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Paul Bushnell: Nashville Memories

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Note: This interview was conducted on March 14, 2003 during a course taught by Dr. Pam Muirhead. Several unnamed students are present during the interview in The Ames Library, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois.

The video was professionally reformatted from a VHS tape which was inaudible for the first 10 minutes. All but the first part (00:2:15) have been restored. The original VHS and preservation copies of the digital format are held in Tate Archives & Special Collections of The Ames Library. Other copies held locally are with the collection for the Bloomington-Normal Black History Project at the McLean County Museum of History, Bloomington, Illinois.

Bushnell: I was deeply concerned about the election of 1960 when John F. Kennedy would become president. I was enough out of sorts with things. I know I grew my hair a little longer. My mother called me a meathead. I really wasn't—I didn't fulfill that definition much but I guess there was a certain indication of alienation there. Perhaps we were drowning in suburban values—middle class values, I'm not sure. But as I look back before the Civil Rights Movement, I do remember one or two things about the roles of the limited contact I had with the Black community in my hometown in Ohio. I grew up in Wooster, Ohio, which is about 50 miles south of Cleveland and it was a town I eventually learned where only—where Blacks could only eat in three or four restaurants in town and none of those were very good, where there was a very limited number of Blacks in the community. They pretty much dominated the local barber shops—that seems to have been one of the jobs they could get. There was one Black man who worked in the chemistry department at the college in town. He was in charge of the chemicals—a pretty responsible job as those of you around who have any acquaintances in chemistry departments know, that's a responsible job. He had a daughter who graduated from college who helped me do—who helped do some typing on—I had a major senior paper due and couldn't get it typed. I realize too that when I was in first grade, my first grade teacher treated rather badly two Black children whom I didn't know who sat near the front on one side and they were fairly hungry and used to carry some kind of food, cereal or something in their pockets, and I thought she was very disparaging and hostile to them ***(cuts out)*** I really think that some of my concerns about race may have been rooted in that very experience of perceived injustice, really ***(cuts out)...*** treated this way ***(cuts out)...*** But I was aware of, through my high school and college years, of Black students. I got to know some of them—one of them I got to know on a laboring job I had during the summer between years of college education. He was the son of one of the barbers from town. He eventually wound up going to college. There were a few that distinguished themselves in that way and through them I got a better sense of where Blacks were in the town. When I got to Nashville—I went there strictly as a graduate student at Vanderbilt University—and I had an assistantship and was grading papers for a course in the history of the church in Western Europe. It was a standard course that all students in the divinity school took and as a person who was specializing in the history of religion, that's the place where I actually wound up as a T.A. In the winter of 1960, I came back after Christmas break and it was a normal kind of year with normal kind of work, but very soon a sit-in movement broke out February 1, 1960 in Greensboro, North Carolina. That was pretty interesting. I thought, "This is an over-due expression of resistance on the part of the Black community," and suddenly the

