue everywhere. Every family, every young person was dealing with what they were going to do

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about that. So that was also a very distressing time in that way. So we felt the war- we didn't want the war to go on, but we didn't know how to stop it either. And Lyndon Johnson just seemed to be barreling forward with all of that. Even though he had been a supporter of civil rights, in that sense, was somebody whom we could- and he did some other things, I mean, he started Medicare and Medicaid and the War on Poverty and he did some things for ordinary people that made a huge difference. On the other hand, why was he pushing this war in Vietnam? So you couldn't decide where he stood and where you should stand in relationship to him. So in that sense, it was also very confusing to figure out what was going on and what can we do about all of this.

01:17:07:00 The forces against the Vietnam War were not very strong at that point. There were a few lone voices. It wasn't clear that, that process could be stopped. And in the end, it was not stopped. It went forward and many deaths later and many- much devastation of Vietnam later. It only ended after all of that devastation. So it was a- it was a challenging time to be young. And I also have the sense that it was disillusioning in the sense that all of those people in power that we had some respect for were falling off their pedestals one after the other, you know. That was the experience as being a young person then. We thought that they were intelligent people who knew how to do sensible things and then they weren't doing them. And so it's like, "Wait a minute, who can we trust? Who can we trust to run the country in a way that really is a humane commitment- in a way that's humane and that's committed to justice for all people. Who can we trust to do that?" We thought Lyndon Johnson was kind of- would come along. He was kind of slow, but he did in fact come along, but then he wasn't going to do that around Vietnam, so who could be trusted? So, it was- a lot of young people became very disillusioned and I just kind of backed off for a while and trying to think, figure out, well, what are we going to- how to make sense out of this whole thing. So, it was a very turbulent time.

01:18:39:00 And, you know, next summer, the following summer, in the summer of sixty-seven, there was a conference for new politics that had a big conference in Chicago. I don't know if that's within your radar, but people came from all over the country. I had

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spent that summer in Appalachia as a volunteer with the VISTA program. We brought a whole lot of people up from West Virginia to this conference in Chicago. And there was a hope that this conference would nominate Martin Luther King for president and would make a commitment to end the war in Vietnam. The conference was powerful, but it sort of fell apart in all kinds of ways and it was really clear by the end that nothing was going to come of it. Doctor King did speak at the conference, Dick Gregory also spoke and gave a very powerful speech. The idea was to nominate Martin Luther King for president along with Benjamin Spock for vice president, who was the baby doctor who had come out strongly against the war, and-but, you know, the whole thing just fell apart.

01:19:37:00 So, it was kind of a- that was sort of a last-ditch effort a year after the Chicago movement to kind of build a coalition across the country that could stand for peace and justice everywhere. So, it was devastating, really, that, that didn't happen. And of course, then sixty-eight with all of the tragedies that it brought, including the tragedy to Martin Luther King was utterly devastating. It set us back for a long way, a long time... in terms of people really being able to feel that we could change the country in a way that it would reflect the values of justice and a humane caring for all the people. We're still working on that question.

01:20:28:00 TREY ELLIS:
What is open housing and why was it chosen as a focus of the demonstrations versus ending slums? You know, the decision to focus on the- why was there a decision to focus on open housing?

01:20:40:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:
Well, the organizing against ending slums was coming along. The tenant unions were being built. We had many people in the communities organized. And as I said, we got a couple of agreements with landlords in the spring and summer of nineteen sixty-six. So, that was, that was coming along fairly well, although slower than we had hoped. But we were young and we thought things were going to happen in months

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instead of years, so, you know, our idea of what a realistic timeframe was a little off, but nonetheless, things were cooking along that front. But we really wanted to have some kind of direct action campaign in the summer and it wasn't easy to figure out how to do that around the slum housing because the landlords were dispersed and which ones you're going to pick to be the main culprits. There were so many, you know. It was a little difficult to find a focus for a direct-action campaign.

