

BOX 12  
(second half of tape)

KELLY SMITH  
Nashville  
Tape 1  
Feb. 13.

Q: This is conversation with Reverend Kelly Smith, Nashville, Tennessee, First Baptist Church.

Q: I would like to ask you just something about your personal history for naething, just for the record. You went to Boston University, didn't you.

A: No I didn't not, went to Howard University, and I did a little work herein Vanderbilt, 1955. Rather early, time, *I was among the first four Negroes to attend the university.* ~~before any integration of the university.~~ But well, my grade school days were spent in the state of Mississippi, I was born in the all Negro town of Mound Bayou (7), Mississippi, and went to college at Morehouse College, in ~~xxxx~~ Atlanta, Georgia, and then to these other schools.

Q: How long have you had this pastorage?

A: Well, I've been here 13 years, 13 years next month, actually.

Q: CAN You remember at what point, and how you became involved in this civil rights effort?

A: Well, ~~xxxx~~ I suppose in a sense actually growing up in Mississippi automatically involves ~~xxxx~~ one in civil rights efforts, one way or the other. You don't ignore it, in other words, but I don't really know where I ~~first~~ began to take ~~;~~ I don't really say leadership, but rather aggressive part in some of the efforts being made, I don't know when that started. I remember as a college student in early forties, being a member of the campus chapter of the N.A.A.C.P.,

Q: Was this at Morehouse?

A: This was at Morehouse, yes. I served a church in *Vicksburg,* ~~Pittsburgh,~~ Miss., ~~xxxx~~ from '46 to 1951. And had a Sunday night radio broadcast and

all, we had occasion to become involved in some things there, I was on the Executive Committee of that branch of the N.A.A.C.P., and well, then our church, some how the other, we developed the kind of image, which made people who had some sort of difficulty, racially, feel tht if they come there, they can get some form of help. Well, this kind of involvement sort of characterized my staying there in Mississippi, and then when I came here, I got more involved in it, still with the N.A.A.C.P. to start with in leadership, and then forming--forming another organization which is an affiliate with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. And then things went on from there.

Q: How did the Nashville sit-ins begin? What started it?

A: As I think back on it, it's interesting, because I don't think the facts are generally known about ~~xxxxxx~~ Nashville's involvement in the sit-ins, in relation to the involvement of other communities.

In 1958 when we formed an organization called the Nashville Christian Leadership Council, ~~we~~ had been in existence a very short time, and before we adopted the methodology of nonviolence, ~~in 1958, and in March, well,~~ The organization was formed in January '58, <sup>at</sup> in March of '58, we had a workshop on nonviolence, that soon, and then we had them off and on, for some 15 ~~xxxxxx~~ or 18 months.

q; Were these the clinics?

a; Yes, yes, sort of clinics, that's right, and we had many Sunday night coffee sessions, ~~when~~ <sup>At</sup> this time it was all adults, there were no students involved anywhere, and the thought of students hadn't really entered our minds at that time, ~~wasxxxxxx~~ <sup>at</sup> these coffee sessions we discussed the problems of Nashville, and which problems we could perhaps best approach. And having adopted the nonviolent methodology, we had to think in terms of a kind of project which would lend itself to a nonviolent demonstration, which could also serve as an opening wedge for other things. It was after a good deal of discussion that we

independent of any other community, arrived at the matter of lunch counters. This is an interesting coincidence. We had decided this, and in 1959, we went to some merchants ~~xxxx~~ here, some businessmen here, and attempted to negotiate with them on the matter of opening up their lunch counters, desegregating their rest rooms, and employing Negroes in whitecollar, blue collar positions, Well, of ~~xxxxxx~~ course, this was considered all utterly ridiculous, ~~in-that--~~ in 1959; in some instances, people that we went to see, felt, ~~that~~ <sup>that</sup> you know, this was just sort of a frivolous thing that you couldn't really be serious about, you must be kidding us. But after having been told what the policy was, and having been told that they would not change, in the fall of '59, ~~wexxx~~ had kind of staged what we call ~~ax~~, well, kind of a pre-sit-in sit-in, it was not really a prolonged sit-in, it was a testing kind of thing, where we had gotten the verbal answer from the merchants. ~~We~~ had gotten the verbal answers that the place was closed to us, but we wanted to find the answer in an "action" situation, for it is possible, we felt, that people might say their place is not open, while maybe they would serve us, maybe they don't admit, I have known situations like this. So we had a cross section of people, some Negro ministers, some white workers, and some foreign persons, to go down to ~~xxx~~ one of the department stores, and attempt to be served. This was in the fall of 1959. and of course they were refused, ~~and~~ had a very interesting discussion with the floor walker there.

Q: How was that, what passed between them.