same thing erupted in Nashville, Tennessee. And I discovered that one of the students whose papers I was grading was deeply involved in this movement, had been teaching non-violence. Of course I knew him because I saw him in class and was grading his papers and I knew that he was also a very good student. And he was a particularly interesting student because he had been involved as a conscientious objector during the Korean War. He had served some alternate time and done some alternate service, and he had gone to India and had obviously studied Gandhi-ism? up there in some depth, so he knew more about that than—about non-violent tradition—than Martin Luther King did. Although this was several years after the Montgomery Bus Boycott, still I was fascinated that this had happened; and in Nashville suddenly there was a large sit-in movement. Many students were arrested and, although that wasn't the case every time, it was at this one juncture. And so I thought, "Well, maybe I can do something. I want to get involved in this. I want to support these people in what they're doing. This is an over-due initiative in the Black community and I want to indicate my support." So I was told that one of the things I could do would be to go to court when these cases came up, and I did. I went down to the courthouse and hung out there a little bit, found the courtroom where this was going on and went in and took a seat. And it was one of the most powerful sociology lessons I ever had in my life because all the cases that came up at the beginning of that court session were cases that had to do with the people that the police had picked up over the weekend. None of these were civil rights demonstrators at all. Most of them were drunks or prostitutes or people that were caught in various kinds of minor crimes, and as they were paraded through there, I got a really interesting dose of sociology, as I say, finding out who was at the bottom in this society and what happens to them. Then of course the sit-in cases came and when the sit-inners were paraded before the judge, the judge would sometimes deliberately swivel his chair and look at the wall behind him to demonstrate his disregard for what they were saying. It didn't matter what they said. "Guilty," and came down with the gavel. They were charged with disturbing the peace, I think, and the lawyers, the young Black lawyers that were in court representing them, attempted to make good arguments about their actions but the judge wasn't hearing any of that. Consequently, after a number of these cases, the court was suspended for lunch, and I went out in the hallway outside the courtroom and as people exited the court, gradually there gathered there a group of Black students who were from Fisk University and from Tennessee A&I University, which is Tennessee State University there in Nashville, and they were all obviously supporters of the movement and were there to see their friends—what happened to their friends in court. I began to talk with them and to indicate my interest in it and so they accepted me and we all talked about the cases and then about our hunger and it was decided that a couple of us ought to go to the Crispo across the street and get some hamburgers and some drinks for everybody. And so I was chosen as one of the people, and a young Black woman from one of the universities was to go with me. We went over to the Crispo and she had a particularly lively disposition and she thought, "Well, when we order here I can just slip in on the counter stool maybe and see how far this goes." As long as we're standing up there, of course we can be served, but it was interesting, we gave this rather lengthy order because we were ordering for at least a dozen people and as we gave it, he turned to go to start getting these burgers and things and she slipped into the stool and he turned around and gave her an "Up" *(makes hand movement)* order that was just absolutely unmistakable as sort of a—"You know, you do that and you won't get any of these things to eat." And so she backed off. We got these—the food in several bags and started back across the street. It's memorable to me--this is a wide street in front of the courthouse at least four, five lines of traffic--and she said, when we were waiting for the cars to get by so that we could cross the street, she said, "Would you mind if I ask you a personal question?" And I said, "No not at all." And she said, "Are you negro?" It was sudden—a sudden hunk of learning for me. I suddenly

realized that if you, if in a sense you cross the racial street, the assumption is you're Black and in fact, you're treated that way by the society around you. This was one of two different occasions when I was taken seriously by somebody for a few moments who was Black. I sort of laughed and thought I was as conspicuously white as you could get...

Pamela Muirhead: *(laughs)*

Bushnell: but you know that too is not part of most whites' perceptions of blackness, that there are all kinds of shapes and destinations here. After all, nothing is as black and white as our concepts of black and white. Once in Raleigh, North Carolina, I was there for the sit-in conference for the organization—student nonviolent coordinating committee, SNCC--was organized. I pulled into a gas station with a carload of students. I guess the others were all Black, and I was driving and I got out of the car to ask directions to some particular place in town and the gas station attendant who was there doing the pumps didn't know, so he called to his boss and said, "Where is—how do you get to such-and-such a street?" And the boss said, "Who wants to know?" And he said--and he pointed to me and said, "This nigger over here." And that again is a pretty clear indication, I thought, of where the racial patterns really are. I began, over the period of time to, you know, to be able to act on these things and to realize that when I was there with the students and we were engaged in demonstrations or something else, that I was going to be treated as Black and I also realized that when we got out of that area of town--the commercial area of town—if we went to the Black section of town, that's also where I could feel safe, or I could exhale, or we could regroup. After the courtroom experience, which was a really startling experience of American justice, I joined the movement more formally and was accepted as one of the executive committee of the national student movement. There was one other white student--graduate student from Vanderbilt who was also on that committee. We both joined at about the same time and in that process we realized how easy it was to cross the line from the white community into the Black community and how hard it is to cross the line from the Black community into the white community. It was made absolutely clear. We were very warmly received because I think most Blacks realized that if you wanted to cross the street in *that* direction--we identified with Black people--that you were prepared to run some risks, that you were prepared to accept the consequences; therefore you're genuineness in the effort would probably not be called into question so much. At any rate, we were allowed to speak and to argue whether or not we should, for instance, have a demonstration, just like any of the other Black students, and this was an exceptional group of Black leaders. The chair of this group—it was a rather large group. There were students from Fisk University, from Tennessee State University, from Meharry Medical College, from American Baptist Seminary—this was the exceptional—and from the nursing schools at Fisk. One of my—a vivid memory—in our meetings, there would be a little cluster from the American Seminary, and that was an exceptional group. The very well-know John Lewis was one of those; he is now a congressman from Atlanta, Georgia in the United States Congress. He was for several years the president of SNCC, the chairman of SNCC. John was a stalwart in the movement. James Bevel, another one of those ministerial candidates, a little crazier--a lot crazier than John but very important force in the movement. Bernard Lafayette, another major figure on the national scene. The chair of the meeting was Diane Nash from Chicago who was a very, very strong leader. There were others in the room that were equally strong. One of the people I knew well in that group was Marion Barry. In later years, [he] did not distinguish himself terribly well as the mayor of Washington, D.C. but...