01:21:32:00 And so- but we also understood that the reason that the housing conditions were so bad was because African Americans had so few options because of the closed housing market. And so, we understood that if we could open up housing and- so that African Americans could live anywhere, people could move out of these terrible slum apartments, they could move to neighborhoods like the South West Side of Chicago where the apartments were actually no more expensive than the ones on the West Side. All this bad housing was not cheap because the landlords also could jack up the prices because people didn't have any options. And so, there were many parts of Chicago where there was very good housing that could be had for the same price. And so, we thought if people- that we could solve the problem of- at least to some extent, we could solve the problem of the poor housing conditions that people were having to live in by opening up new housing opportunities for them. So that was the logic of how we connected those two issues. I don't think we were terribly successful at making that clear to everybody else. We tried to tell that story in many ways, but I don't think it got through very well.

01:22:48:00 And, you know, and I didn't describe earlier the system of blockbusting in Chicago, which I could describe if you'd like. But the way that the real estate industry expanded the black community was a very systematic process in which they would have a certain area- okay, there was a boundary line. No African-Americans lived west of Ashland. Then there would be a few blocks, which would be for a few years, what the real estate people called a "gray area," where they would not loan money or sell houses to anybody, neither white nor black. Then, eventually, they would move one black family in. They would run around and tell all the white families that, "Your property values are going down, black people are moving in, so sell your house to

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me really cheap." And so, people would sell their house at less than it was worth and then those real estate people would turn around and double the price to the black family that was moving in, so it was a very lucrative business for a certain sector of the real estate industry in Chicago.

01:23:47:00 So, in that whole process of expanding the black community on a block by block basis like that, meant that white communities got displaced, which they didn't like, which I understand they didn't like. So, we were trying to figure out how to explain to the white people that if we had open housing, if we had fair housing, if black people could move anywhere, it would end the blockbusting system. There might be a few blacks in their neighborhood, but their whole neighborhood was not going to change. They didn't all have to move their Lithuanians out to some other suburb, you know, they could stay there with a few other people and they could have, more or less, the same neighborhood that they had had. That we were not really very successful. We really tried to get the white communities on the boundaries of black community to understand that. But we had some really dramatic moments with that. Did Bernard tell you that?

01:24:38:00 Okay. Well, we had a rally in a church. We had a meeting in a church in, I think it was Belmont Cragin on the North side of Chicago, and it was a white congregation and we were trying to explain this to the white people that if we had open housing in Chicago, they would be better off too. And Bernard was there, Bernard Lafayette, who was one of the leaders of this time, was there making a speech about this. And suddenly, there came this group of men walking up the aisle, looking very dangerous and the police, who were sitting in the front aisle issued- they sent Bernard out the back door. Bill Moyer and I were together and we were going to go listen to Bernard give this speech and we ended up picking him up from this mob of people and getting him out of there is what it turned out.

01:25:28:00 So that was- we had- and I think that Bernard said he was having a good conversation with the congregation about it. So, there were some people in those communities that were halfway open to this kind of discussion, but there was a very intense group of people who were trying to prohibit that from happening. And

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because so much money was being made, I mean, it's hard to know if those were people who were ideologically opposed to living next to black people or, in fact, there was so much money being made in this blockbusting system that they were basically there to defend that system because it was making money for some people who were powerful in Chicago.

01:26:00:00 But in any case, that was our- after that, we realized we can't have public meetings in these communities because they're going to be too disrupted. So, we tried to reach pastors on the South West Side. They had a few meetings in church basements with a few select groups of people that they thought would be open to understanding all of this. So, we really were trying to reach out to the white community and to show everyone that the open housing would be better for everyone, but it was a very difficult process at that historical moment. And I don't think- I mean, later on, you know, some more people- that work continued for many years later, but- and began to have an impact, but at that particular moment, we couldn't really make that argument to the people that really, we needed to make it to.

01:26:45:00 TREY ELLIS:
How did you feel about the media's response to this- to King bringing this movement, sort of this disruption to the North in Chicago? How was the news coverage and how did you feel?

