

STRATEGY OF THE MOVEMENT: 1965-1968

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What strategic decisions and actions did Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) make to achieve the goal of equality for all in America?

LESSON OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will examine the course of Dr. King's and the SCLC's activism between 1965 and 1968, and uncover and identify the strategic goals and underpinnings of different strategies and tactics they undertook during their struggle for equality.

Students will access multiple historical sources to analyze first-person interviews as a resource to understand history, practice the skill of historical corroboration, and build their understanding of the essential question.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Students will examine the course of the Civil Rights Movement between 1965 and 1968 by:

- Students will examine the course of the Civil Rights Movement between 1965 and 1968 by:
- Critically viewing documentary film and first-person interviews to inform their understanding of history
- Synthesizing new learning through developing questions for further historical inquiry
- Demonstrating their understanding of the lesson topic through a final writing exercise

MATERIALS

- Equipment for watching video segments
- Copies of handouts

LENGTH

Two 50-minute class periods, with homework.

ACTIVITIES

- 2 Do-Now: Opening Questions
- 2 Analyzing Film as Text
- 5 Analyzing Supporting Documents
- 6 Close View of Interview Threads
- 7 Read and Corroborate
- 7 Closing Discussion Questions
- 7 Homework or Extended Learning

HANDOUTS

- 9 Do-Now on the 1965 Voting Rights Act
- 10 Close View of the Film: Clip 1
- 11 Close View of the Film: Clip 2
- 12 Close View of the Film: Clip 3
- 13 Close View of the Film: Clip 4
- 14 Movement Building: Interview Thread One
- 16 Movement Building: Interview Thread Two
- 17 Movement Building: Interview Thread Three
- 19 Movement Building: Interview Thread Four



ACTIVITIES

1. Do-Now: Opening Questions

Teacher Note: Have students discuss or respond in writing to these Opening Questions:

- What were some of the most visible successes of the Civil Rights Movement?
- What do you know about how the movement and its leaders accomplished those changes?

USING HANDOUT ONE ON THE 1965 VOTING RIGHTS ACT:

- As a class, come to a consensus about what the Voting Rights Act entailed and why it was important.
- Read aloud Clifford Alexander’s account of how the 1965 Voting Rights Act was passed.
- What can we learn from his words about how social change happens? Who was involved? What different kinds of expertise were required?
- Clifford Alexander asserts, “Very few members of Congress, senators or members of Congress, do things just because it’s right or we’d have a far better world than we have today. So, they do something because there’s pressure on it.” In what ways did the Civil Rights Movement put pressure on Congress?

2. Analyzing Film as Text

Video: Watching Clips from the Film *King in the Wilderness*: Contextualization

Teacher Note: There are four clips associated with this lesson. The first clip is an introduction to Dr. King’s view of the movement’s purpose during this time. Watch the first clip as a group and have students use Handout 2: Note Catcher for “Dream into a Nightmare.”

Consider splitting the class into three groups to watch the remaining clips using a jigsaw exercise, where each group watches one clip and presents its respective Note Catcher observations and conclusions to other groups. After each group has presented a summary of its clip and its conclusions, use the Historical Synthesis Question exercise as a large group to form an outline of what the students learn about the movement’s overarching strategy.

- 1 Clip 1: “From a Dream to a Nightmare” (run time: 2:30)
- 2 Clip 2: “More Than a Tactic” (run time: 4:17)
- 3 Clip 3: “Relevance in the North” (run time: 7:24)
- 4 Clip 4: “This May Be My Last Campaign” (run time: 5:07)

NOTE CATCHER VISUAL ANALYSIS QUESTIONS (HANDOUTS 2-5)

Handout Two: Clip 1, "From a Dream to a Nightmare"

What did you see?

- According to Dr. King, what changes occurred in the movement since his 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech?
- What are the three evils that Dr. King says must be addressed in the struggle for equality?
- What do you notice about the emotions Dr. King displays as he is speaking in this clip?

What did you learn?

- Discuss the ways in which you think race, poverty, and militarism are interrelated.
- What do you think Dr. King meant when he said, "The dream turned to a nightmare?"

Handout Three: Clip 2, "More Than a Tactic"

What did you see?

- Give a short description of the events represented in the clip.
- What reasons are given for the Watts riots in the film?
- What role did Dr. King play when he went to Los Angeles during the riots?