~~xxx~~ A: It was a ~~kindxx~~ kind sort of thing, interestingly enough, one thing that we remember straight through the struggle, was that the floor walker said then that -- "if you people wanted <sup>to</sup>, you can change this policy."

Q: He said that to you.

A: Yes, he said it to the group.

Q: Were you in that group?

I was not in that group. No. I was not in that particular group.

But , and then, from there, it became clear what we were going to have to do, so then we followed intensified work shop training, and Jim Lawson, I imagine you'll be seeing him,

Q: I'm going to see him, I want to.

a; Well, X Jim was extremely important ~~to us~~,--to us, in what happened here, because Jim was <sup>really</sup> (the) only ~~person~~ person who was not a neophyte in this matter of nonviolence. He lived it and breathed it, ~~and~~ it was his true philosophy, he had spent some time in India and so forth, ~~so~~ Jim had come to town just ~~after~~ a little after we formed the organization. He had come to live here, so we made him projects director, Chairman of the Projects Committee, and as such, ~~he was~~ his committee would select the projects, ~~and~~ and put them ~~into~~ to the group.

Q: Was he at Vanderbilt at that time?

A: He was at Vanderbilt, yes, he was at Vanderbilt at that time, because I think X that was really his mission in town here. So then ~~he~~ Pre--Projects Committee was conducting the workshops, well, Jim actually conducted them for the committee, ~~and~~ And Jim came to me one time, and, as I was President of the organization, and asked -- what about getting some students to become involved in this? I told him I thought it would be a very good idea. And so he did. ~~And~~ got the students, and the thing ~~that~~ surprised us, I suppose we shouldn't have been surprised, but we had no precedent upon which to depend, so that the students became very interested and outnumbered the adults, quickly and easily, and became part of the workshop ~~thing~~, and the sit-ins, actually became a students affair, ~~and~~ there were so many here.

Q: Did you meet any resistance on this, about the recruitment of students?

A: Not at that point, no.

Q: I mean, not from parents, or from authorities of any kind?

A: No, not at this ~~xxx~~ stage, Later on, we did, once the battle got sort of hot, you see. Then there were parents, there were school officials who felt that we were culprits for ~~xxxxx~~ doing this. But now we recruited students for workshops, we never recruited anybody for actual participation. These ~~were xxxxxx~~ always volunteers, they had to be volunteers. For one thing, we would not like to have the responsibility of this. For another thing, we believe that a person conducts himself better, if it is something that he wants ~~xxx~~ to do, rather than sort ~~of xxxxx~~ of being talked into, or almost forced into doing so. For the actual participation, this was purely a ~~xxxx~~ voluntary matter. And this was something we had to say over and ~~xxx~~ over and over again, because ~~xxxx~~ there were teachers, college teachers, and parents, who gave us a pretty bad time, because they felt that we were pushing the kids out there, to get arrested and all this, <sup>they</sup> just didn't know that the kids insisted upon doing this. So this is really ~~no-aa-~~ the background of this, and of course, it was in February I believe of 1960, when we had our first sit-in, ~~and~~ <sup>T</sup> the first real trouble came the latter part of February of 1960, when we had violence, and arrests, and everything, and the whole community, sort of found itself involved ~~in xxx-wit heurrel--~~ without really planning it.

Q: The boycott began at what time.

A: The boycott began, I suppose, <sup>about</sup> in less than a month or something. **I**t almost automatically began, because with all the difficulties, going on downtown, people being arrested and beaten and the hoodlums in the streets and all, ~~xxx~~ people simply stayed away from the stores. ~~rather~~ ~~then~~ ~~there~~ ~~were~~ ~~some~~ ~~persons,~~ ~~and~~ ~~we~~ never have found out quite who, started it.

Q: Started the boycott?

A: The boycott, yes, the official boycott. It was kind of a word of mouth thing.

Q: I see, spontaneous to begin with.

a; Yes, it really was. What we tried to do, the Nashville Christian Leadership Council, was to give some kind of form and substance, to the boycott, and to try to interpret it in the light of our nonviolent discipline, that is, make it make sense, in this regard and all, and then to, well, to work with it, as best we could, and with the people who were ~~xxxx~~ involved ~~xxxx~~ in it. And to get maximum mileage out of it. In the pursuit of the goals, of desegregation.

Q: ~~xxx~~ How did the crack come?

~~xxx~~ A: The actual change?

Q: Yes.

A: Well, it was through negotiations,

Q: Who negotiated, this came different times, different methods of negotiations.

A: Yes, we ~~and-to-learn~~ had to learn, because we made some mistakes in everything, but in negotiation, we had to learn that there were certain kinds of people who were not <sup>adaptable for this purpose.</sup> ~~available.~~ The ~~Naxi~~ Nashville Christian Leadership Council sponsored the negotiations. I was chairman of the group, was chairman of the Negotiations Committee for most of the negotiations sessions we had. Well, we had to frankly seek out people who were of the right temperament, as well as determined spirit, to and this isn't always ~~xxx~~ easy to find.