01:27:00:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:
Well, okay, one thing- I want to say a little bit about Mayor Daley. Mayor Daley was very astute and he tried to outdo the movement. So, when we start talking about bad housing conditions, Mayor Daley decides that he's going to send- have a campaign against rats and that he's going to expand his rat control department and they will be out on the west and south sides of Chicago, and this is the headline on the paper, "Rat Control Department Greatly Expanded to Deal with Problems in Poor Neighborhoods." So, it's like every time we brought something up like this- now, I don't know if Mayor Daley actually even expanded his rat control department and

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sent those people out there, but he made a public statement that he was going to do that. So every time we would bring up an issue, he would say, "Oh, we've taken care of that already." So that's what I mean about him being very astute. And the media kind of went along with him in that way. And so, Mayor Daley would say, "Well, these people are trying to raise trouble over something that's not really a problem. We can take care of that already."

01:28:05:00 So that was one level of how the movement- how the media dealt with the movement. They tried to undercut the premises on which it was based in the sense that we were out in touch with people in the neighborhoods. And the media would also carry stories like about babies dying from rat bite in their cribs too. And so, we knew that those stories, they were tiny little stories buried somewhere, but when Mayor Daley does something about this, it's on the front page in the headlines. So, the story wasn't totally covered up, but still, it looked like Mayor Daley was taking care of all these kinds of things. Around the open housing, you know, Chicago did have a fair housing ordinance. Now, they never enforced it, but they did have it on the books, and so mayor Daley would say, "Well, they don't have any problem with this in Chicago," you know. And you try to describe the blockbusting system and all of that. "No, no, that's not..." I mean, it was out of touch with reality in a sense. So that was kind of the over- the context at the beginning of this.

01:29:02:00 In the summer, when we did the open housing marches, they got good coverage from the media. We had a couple- there were two- the first two marches in the Gage Park, Marquette Park area where the most extreme in terms of the population of people being very distressed about the marches and throwing things at people and what not and the police not protecting, not protecting the marchers. I mean, I remember marching through Marquette Park and watching people throw matches, lit matches into cars. They set a number of the cars on fire, and, like, twenty-five cars they burnt up that belonged to the movement and policemen standing there watching that happen. Now, I don't know, maybe they didn't know how to disrupt that kind of a mob scene, I'm not sure. But in any case, there was a lot of pressure on the mayor because the police department wasn't protecting the marchers and after those first

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couple of marches. Andy Young's car was pushed into a lagoon in Marquette Park along with several other cars. So, the pressure- they did cover all of that, the media covered all of that, and it made the police chief, Orlando Wilson, look bad. And so, he did come through, and he said, okay, he would protect the marchers and in the later marches, there were lots of policemen along the side of the marchers. And there was less of that- there was not really any more of those hostile crowds. There were hostile crowds, but they were not attacking the marchers in the way that they did in those first few marches.

01:30:43:00 So- but Mayor Daley was very distressed and he said, "It's just causing all this trouble in the neighborhoods, and we don't need to do this, and we can solve this problem some other way." And what we understood later was that Mayor Daley's machine relied on the black vote and on the working class white vote and what was happening, as the marches were pitting two of his constituencies against each other, and so that was very upsetting to him because he could only get elected if he had all of his constituencies. If he lost half of them, he was going to be in trouble. And so, he said, "We got to get this over with and get these people from- stop these people from being upset with each other because it's going to undermine the machine." So, in that sense- now, nobody ever explained that at the time, I don't think. I don't think that would have come out at the time. I don't remember it coming out. But it was clear that the level of his- he was very agitated about the whole thing and he really wanted it to end.

01:31:42:00 So when- it was the... one of the religious groups in Chicago decided to call a meeting to try to come to some agreement that would stop the marches and Mayor Daley said, " Oh, well." He came along, said, "Okay, they wanted some way to stop it and if this might be a way, he'd be there." So they had a meeting to try to work this out with seventy men, actually. That's kind of an indication of the times, the leaders were perceived- all the leaders were perceived as m- the perceived leaders were men, but they were men from- people from the movement, from the city government and many of the business leaders in Chicago gathered to begin to try to come up with some kind of agreement to stop the marches.