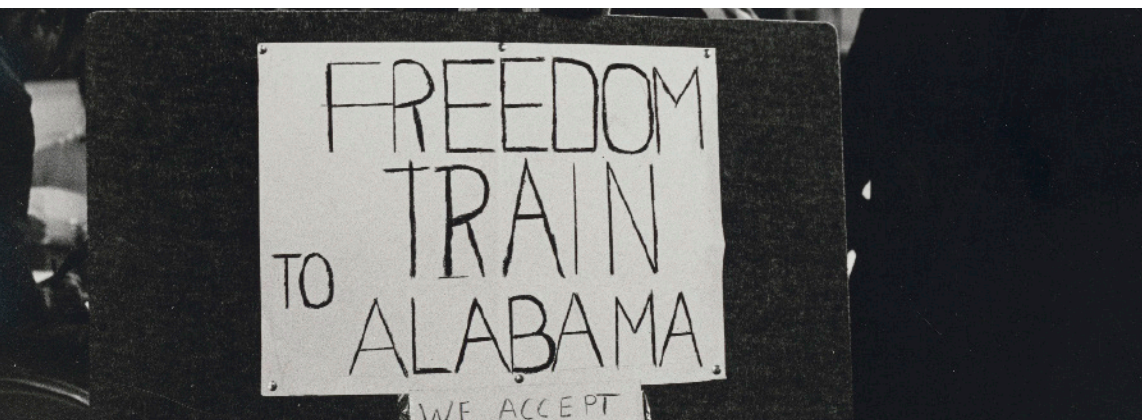
What did you learn?

- Why do you think the passage of the Voting Rights Act did not stop the Watts riots?
- John Lewis says that Dr. King called the riots the "language of the unheard." Discuss why you think Dr. King felt compelled to try to quell the riots.
- According to your understanding of the nonviolent nature of the movement, what would the consequence of the riots be to Dr. King's strategy?

Handout Four: Clip 3, "Relevance in the North"

What did you see?

- Give a short description of the events represented in the clip.
- What are the areas of inequality that Dr. King and the SCLC attempted to address in Chicago?
- What did the interviewees point out was different about working in Chicago than previous work they had done in the South?



What did you learn?

- What methods did you hear or see in the film that Dr. King and the other members of the Chicago coalition used to pressure policy makers in Chicago to address inequality in housing, education and employment there?
- Diane Nash says she opposed SCLC's move to the North because the work wasn't "finished" in the South. Do you think it was strategically important to move SCLC's civil rights work to the North? Why or why not?

Handout Five: Clip 4, "This May Be My Last Campaign"

What did you see?

- Give a short description of the events represented in the clip.
- What stands out to you about why Dr. King says he is going to continue his commitment to nonviolence?
- What are the goals of the Poor People's Campaign?

HISTORICAL SYNTHESIS QUESTIONS

After the jigsaw groups have presented their notes and observations to one another, as a class, address the following Historical Synthesis questions:

- In Clip 1, Dr. King mentions racism, poverty, and militarism as key challenges in the struggle for equality. How do you see those challenges reflected in his strategies in Los Angeles and Chicago and with the Poor People's Campaign?
- How do you see Dr. King's commitment to nonviolence as strengthening, or challenging, the movement?
- In Chicago and in the Poor People's Movement, Dr. King laid out specific changes he would like to see. How do clear goals strengthen the message and momentum of a movement?

HABIT OF A HISTORIAN

Have students write down observations and questions that emerged about the different stages and parts of the Civil Rights Movement, and why Dr. King and the SCLC chose the actions they took.



3. Analyzing Supporting Documents

Teacher Note: In this exercise, students will examine primary sources such as correspondence, meeting notes, and telegrams to glean more information about the considerations and information upon which the strategic movements of Dr. King and the SCLC were made.

Ask students to do a Close Read exercise of the following documents from The King Center Archive, or have students find their own. Have students read through the documents multiple times, identifying where the text came from, who wrote it, how they are saying what they say, and what the text means. It might be helpful to keep students in their small groups from the film clip exercise to focus on one of the three.

