

PHILOSOPHY OF THE MOVEMENT: NONVIOLENCE

INTERVIEW THREAD THREE: RESPECTING DIFFERENT VIEWS

MIRIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

“Then I went to Mississippi to practice law. And the Meredith March was a part of that. At the time we went it was still a hell hole. The Mississippi Summer Project had ended in 1964, everybody had left for different reasons. The press left when the white kids left. And, and Meredith didn’t consult with anybody, he still doesn’t, bless his heart. He’s all gray and gorgeous now. I just took my grandchildren to meet him this summer, went on a civil rights tour. But at any rate, he did this march and it wasn’t on anybody’s agenda, he didn’t consult with anybody. And so, Doctor King and civil rights leaders rallied around that, and we all walked from, almost from Memphis, down to Jackson. And that’s when the first -- and every night, and again -- accessibility, listening, we would stop and sleep in people’s houses because motels were not available.

“And Stokely [Carmichael] and Willie Ricks and the SNCC kids -- I was now kind of a former SNCC kid who was now more part of just getting people out of jail [unclear]. Anyway, I was bridge. But we’d meet every night and it was amazing to me how after long walks he would listen to them vent, listen to all of us vent, and it wonderful to be a fly on a wall, with great patience. And I remember him often saying, ‘Stokely, is it that bad? Is it that bad?’ But he listened. And that was when Black Power first began to emerge, and I will never forget Doctor King’s face when in Greenwood [Mississippi], we had a rally, and Willie Ricks got up and started saying, Black Power. He looked like the most stricken man. But again, what I remember was the listening the patience, trying hard to understand, because he really was committed to nonviolence. How to connect. And I don’t know if I would have the patience to do that, but he listened in Chicago, he listened whenever there was an outburst. The Black Power thing reinforced itself in, in Canton [Mississippi] where they had gas canisters. And then in Jackson, but that was the first real breach in the nonviolence commitment that many of us had grown to accept. But he was not judgmental, he was always there to say, ‘I don’t go there, but I really want to understand why you go there.’ The patience, I mean patience of Job, which I didn’t have. And an ability to kind of just kind of be present.”

ANDREW YOUNG

“We had those kinds of things happening, that we were challenging age-old traditions. But the people weren’t bad people, and while one group of people were marching against [Chicago] Mayor [Richard] Daley, Mayor Daley had had maybe the second biggest fundraiser for us at the time of Birmingham, one was in Los Angeles, and Mayor Daley and [gospel singer] Mahalia Jackson had put on a fundraiser for us in Chicago to support our work in Birmingham and Selma. And so that was the way nonviolence was supposed to work, that we were supposed to be able to disagree without being disagreeable. And throughout that entire movement, we met regularly with Mayor Daley, and we disagreed, but we always kind of came to a new understanding, and we remained friends, and even supporters, because in the Democratic Party, Daley was part of the liberal wing. I mean, after all, it was probably the Daley machine that helped produce Barack Obama. We never felt enemies, like we were different, but we didn’t feel that way in the South either.”