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01:32:31:00 TREY ELLIS:

Which brings us to- so this- can you tell us about the Summit Agreement? What was the feeling from your group and your workers about the Summit Agreement? And, you know, and then at the end, it felt like the people were disappointed by the agreement.

01:32:48:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Yeah, there was a lot of disappointment from the summit. Okay, there was- back up here. So out of this meeting came an agreement, which we've referred to as the Summit Agreement, still referred to as that. And it was- it said that all these changes would take place in a whole variety of institutions in Chicago that had to do with open housing issues. One thing to mention is that when Martin Luther King put the demands on the door of City Hall, they were not just about open housing, we called it an "open city" and it had to do with- mentioned police brutality, it talked about the welfare system and the changes that were needed there. We talked about economic opportunities. So, the original demands for the summer were much broader than those actually brought to the summit discussion, which were only around open housing. It was not really possible to get the realtors to say, "We'll stop discriminating tomorrow." That's what we wanted. They said, "Well, we're going to think about this and we'll try to change the way we do things." And I don't remember quite the exact wording, but we did not get a definitive statement from them that discrimination in housing will end in Chicago. And that was the main thing I think that was really distressing to people.

01:34:10:00 The Chicago Housing Authority was supposed to do some things to integrate the housing that they had. There were a number of other city organizations. So the agreement was disappointing in some ways and it was particularly, I think, disappointing to the younger staff because we were used to winning. You know, after the campaigns in the South, people thought, "We have a big campaign. We're going to win." And it wasn't really a very clear victory. And so- and we didn't get a national

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fair housing act out of it either, which was another kind of thing we might got out of it. So, between those two things, it was perceived as not really taking us forward very far. But I want to say that one of the things that did come out of it was an organization called the Leadership Council for Metropolitan Open Communities, kind of an awkward name, but this organization existed in Chicago for forty years. It was supported by grants from the business community. And it really made all kinds of efforts to make housing more available.

01:35:21:00 So, they ran what was known as the Gautreaux Program to move people out of public housing into, quote, "opportunity neighborhoods," that was run by the Leadership Council. They sued realtors when they discriminated. They provided free legal support. If you've got discriminated against, you could go to the Leadership Council and they would sue on your behalf, and so you didn't have to pay an attorney. And so, they were able to convince some landlords by suing them basically. That was one thing they did. They also started doing training for landlords and telling them, "You know, you can't discriminate like you're used to doing anymore." And they ran a whole training program for landlords and realtors. So- that- which looked like a feeble thing in the agreement. "Okay, you're going to form this organization. It's going to keep working on this issue." It didn't look like much at the time, but looking back on it, it actually was forty years of work and forty years of commitment by leaders in Chicago to try to deal with the issues around housing desegregation. So, I- in that way- that's one of the things that I think did come out of it that made a big difference. Again, it hasn't solved everything, but things aren't what they used to be either, so.

01:36:35:00 But the staff was really disappointed. I was- I remember being disappointed that somehow we hadn't been able to make it all work. We had a meeting out in the Stone Temple in Lawndale and Doctor King spoke and was talking about the Summit Agreement. And I remember- I didn't even go to this. I spent the whole time in the church basement in tears. Just- it seemed to me like we had put so much energy into this and we really wanted it all to work and yet somehow it hadn't worked. Looking back on it, I wouldn't have the same assessment as I did then, but that's how it felt at

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the time. It felt very discouraging to people. And some of the staff began to leave after that. There was one contingent of them that want to go to- went to San Francisco and got there in time for the Summer of Love, you know. And so, you know, there was a kind- not everybody left, but some left, some stayed and continued to do the tenant organizing for a while, but it was a difficult moment for the young people particularly who had been involved in that.