Watts

Dr. King's press statement regarding the Watts Riots:

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/mlk-press-statement-regarding-riots-los-angeles>

Chicago

Letter from Bernard Lafayette, Jr. to Dr. King about Chicago:

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/letter-bernard-lafayette-jr-mlk>

Notes on the Airlie Farm Strategy meeting:

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/black-beautiful-and-its-so-beautiful-be-black>

Poor People's Campaign

Information sheet about the Poor People's Campaign:

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/you-and-poor-peoples-campaign>

Letter from the Poor People's Campaign Committee in Grenada, MI to Dr. King about their needs:

<http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/letter-poor-peoples-committee-grenada-mississippi>

After the Close Read, ask students to share with the class what they learned from the documents about each of these three movement actions that augment information from the film clips. What new questions do the documents generate?



4. Close View of Interview Threads

There are four threads of interview segments that teachers and/or students can choose from or use together, to deepen students' understanding. Consider offering students the opportunity to choose the thread that interests them the most, or to continue with the same groups they used in the previous jigsaw exercise. Each thread contains segments of interviews not used in the film and focuses on different aspects of the movement from 1965 to 1968. The complete interviews and biographical information about each interviewee are available at: www.kunhardtfilmfoundation.org/interview-archive.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BEFORE WATCHING INTERVIEWS:

- What do we learn from the first-person accounts featured in the interview segments that is different from other kinds of historical sources?
- What questions arise from using memories as historical sources?

Watch Interview Thread(s):

- 1** Thread One: Strategy and Goals (run time: 12:05)
Featuring Clifford Alexander, Cleveland Sellers, Joan Baez, and Dorothy Cotton
- 2** Thread Two: Chicago (run time: 6:07)
Featuring Mary Lou Finley and Harry Belafonte
- 3** Thread Three: Poor People's Campaign (run time: 7:55)
Featuring Marian Wright Edelman and Bernard Lafayette, Jr.
- 4** Thread Four: Financial Considerations (run time: 5:16)
Featuring Clifford Alexander and Clarence Jones

Teacher Note: Print and distribute the transcript of the threads in their respective Handouts so students can follow along and take notes as they watch.

WATCH THE INTERVIEW SEGMENTS

As they watch, students will:

- Follow along on the transcript.
- Underline details that catch their attention.
- Jot down questions and insights that come to mind after viewing the threads.

ASK THE CLASS

What do you learn from these interviews that you might not learn anywhere else?



5. Read and Corroborate

Teacher Note: Print and distribute the transcript of the threads in their respective Handouts so students can follow along and take notes as they watch.

What other sources can you use to help you better understand memories and recollections as historical resources?

HERE ARE SUGGESTED ARCHIVES TO USE TO FIND CORROBORATING EVIDENCE:

- 1 The King Center. (www.thekingcenter.org/archive)
- 2 Stanford University: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute. (kinginstitute.stanford.edu)
- 3 Library of Congress. (www.loc.gov)

6. Closing Discussion Questions

- How does viewing the historical sources contribute to your understanding of how the Civil Rights Movement approached change?
- What can we extrapolate from this lesson that teaches us about how social movements make social change happen?

7. Homework or Extended Learning

As an assessment or extended learning assignment, have students write an essay expanding on their ideas about the way leaders of the Civil Rights Movement strategically built support for the changes they wanted to achieve, and decided which policies and changes they wanted to champion. Students can refer to any of the historical source material included in the lesson or resources they discover through independent research.

Consider using this quote from Harry Belafonte in The Interview Archive as a starting place for students to react:

“I think that what I’m getting at was that no one place held a clearly defined set of conclusions-- ‘If we go there, this is what will happen.’ You always had to be prepared for what we did not expect and that constantly kept Martin at the ready. I don’t know how else to put it. He was constantly absorbing information about each location to become location specific so that people understood how deeply connected what he was doing was to their immediate experience. This is in your community. This is not just something taking place in some faraway place that you may never visit. This is really what America is about. And by making those parallels, he was able to bring a cohesiveness to movement mentality that although we had reasons for studying geographical opposites or differences, that those differences should never keep us uninformed about how much alike all of this was for

our total interests. I'm stumbling through this because there's so much to -- it's just not easy.

I remember, I think it was -- there was a labor leader by the name of Cleave Robinson and Cleave was perhaps one of the most forceful voices out of labor, and we talked about going down to the marches in which Doctor King tried to appeal to as broad a cross-section of Americans as he could, labor was very important. He met a lot of times with the labor movement, Walter Reuther and others, and convinced them that they should throw their lot in with us. He kept us constantly in a state of chess. He would do something that evoked a certain response and all of a sudden, the movement had to make a shift, not from what it was doing, but to expand on what it was doing. And the team around Doctor King had to be the visionaries, had to be those who sought these quarters of resistance out and to find the solutions to how to lessen that resistance. To that degree I think the team that surrounded Martin did the task well. A lot of them paid a terrible price for the commitment, but as long as Doctor King stayed the course, the rest of us felt that anything that was happening to us was not that much -- was not that important."