Q: For your side.

A: Yes, for our side, we needed somebody ~~xxxx~~ who would not "blow his top" so to speak. When something is ~~xxxx~~ said that everybody knows ~~all~~ of ~~us know~~ is wrong, you say okay, we don't accept it. But if ~~xxxx~~ you become pretty emotional about it, then we would render ourselves useless, in going further. So somehow we had to learn that certain people could ~~ex-be-us---~~ not be used for this, but could be used in another area. And we

finally developed a negotiating team, which worked rather laboriously in this, and this is, well I don't want to compare aspects of the struggle, but this is an aspect of it, that is much more strenuous and significant, than many people seem to think, It's less dramatic, but it's a tremendous thing, to sit there ~~xxxx~~ with a group of people, who, ~~you~~ come from two entirely different worlds. You don't speak the same language, ~~xxxx~~ and they perhaps have never seen Negroes close up except as janitors and maids, never talked across the table on an equal level, you got to overcome this kind of barrier. So ~~xxxx~~, and then, once you overcome that, <sup>you usually remember that</sup> they are part of an economic world <sup>about which</sup> ~~none of us~~ <sup>we know nothing.</sup> ~~have anything like that,~~ any such experiences. And to sit there and to try to get together <sup>or</sup> something is a rough experience. But it was through ~~he-he~~ the negotiations, of course, coupled with the openings that came from the demonstrations that we were able to get the crack in the wall.

Q: ON what spirit did the crack come? Was there any recognition of just playing, or was it purely a matter of force? Across the table.

A: It was not force <sup>in the usual sense of the word.</sup> ~~I feel~~ and there are differences of ~~xxxxxxx~~ opinion about this. I certainly feel that there were people across the negotiations table who were sold on what we were trying to do, on our sincerity. <sup>A</sup> And you see, some of them thought, before hand, I think, that we had horns and that we were all demons, who had come down to destroy ~~our~~ <sup>them</sup> way of life, or something or other. But when they found out we were ~~only~~ -- real live human beings who wanted the same things that they wanted, and had reasons for ~~xxxx~~ it, and had talked things out, and who ~~we~~ were willing to suffer, sacrifice in order to get this ~~and this kind of thing.~~ I think this helped. And of course, I think some of the things that we said also helped. Now one of the things we had to learn as negotiators, is that you've got to try to, as best you can, sit where the ~~xxxxxxx~~ other man sits, ~~xxxxxxx~~ and ~~xxxx~~ try to understand his point of view, even though you don't agree with him, and this is terribly important. So we

tried to do this. In our negotiations we agreed to a control period. ~~What we call~~ <sup>15</sup> A control period, one of these things. we understand what your problem is, we say, we know that there are segregationist ~~xxx~~ customers, who ~~xxxxxxx~~ would not like this at all. So let's have a control period, where we would start off with one or two ~~Negroes~~ Negroes coming to your counters, at maybe 3 o'clock, something, not a lunch hour, people we have designated, and there will be detectives, plainclothesmen, not uniform ~~policemen~~, because that's too much excitement, but plainclothesmen, sitting there as regular customers. These people will go in, your people will be expected to ~~xxx~~serve them, ~~xxxxxxx~~ ~~xxx~~ then they would go out. You see -- this kind of ~~xxxxxxx~~ thing, to start with. So we did this for two or three days, it didn't take a week, I don't think, really.

Q: The city government cooperated with this program, putting the detect ives in

a; Yes, yes, the city government cooperated.

~~elated-~~ relieved

Q: Mayor was ~~an-league~~/with this solution, you think?

relieved

a; I think he really was. I think he was, because this was quite a problem ~~xxxxxxx~~ to him there, and there had been some things that we ~~xxxx~~ had hoped that he would have done, that he didn't see fit to do, some things that he did, that did not seem to have been the wisest course, to take. And we know that this was ~~xxxxxxx~~ pretty upsetting to him and all. I think he was ~~xxx~~ sort of relieved.

q; How much of the violence, the brutality, was random and how much was under the ~~aegis-of-the-aegis~~ of the police force?

O r can't you distinguish?

A: It's a little difficult to distinguish, because in some instances, the police would seem to sort of give license to this other element that participate. This was not a general thing, ~~xxx~~ there ~~xxxxxxx~~ were some fine people on the ~~xxxxxxx~~ police force too. Like anything else,



we have some of all kinds of people there. And there we're some who ~~were~~ participated in violence themselves, and others who permitted it, you know. And, of course, always if one of our nonviolent demonstrators would be stuck downtown, they would both get hurt, he would get arrested for being stuck and the police always called it fighting, and we had many instances where the ~~police~~ police claimed that these kids were fighting, ~~who~~ <sup>when</sup> we knew better.