01:37:35:00 You know, one of the things that Andrew Young said later, I remember, was that, "Well, you know, it was August twenty-six. It was the end of summer, so it's going to be harder to maintain marches." And he said, "Sometimes, you have to stop your campaign when you're ahead, when you can actually win something. You don't want the movement to peter out and then you can't get anywhere." And so, that's another way for me, looking back at it, I can see, well, you know, there was a really good reason to say, "Okay, you know, maybe we've got as far as we can get this time." And now that I'm more familiar with nonviolence, I know that Gandhi- that happened in a number of Gandhi's campaigns that he- his followers sometimes thought, "Well, you got an agreement, but it was only half of what we wanted." He said, "Well, we got half and that's as far as we get in this campaign and then we'll work on the next campaign to take it the next step." So that was a lesson that we didn't really know as young people at that time, that sometimes you only win half a loaf at a certain point and then you have to keep pushing for the rest of it.

01:38:37:00 So that's something I really- it's interesting to me to try to help younger activists understand now some of the things that we didn't know when we were in our twenties. But we now- there's much more study of nonviolence, there's much more stories about it out there, there's more books, people can see histories of all of this, and we can begin to see that some of the things that we were so discouraged about were actually sort of normal in a social movement, that you don't win everything at the end of a direct-action campaign, some of it you win later, like we won the first fair housing law in nineteen sixty-eight, two years later. That that's a normal pattern actually, but we didn't understand that then, so we got discouraged.

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01:39:21:00 TREY ELLIS:

How did Doctor King assess the summit after time? He's on record saying he was pleased with it. Did he reassess it?

01:39:30:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

He did sometimes. He seemed to be ambivalent about it. He said it- he saw it as a success and some other thing later on, some of his speeches and writings, he said, "Well, maybe it wasn't as good as it could have been." So, our sense when we looked at this is that he was really not- he was pretty ambivalent himself. And I think that only now when we have the perspective of time can we see the kind of things that did actually emerge from it. Like, I was speaking earlier about the Leadership Council... that, that was a group that actually did some good work, but it took them forty years and Doctor King wasn't here to see all of that, so he missed that part of understanding... He missed... okay... The extent that there were success that came later, he didn't get to see that. So, his assessment was very much limited to those two years after the end of that. It's very tragic for me to think about that he was gone by two years from the end of that summer, still stuns me still. You know?

01:40:44:00 TREY ELLIS:

And did King learn from Chicago? Did he learned in this- moving to, like, the Poor People's Campaign, do you think that he... Were there any lessons learned?

01:40:57:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Well, one of the things that I want to say about the Chicago organizing was that it really had a multi-racial dimension. We worked with a Latino community. We had a couple of staff people who spoke Spanish, one who was Puerto Rican and the other one was a woman who learned Spanish in college, but in any case, they were organizing the tenant unions in the Latino community. We were working with a group of organizers from the Students for a Democratic Society who were organizing in uptown, which was mostly, at that point, a community of Appalachian people who

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were predominantly white. And so, we were really working in a multiracial- with a multiracial coalition. We knew that when we- and Doctor King really understood and Bevel understood as well that when we talk about poverty, it's not just an issue for black people. Black people are very affected by that, but actually there were many other populations that were also really affected and that we needed to build a coalition around that. So, we were beginning to do that work in Chicago. And I do feel like that this laid the- this the beginning of Doctor King's work that led to the Poor People's Campaign, when he really was seriously about building a coalition- a multiracial coalition to address poverty, but that work began in Chicago.

01:42:13:00 TREY ELLIS:

And Bevel, how- after the agreement, how did he respond to the Summit Agreement?

01:42:18:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Well, Bevel wasn't very happy with it. He was probably less happy than Doctor King. Bevel was also- Bevel was a man on the move, and he was very concerned about the Vietnam situation. And Bevel was being called, very shortly after the Summit Agreement, to come to New York and organize the Spring mobilization to end the war in Vietnam. And so, he had left. He left that fall. You know, the Summit Agreement was in August, by late fall, he had left for New York, began the organizing for this big march and mobilization that happened in April of that year. So, Bevel was really a person- he was a very powerful when it came to direct action campaigns. The slow, tedious organizing of things like tenant unions was of less- he got the importance of it, but his temperament wasn't such that he was going to stick around for something that was kind of plodding. You know? He wanted to be where the action was. And so, I think he kind of lost his interest in staying around Chicago after that. Maybe because- and I don't really know why. Maybe because the Summit Agreement wasn't what he thought, maybe because he felt like the campaign had succeeded as far as it could get in Chicago and it was time for him to move on to the next campaign, which was going to be the mobilization to end the war in Vietnam.