Common Core State Standards

ANCHOR STANDARDS

Reading Literature and/or Information: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- RL/RI.X.7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- RL/RI.X.8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
- RL/RI.X.9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration

- SL.X.1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- SL.X.2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- SL.X.3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

Writing: Research to Build and Present Knowledge

- W.X.7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- W.X.8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

DO-NOW ON THE 1965 VOTING RIGHTS ACT

From the website of the [United States Department of Justice](#):

The Voting Rights Act, adopted initially in 1965 and extended in 1970, 1975, and 1982, (sic and 2006) is generally considered the most successful piece of civil rights legislation ever adopted by the United States Congress. The Act codifies and effectuates the 15th Amendment's permanent guarantee that, throughout the nation, no person shall be denied the right to vote on account of race or color. In addition, the Act contains several special provisions that impose even more stringent requirements in certain jurisdictions throughout the country.

Clifford Alexander served as Special Counsel to President Lyndon B. Johnson and the White House staff from 1964 to 1967, and was later appointed Chairman of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In the Interview Archive, he offers this account of the passage of the Voting Rights Act:

"I think that it's very important and never been done to talk about how a bill becomes a law. A bill does not become a law by a conversation of two people with one person. Now, how did this happen? It happened through the pressure of people before Martin Luther King and Andy Young, people like A. Philip Randolph, several white people who also did, and that affected the members of Congress to the extent that they saw that for their future, it would be important to get on the right side of this issue. So, before you had [President Lyndon] Johnson talking to King and Andy about the possibility of a Voting Rights Act, you had a lot of generation of energy, thoughts, visits, drafts done by people in the executive branch, over at the Justice Department, within the White House staff itself, outside forces, some lawyer groups or other groups giving what their thoughts were, other civil rights groups coming in with their thoughts. Then you also had in the Congress, 'cause they're the ones who vote on this by the way, so you can have all the goodwill in the world, but if you can't get the votes doesn't make a damn bit of difference. So, in the Congress, what you had to have was a pressure, specific kind of pressure, on them that they saw to it or they felt about this pressure that their future was at stake . . .

"The media got off its blind horse and started to cover what indeed was happening to black people in America. The physical denials to them, the physical [assaults] against them, the denials of opportunity, the lack of job opportunities, the insults of the segregated water fountains. All of these things were going on at the same time. Finally, you had a camera that was focused on these things. So, you wake up and you get up in the morning and you see your morning news, and you see the Bull Connors¹ of the world with their outrageous behavior, or you see that people trying to go to school are taken on by the [George] Wallaces² of the world. . .

"Very few members of Congress, senators or members of Congress, do things just because it's right or we'd have a far better world than we have today. So, they do something because there's pressure on it. Now, the understanding of pressure, the understanding of how to execute pressure was something that both Martin and Lyndon understood. Now, Lyndon Johnson pressured you a very different way than Martin Luther King did, and images of Martin Luther King more than the specific words, what he was willing to do on behalf of people, what he was willing to take on behalf of people. But we have to remember that it ain't all about Martin. A. Philip Randolph, Dorothy Height, Whitney Young, Roy Wilkins³, all of these and hundreds and thousands more who over the years had not only lobbied but helped draft or helped go for these things. "

1. Bull Connor was a Selma, Alabama public safety commissioner known for his racist policies and harsh tactics used against civil rights activists.

2. George Wallace was a governor of Alabama, and presidential candidate, who favored racial segregation and opposed the Civil Rights Movement.

3. A. Philip Randolph, Dorothy Height, Whitney Young, and Roy Wilkins were prominent activists within the Civil Rights Movement.

CLOSE VIEW OF THE FILM

CLIP 1: “FROM A DREAM TO A NIGHTMARE” NOTE CATCHER

Instructions:

As you are watching these film clip from *King in the Wilderness*, consider the following questions and record your answers.

What did you see?