Q: Were there any <sup>convictions</sup> ~~conditions~~ of the hoodlums,

a; No.

Q: No convictions. Any convictions of Negroes for fighting.

A: Yes, yes, and of course, we finally would get cleared, we still have <sup>a</sup> case, by the way, we have one coming up on the 21st, of this month. But <sup>^</sup> oh there were convictions, till we get it up high enough.

Q: I was interested in what you said about the attitude of the white negotiators, and what bearing it might have on general observations that have been made by a number of people, I mean, a number of Negroes. ~~Most recently in Clinton, I guess, James Baldwin, he said~~ -said that the southern mob, does not represent the ~~real~~ southern white majority. They moved in to fill a moral vacuum. Does that make any sense to you?

A: This could very well be true. There are many ~~nonvocal~~ nonvocal people who are often potentially good people in this thing, if they once would become vocal. And I don't think the mob does represent this other <sup>White</sup> man, not necessarily. ~~I-trepre--I-trepre--~~ It represents him in a sense though, it represents him in a permissive kind of sense, because he's in charge of the ~~police~~ police force, he's in charge of the city and this kind of thing. If these ~~people-are-~~people are ~~permitted~~ permitted to exist, then in many cases, what they do, is awake that. So in that sense, they sort ~~are~~ of represent them.

**MISSING PAGE(S)**

Q: It's an old question of what , whether fascism represented Italy, ~~in 1939~~. I was there for the first year of the war, evacuated in June '40, and I was convinced that fascism did not <sup>then</sup> represent the will of the Italian people. But ~~xxxxxxx~~ it was in a position of authority, over-all <sup>the</sup> country,

A: Yes, yes, this is what happened.

Q: But now I find this question, I find all sorts of answers, ~~xxxxxxx~~ and I know it represents the majority all the way, to those that is simple a question of over-all aim, this organized majority who have no point of focus. Now, this is said, in every corner \_\_\_\_\_ every single spectrum, it's said. But I think the attitude held must modify the course of action, the person takes,

A: I think so.

Q: If a person says, and a very able , a lawyer who's been deep in civil rights, ~~a~~ very intelligent and competent man, said here the other day, not in Mississippi either, he said, I'm about to become a Black Muslim. It's hard to believe it's anything but white devil, in answer to this question. Pity that's one course of action may stem from this. Now he's affiliated with CORE, and ~~xxxxxxx~~ yet, he's ~~xxxx~~ active for CORE, but ~~xxx~~ his personal view are getting more and more desperately outside of this program. And he admits the feelings now, and lead to one kind of these ~~xxxxxxx~~ actions ~~xxxx~~ as opposed to what you're saying.

*never*

a; Yes, yes, I can understand. I think I have seen some of this develop. I've ~~xxxxxxx~~ <sup>seen</sup> some of this develop, ~~the~~ one thing about people here, the feeling that all white people are "bad". That there are none upon whom you can really depend , really care. There are some people on our board who have said this, ~~I mean in the CORE board,~~ the Nashville Christian Leadership Council board, we've had this kind of ~~xxxxxxx~~ thing done, and oh I ~~think-we-have~~ believe we had one, at least one <sup>such</sup> ~~xxxx~~ person on it since we've been organized.

Q: Mr. E vers yesterday said to me, on this general line of discussion, that one thing he thought was true. That most of the segregationists, not all, but most of them, would respect courage, when stood up, \_\_\_ peace. And found that the words of most people would stick, once the word was given. You cross a line, and the line would be met in the crossing. And of course, he had a very rough time. Now I, he then talked about the other aspects, other people in \_\_\_ but even he \_\_\_ had some hope of workable agreements. The word would stick, \_\_\_ a lot of them respect courage any way, respect that.

A: I think he's right. I would go along with it. And I think the courage is expressed---expressed in different ways, including nonviolent demonstrations. I think that has met great respect, ~~where~~. Well, we have some interesting stories to tell here, ~~I could develop here,~~ like the one of the two boys, one white and one Negro. The white boy had attacked the Negro boy, and going ~~back~~ back in the paddy wagon, and the Negro boy talked to him, and before they got to the jail, the white boy was \_\_\_ sorry, and he felt guilty and wrong, about what he had done. The Negro boy had not shown any bitterness toward him or anything, and that's a little bit too ~~much~~ much, you know.

Q: ~~As~~ This is a slavery that the man in the mob yearns to be released from, the \_\_\_ devil.

A: Yes, yes, I think so. I really do. He may not be aware of it,

Q: Yes, but he has some inner tension about this, at least, he wants to justify as right, and not just as a piece of offensive violence. Let me ask you another question, sort of leading question, lead where it will....

THIS ~~TEXT~~ IS THE END OF TAPE 1, with Rev. Kelly Smith,  
Nashville, resume on tapew.