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01:43:52:00 TREY ELLIS:

Can we talk about the... You talked about King's death. Do you remember where you were and then how it affected you personally?

01:44:04:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

After the year in the movement, I went back to graduate school and switched my field from history to sociology because I thought maybe the sociology would be more useful in understanding what was going on in the city. And I was able- I was able to go to the University of Chicago, so I stayed in the city. So, I was a graduate student of the University of Chicago in nineteen sixty-eight... I still remember very vividly when my old friend from the movement, Claudia King, called me up to tell me that Doctor King had been assassinated, and we were all just stunned at that moment, like the whole country was stunned. It was unbelievable. He had given so much, he had given so much. And he cared so much about ordinary people. That was what I loved about him. We know his eloquent speeches and that was wonderful, but it was his heart that he really cared about what happened to the children who were hungry and the children who didn't have the healthcare they needed, and how are we going to make this a just world for them? And to have that caring sort of removed from us so dramatically was just really devastatingly painful...

01:45:38:00

I was not able to go to the funeral. Claudia and I wanted to go to Atlanta, but we neither had much money then and we couldn't figure out how to pay for getting there and how to pay for a hotel and whatnot and we didn't have anybody to stay with there because we knew that so many people would be converging on Atlanta. So, we missed that, which I have always regretted because I think it would have been important to actually share that moment of grief with those other people who were- who we had shared the movement with and who were so- who were close to Doctor King. I know James Orange and James Bevel were walking with the mule train with Doctor King's casket. There were people that I knew from the Chicago movement who were a part of all that. I would have really loved to have been there with them,

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as well. And I have to say that the assassination of Robert Kennedy two months later was just another incredible blow. It made that year unbelievable because Robert Kennedy had also been a voice for the poor. He was really interested in poverty and hunger and he had political power within the political structure and he cared about those kinds of issues. And that he was also struck down during that same spring, it's unthinkable. It's just unthinkable, the whole thing.

01:47:09:00 So, I feel like the country is still recovering from that in a sense. That those voices from that time are still really important to us. We're in a time now when commitment to making sure that everybody has an opportunity to have a decent life, has the food and shelter and healthcare they need. We're having a hard time as a country making a commitment to that. We're not really there, although the voices calling for that are getting louder, so that makes me hopeful. We're not there yet. So, I really feel like there's a lot of Doctor King's work that got started in those last few years that is still needed. It's- we really are, with the work we're doing now, kind of wanting to say it's time, it's time to recommit to the work that he started in those last years and to finally create the just society that he was calling us to.

01:48:09:00 TREY ELLIS:
In Chicago, where there- did you notice the rioting or any of the protests to his assassination and they were certainly violent in ...

01:48:20:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:
Yeah... so one of the things that we did as the old staff by this time kind of scattered, but we had a meeting together at a house in Hyde Park after Doctor King was assassinated to see if there was anything we could think of to do together to address the situation. And it was really a very sweet moment to see each other again kind of a couple of years later where people had scattered. Charlie Love was back here from- he's gone- he had moved on to San Francisco, but he was in town then. There were some people from the West Side there. And it was a kind of sweet moment of mourning together. So, I really was grateful for that. On the other hand, we couldn't

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think of what to do together. And I remember Jimmy Wilson, who lived on the West Side saying, "Well, there are riots breaking out on the West Side and I need to get home before it gets any longer." And some people said, "Well, we're sending you back with food because it's going to be hard to get to the grocery store in the middle of the riots." So, there was that kind of practical approach to it. So, it was a very poignant time and also just sad that we couldn't think about- we couldn't come up with anything that was big enough to address the enormous magnitude of what had happened, but it was good to be with one another for a bit and to share that time.