- According to Dr. King, what changes occurred in the movement since his 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech?
- What are the three evils that Dr. King says must be addressed in the struggle for equality?
- What do you notice about the emotion Dr. King displays as he is speaking in this clip?

What did you learn?

- Discuss the ways in which you think race, poverty, and militarism are interrelated.
- What do you think Dr. King meant when he said, “The dream turned to a nightmare”?

After watching this clip: What further questions do you have about Dr. King?

CLOSE VIEW OF THE FILM

CLIP 2: “MORE THAN A TACTIC” NOTE CATCHER

What did you see?

- Give a short description of the events represented in the clip.
- What reasons are given for the Watts riots?
- What role did Dr. King play when he went to Los Angeles during the riots?

What did you learn?

- Why do you think the passage of the Voting Rights Act did not stop the Watts riots?
- John Lewis says that Dr. King called the riots the “language of the unheard.” Discuss why you think Dr. King felt compelled to try to quell the riots.
- According to your understanding of the nonviolent nature of the movement, what would the consequence of the riots be to Dr. King’s strategy?

CLOSE VIEW OF THE FILM

CLIP 3: “RELEVANCE IN THE NORTH” NOTE CATCHER

What did you see?

- Give a short description of the events represented in the clip.
- What are the areas of inequality that Dr. King and the SCLC attempted to address in Chicago?
- What did the interviewees point out was different about working in Chicago than previous work they had done in the South?

What did you learn?

- What methods did you hear or see in the film that Dr. King and the other members of the Chicago coalition used to pressure policy makers in Chicago to address inequality in housing, education, and employment there?
- Diane Nash says she opposed the SCLC’s move to the North because the work wasn’t “finished” in the South. Do you think it was strategically important to move the SCLC’s civil rights work to the North? Why or why not?

CLOSE VIEW OF THE FILM

CLIP 4: “THIS MAY BE MY LAST CAMPAIGN” NOTE CATCHER

What did you see?

- Give a short description of the events represented in the clip.
- What stands out to you about why Dr. King says he is going to continue his commitment to nonviolence?
- What are the goals of the Poor People’s Campaign?

What did you learn?

- How do you see the Poor People’s Campaign fitting in with the previous work that Dr. King and the SCLC had done?
- What is different about the Poor People’s Campaign than previous actions in the movement?

MOVEMENT BUILDING

INTERVIEW THREAD ONE: MOVEMENT BUILDING, STRATEGIES, AND GOALS

CLIFFORD ALEXANDER

"But with King, you had another kind of relationship. Part of a relationship that I didn't see, which was whatever he and [President] Lyndon Johnson had to say to each other on the phone, and I think there was a fair amount of that. There were some things which will be transmitted -- were to be transmitted by me to Reverend King because this is what President Johnson wanted me to do. And in those days, unlike these days, we didn't keep from the general public what it was we were talking to people on behalf of the president for. He, I think, felt very comfortable with President Johnson. There've been some misrepresentations in the media about this hostility and so forth. Was Johnson unhappy with the fact that Martin Luther King opposed the war? Of course, he was. Was he unhappy with a lot of people for that? Of course, he was. Did this mean that he was hostile to him? Not a bit. What they both were, if one has to think about how they were with each other and how they acted because of how they were with each other, they both were very good at what they did. Martin Luther King was not a legislator, Lyndon Johnson was not a preacher. They both thought they knew a great deal about each subject, but they were neither one of them [were] the top of the field in it.

"Johnson knew that and said to King and to others within the civil rights leadership, 'I have to be pushed by you. You have to help me. You have to get people excited by the injustice that you see. You are the best witnesses to all of this. And if you can do that, you could help me formulate the legislation, talk to the people who may be on the fence, get some new allies for us."

"King, on the other hand, knew what his responsibilities were. He didn't, I hope, know what section 482 of the Voting Rights Act was, nor should he. But he did know that he would want that, or he did know that he would want the Civil Rights Act of 1964. And I think he did many other things in the relationship."

CLEVELAND SELLERS

"Things were going very smoothly at the initial stage of that Selma to Montgomery kind of effort. John [Lewis] decided that he was going to be a part of that and ended up leading the first march with Hosea Williams. Hosea Williams was a fantastic organizer for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, one of the few organizers that they had, but he had a contingency of people who were pretty good organizers too that worked under his kind of leadership. SNCC had been in Selma from -- since about two years prior to the Selma to Montgomery march. Bernard Lafayette was there, [SNCC Alabama Project Director] Silas Norman was there and Silas Norman was the project director when that happened and so we agreed to share the space and on the assumption we were going to work out whatever kinds of strategies that, that we were supposed to put together and work on in unity.

"One of the things that we detected very early was, was that there was a working out of strategies along with the Justice Department and we were not notified about that. So, we were kind of left out of the loop and so on that Tuesday, I don't know the exact date, but Tuesday when the march started out, we assumed that the march was going to go straight on through and there was going to be another confrontation, but there was an agreement that you take the march from the church, Brown Chapel¹,

across the bridge to the highway patrol, then you would kneel and say a prayer and turn around. And that was called the "turn around march." Well, that created a lot of anguish, not only on the part of SNCC, but on the part of the clergy and all who assumed that the march was ready to go forward and that they were going to in fact violate the injunction. The agreement on the injunction was, was the federal government was going to -- was going to work out through the courts some kind of system to allow the march to go forward, but we were not aware of that, and so people became very upset by that.

1. Brown Chapel A.M.E. Church in Selma, Alabama, was the starting point for the Selma to Montgomery marches.

JOAN BAEZ

"To try and have a movement without the music would have been ridiculous, plus it's there, I mean, it's just there. 'Ain't going to let nobody turn me around,' it's just like saying 'good morning,' you know. A picture of two kids, which I saw, they had to be 10 or 12, and marching with a -- it was Washington, I guess, with a sign saying 'freedom,' or the like, and a cop running at them. They got down on their knees, and went on singing, and the cop didn't know what to do with himself. It was too embarrassing to-- not always, but in this case, too embarrassing to, you know, hit them, knock them out, whatever his plan was. If they had just flipped him the bird, it would have been enough to do whatever he really had in his heart to do."

DOROTHY COTTON

"It wasn't about singing with Martin, it was about getting the church to sing--getting a room full of people where he's getting ready to speak, and he often would get up to sing -- he would often get me to get that room singing before he even came out there. But when he came out there, he'd get them to sing one of his favorite songs, or get me to sing a song, but he loved to sing."

TREY ELLIS

"What kind of song- would you like to sing for us? What did you sing? What songs when you think of Martin do you...?"

DOROTHY COTTON

"Well, as I was just humming there- *[Singing] I'm gonna do what the spirit says do, I'm gonna do what the spirit says do, what the spirit says do, I'm gonna do, oh Lord, do what the spirit says do. [Talking] we used to sing [singing] I'll go to jail if the spirit says jail, I'll go to jail if the spirit says jail, if the spirit says jail, I'll go to jail, oh Lord, I'll go to jail if the spirit says ja- [talking] We sang a lot of different kinds of songs.*"

MOVEMENT BUILDING

INTERVIEW THREAD TWO: MOVEMENT BUILDING, CHICAGO

MARY LOU FINLEY

“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.

“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 fair housing act out of it either, which was another kind of thing we might get 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 40 years. It was supported by grants from the business community. And it really made all kinds of efforts to make housing more available.

“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 40 years of commitment by leaders in Chicago to try to deal with the issues around housing desegregation.”

HARRY BELAFONTE

“I think Chicago was a—was a huge awakening for him. I'm not quite sure how he envisioned it, but he always saw the North and for those of us who lived in the North, as people who experienced -- whatever experiences we were having were lesser of all the evils, unless you know the South and what's going on in the South and what's going on in the South, you have no idea how bad the situation is because in the North, you're somewhat insulated.

“Well, that concept or that thought from his perspective was immediately changed when he met- when he encountered Chicago and Cicero [Illinois] and what he did. And in making the decision to move into Chicago, was he felt that very strongly that to begin to unearth the silent prejudices, the silent racism that so dominated the North, to rip that apart and to let the world see that the North was really not very much better than the South, if not even worse because it was hidden beneath this façade of the more democratic place to live. He felt that Chicago and what went on in the North was perhaps as significant if not more in many ways to what was the, again, extension coming from the Montgomery Movement up to this moment, that the bigger picture was really what was taking place in the places that didn't debate it much -- the North. What went on in New York and Chicago and then Detroit and all those places that- where there was racial seething, he, he had a lot of homework to do and he sure drove us all to look at things and to see things through prisms we'd not quite been challenged to do before.”