01:49:51:00 I want to also say that the riots that happened in Chicago happened on the West Side. There were not riots on the South Side. And, well, you know, the people would say, "Well, you know, the West Side is wilder, less control ... " Whatever, there's lots of historical reasons for that. But what I want to say was those young people on the West Side, a lot of them knew Doctor King, and the loss of him was very personal to them. A one of them- a couple of them that I've spoken to, in the process of working on the book we've been doing, said, "It just felt like time stopped when he was assassinated." And he said, "We were so devastated we didn't know what else to do...

01:50:40:00 So, we, you know... that's... the riot was something to do, I guess." But I think it's really important to know that they were so personally touched by him, that the loss of him was a very personal loss for them and that, that may well have been part of why they struck out in the way they did, not the way Doctor King would have wanted them to do. He really did not want the people to feel like riots or a solution, but I think when young people are really devastated and there's no option, that happens sometimes. So, you know, it's really important for there to be a clear sense of how to bring change in the communities by peaceful means.

TREY ELLIS:

So, the West Side and South Side were both black, but you say the South Side ...

01:51:31:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

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Okay, yeah, I just want to say. The African-American community in Chicago in those days was concentrated on the South Side of Chicago and the West Side. The South Side was the older black community. The West Side included many people who had migrated- come from the South, particularly Mississippi, in recent years, in the sort of forties, fifties and sixties. So it was a newer black community. It had fewer community organizations in it. The old civil rights organizations were primarily concentrated on the South Side of Chicago. So it had a different flavor, the West Side. So, it was interesting that Doctor King chose to work and live on the West Side because that was really the most impoverished, most challenged African-American community. And when the riots happened, the riots happened on the West Side, but not on the South Side. And because of the way people think in Chicago, that South Side has more middle-class people and whatnot, that maybe that was why the riots were on the West Side.

01:52:25:00 But what I would suggest is that those were young people who knew Doctor King and the loss of him was so personal to them. And when they described it to me, they say it's like- they've said things like, "It just felt like the world just came to a stop and we were just so devastated, we didn't know what else to do." The person I spoke with about that was, like, seventeen at the time. I mean, I spoke with him, like, last year or something, recently. So, I think even though Doctor King would have been upset, of course, that all these people, young people he'd been working with were not finding a nonviolent outlet for their distress at that time. But nonetheless, I want to be respectful of their caring about him and their personal loss that his loss was for them.

TREY ELLIS:

Why is it- what does Doctor King have to tell us today?

01:53:19:00 MARY LOU FINLEY:

Doctor King spoke about justice. He spoke about what it meant to have justice for ordinary people. And the sense of justice for ordinary people comes out of caring

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about ordinary people. Even those who are struggling and sometimes make mistakes, like we all do. But what we really need to be able to do now is to commit ourselves to the kind of principles that he stood for, which is that children who are hungry need to be fed, we need to take care of the sick children in our society, we need to take care of the sick adults, we need to take care of people. We need to, as a society, commit to everyone having a decent life, and we need to organize our society to figure out how to do that.

01:54:05:00 So there need to be jobs for everyone who needs jobs, there needs to be money for people who are too disabled to work, there needs to be food available to all the children, there needs to be healthcare available to everyone. Those are the kind of things, the unfinished work of Doctor King that he began back in that time. And I think that we need to revive his language for talking about all of those things. You know, there's been a whole thing that happened over the last thirty years of trying to kind of make fun of people who said, "Justice is important." And we have to go- we can go back to his work as a source of inspiration and as a way to see what it is we need to do now, because those problems have, in some sense, gotten worse, you know. Poverty has... poverty has gotten worse in many respects. Some ways it's better. It's better for the elderly. It's better- there were many- there's a bigger African-American middle class than there was then, so some things have improved, but for the people who were stuck in poverty, they are still as stuck as they were then. And that we have to figure out how to create an economic environment that will provide the opportunity so that everyone can have a decent life. That was the last of his work and that's the work that still remains.

01:55:20:00 And one of the things I love- the quotations from Doctor King that I like about all of this is this, and I'm going to read this to you. "Power without love is reckless and abusive. And love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. And justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love." And I love this and I feel like justice- that kind of justice needs to- comes out of love. Power correcting, "justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love." That's what we need now.

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01:56:07:16 END OF INTERVIEW