MOVEMENT BUILDING

INTERVIEW THREAD THREE: POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

"And he had been in Marks, he'd been in Marks [Mississippi] for a funeral and had gone to a center and saw children who were -- the teacher had one apple for lunch, and she's carved up that apple for four kids. And that was the first time Ralph Abernathy said that he's ever seen Martin cry in public, but he had to leave the school because he couldn't believe they were each getting a fourth of an apple. And the hungry Marks was palpable.

"But any rate, he responded immediately, and called his staff together who was not happy about this. And there was robust debate over the ensuing months about whether Vietnam should be the big issue or whether it should be economic opportunity and jobs, and obviously it was by -- obvious by then that the next step that the talking about changing laws was to get people jobs. They had to eat, they had to survive, they had to work, they had to have an income. And so that was a very interesting follow on set of months, but he stuck with it. And committed himself to doing a Poor People's Campaign."

BERNARD LAFAYETTE, JR.

TREY ELLIS:

"And was everybody working towards the Poor People's Campaign? Was it all hands-on deck?"

BERNARD LAFAYETTE, Jr.:

"No. In fact, since we're talking the experiences with Martin Luther King. Martin Luther King did not have the support of his executive staff, and in fact, he went on a fast to unify the staff and to bring them together, 'cause they each had their own programs and they had their budgets and they wanted to, you know, get on about their work. And they didn't see this Poor People's Campaign as, you know, related to what they wanted to do. And Hosea [Williams], for example, had voter registration and he already had a plan, he had a staff and he had, you know, the area was going to work, that kind of thing. Same thing with each of them. Jesse [Jackson] was still in Chicago. He'd not moved, 'cause he'd organized business people and the Operation Bread Basket then was one where you got merchants and folks had products and Jesse had organized a full page ad so all of them were, you know, buying spots on the ad -- the full page. And it was very, you know, creative, I thought. So, this Poor People's Campaign was not something that Martin Luther King -- but Marian Wright Edelman had come up with the idea and Martin Luther King had embraced it and he wanted to move ahead with it. It was slow starting, actually, and it was postponed more than once. And so, as the administrator over all of the others, we took a certain part of the budget and said that this is going to be devoted to the Poor People's Campaign. So, I told each staff person that we need to find out how they plan to spend this money for the Poor People's Campaign that was in the budget for them, and so therefore, they began therefore they began to give some thought to how they could relate what they were doing to the Poor People's Campaign. But Martin Luther King made Hosea Williams the National Field Coordinator. So," he would deal with the bringing all the people on the- you might say the... "mule trains," and that sort of thing- mobilizing folks in the field to come on the campaign. They finally started coming aboard, one by one, and I had this conversation with Martin Luther King in the office after the staff meeting was over, and we were calling it the "Poor People's Campaign" and usually our campaigns were related to racism and overcoming segregation, and those kind of things, discrimination and that kind of thing. So, we were talking about, you know, black people for the most part.

"So, I said to him, Martin Luther King -- after the meeting was over, just the two of us- I said, 'Martin Luther King, we're calling this the Poor People's Campaign.' He said, 'Yes.' I said, 'Well, you know, there are'" and we said in those days -- 'There were Chicanos who are poor, you want them to be in?' He said, 'Yes, we want them to be involved.' I said, 'Okay, as I said what about the Native Americans?' He said, 'Well, yeah, Native Americans.' So, by this time he turned around and looked up at me 'cause he'd anticipated the next question. I said, 'Well, Doctor King, what about the poor whites?' And he said to me, a little disgusted, he said, 'Are they poor?' I said, 'Well, yes.' 'Well, we want them involved.' 'Okay, alright, the poor whites. And who's the leader of the poor whites, okay?' I said to myself.

“So, I began to mobilize them and I got Tom Houck and Mrs. King came to me and said, ‘You know, he’s our driver and anything etcetera, but he’s just so anxious to get involved in this, you know, actions and campaigns and everything, could you take him?’ I said, ‘Yes, I’ll take him.’ Young fellow, enthusiastic, just full of energy, you know. So, I gave him an impossible task. I said, ‘Alright, Tom, we want you to go and find the leaders of the Native Americans, the different groups, and the Hispanics, okay, Chicanos, and the poor whites.’ So be -- at my surprise, Tom Houck got going out there somehow and found different leaders of these different groups, all the way from Washington. But I did know some of them already because of the campaign we had to end of the war in Vietnam in New York the year before, in ‘67. Okay? We had mobilized some of these Native Americans and also the Chicanos, like Cesar Chavez,¹ and all of them, etcetera, so we just simply followed through and located them for this campaign.

“And we had a meeting at the Paschal’s and that’s when Martin Luther King was introduced to Cesar Chavez, and [Adolfo] ‘Corky’ Gonzales² out of Denver, and all the other people - and the labor union played a very important part in identifying these different ethnic groups because they knew them, and they were very much a part of the movement. So, we were very excited about Rose Crow Flies High from Seattle, Tilly Walker from North Dakota and Mad Bear Anderson from the Iroquois reservation, and just a number of them. And also, Dennis Banks, you know, from AIM [the American Indian Movement], you know, group, stuff like that. And so, it was really on the move when we got this Poor People’s Campaign going.”

¹ Cesar Chavez was a Chicano labor activist who worked on behalf of farm workers.

² Adolfo Corky Gonzales was a Chicano rights activist and civil rights advocate.

MOVEMENT BUILDING

INTERVIEW THREAD FOUR: FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

CLIFFORD ALEXANDER

"Every black organization of prominence in civil rights is short of money. We do not have a major group of white and black people who have that big-pocketed opportunity to help us not have to spend our time kissing ass to raise some money for the next meal. So, they were not very -- not themselves very certainly filled with money, so he had to do a lot of things. He had to go beg money for them. He had to express thoughts that if you had eight or 10 people who were on staff could use some of those, had to do some of that as well. I don't have any idea how many speeches and things that he gave during a year, but they were enormous numbers. So, he covered a full range of things that obviously I didn't see all his speeches and begging for money. And he was a scholar, he -- the highly educated man, a curious man, and that took some of his time as well."

JESSE JACKSON

"So, he had a great appreciation of the many roles that many people play. And he saw himself as kind of guiding those forces. And he was more like -- more interested in building a kind of... a tugboat as opposed to an ocean liner. He didn't want a big organization, per se. He didn't want a membership organization, he'd say you get bogged down in raising members. It was not the big ocean liner, he wanted to have a strike force. It was going to give him time to raise the issues, expose the contradictions and have the courage to fight.

"And so, I remember him saying one time that he did not want to build a big building, leave it as a monument, didn't want to have a lot of money left. He felt if any money was left, it would be a reflection on his leadership, that it was not about money. He believed that you should be materialistically minded enough to take care of basic essentials, but not mindless and materialistic and out for your stuff. He had that sense of-- that's why they gave him -- he won the Nobel Peace Prize, he gave the money away to all the organizations. He kept just a portion for SCLC. 'cause he had -- those were kind of his, kind of his values."

CLARENCE JONES

"I was not part of the SCLC organization. SCLC didn't pay me. There was a period of time when my work with him overlapped when I was also an investment banker in Wall Street. I think it's fair to say that as a lawyer, from practicing law and other things, I know as a matter of fact that in one year I made more money than all the combined salaries of everybody on the staff of Southern Christian Leadership Conference. They didn't pay me a damn thing. Everything I did, didn't even pick up my, occasionally, they'd pick up a hotel, but most of my travel was picked up on my then American Express card and reimbursed by Southern- So- And that, in a strange way, I think it affected how Doctor King looked at me and another person I was very, very close to, Stanley David Levison. Neither of us were in any way financially dependent, nor ever took, or wanted, a penny from him or the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

"In fact, as the history will record, and it's uncomfortable for some people, but the fact of the matter is there are persons like Harry Belafonte, Stanley David Levison¹, and at sometimes a white lawyer by the name of Harry Wachtel, and myself, collectively; we were the collective financial reservoir that kept Doctor King and his family afloat. And chief among them was Harry Belafonte. And so, I get really personally offended when I hear or read one of the more adult King children say, one, they didn't know about it, or two, they express this anger at Harry over one thing or another. And I say, 'Well, hold on. He's the man that paid for their schooling, that let them go to school. He's the man that paid for the domestic household servants.' And when there was a critical time when he [Doctor King] didn't have any money, it was Danny Levison, Harry Wachtel, Harry Belafonte and Clarence Jones that sent the King family money. So, I don't want to hear a damn ill word about any one of those persons who spoke, particularly Harry who is 90 years old."

¹Stanley David Levison was a businessman and lawyer and activist in progressive causes.