Muirhead: *(laughs)*

Bushnell: but we all liked Marion and he was a major leader in the group. He was going for a master's degree in chemistry when all of this started and I always remember him well because of this one instance downtown...

Muirhead: *(laughs)*

Bushnell: Yeah, he got involved in the wrong end of chemistry there. There was one incident downtown where there had been a demonstration, and we were pulling out, and I had a car that I was driving slowly up the street to see whether there was anyone whom I could give a ride, and I noticed that Marion was being cornered by three or four white cops in a storefront across the street. The little angle where the glass of the window—the display window glass went in towards the door—they had him trapped in there for a moment, and he was nonviolently trying to extricate himself and not get slugged. He managed to slip out of there. They grabbed at him. He managed to cross the street where there was a policeman observing the whole thing and not lifting a finger to do anything to prevent something serious from taking place. This had gone on for two or three storefronts as I recall, and so I pulled my car up next to the curb on the side where he and the policemen were, and I threw the door open on the passenger's side and he jumped in and we drove back to the campus of Fisk University. I've always rather cherished that memory *(laughs)* when Marion was making headlines for some other things. He was on the team that we sent down to desegregate the Memphis Public Library. That was something that, those of us who were northerners, had relatively little experience with segregation. We never quite realized that you could actually—that libraries could be segregated. It would not be possible for Blacks to take out books or to use the library facilities fully. They had some very limited privileges. Down in Mississippi this came to a head when the Tougaloo Nine pulled a very interesting sit-in at the Jackson Public Library and probably got jailed for two days as a result of having done it. They had very cleverly gone and done some research at a Howard branch library in the Black community and found things they needed that weren't in Harvard. They had to go the main Jackson library for them, so they crafted this demonstration out of need for materials that weren't available in the branch of the Black library in the Black community and that was the basis of the sit-in but it made very clear the issues that were involved in library segregation. Well, Nashville was the center and it was the center because it had a powerful teacher of nonviolence who was my student whose papers I was grading—well not my student—whose papers I was grading at Vanderbilt. His name was James Lawson and Lawson became one of the premier interpreters of nonviolence. He made a very important speech at the first sit-in conference there in Raleigh in which he made the point that the whole point of sitting at a lunch counter, the whole point of challenging segregation in this fashion, he said, "This is to raise the moral question about what kind of society we are. This is—we are calling the injustice of segregation to the attention of the country. We want people to address this as an issue of conscience." You know, it's not just about hamburgers; it's not just about lunch counters, partly because so much of the Black community could not have afforded to be customers at lunch counters. We discovered that most of the Blacks in the community were trapped in menial jobs because they couldn't get above the level of janitors and clerks and could hardly get jobs as store clerks. One of the members of our movement told a story about how she had gone to a department store to get a gift for somebody, some candy. She had stood there at the candy counter in this very fine department store and the clerk would never wait on her as long as there was a white customer in line, so she waited and she waited and she waited and finally when all the white customers had been served, she finally turned to her and of course, she would never

address a Black person with any term of respect, she was turned to her finally and the Black woman decided that she would have two of these, three of those, some more of these and those. She kept her getting things for a long time and then she said, "You know, I've been in here so long, I think I've changed my mind. Good bye and she walked out. That was a method of what we might call passive resistance and that of course was what the sit-ins were meant to demonstrate—a kind of nonviolent resistance to an unjust law or ordinance of the city or state. The point was to resist unjust laws of that time and it was not very easy because theaters—all movie theaters—were segregated. Blacks were not served in any restaurants of any sort in town except in the Black community. When we wanted to have a meeting, to go to a cafe in the Black community, where I'd really be a minority, a serious minority, where I might not have been feeling very comfortable if hadn't been with Black friends, but I was never seriously challenged under those circumstances. They figured, "If this guy is crazy enough to come here, he probably has a reason for being here." At any rate, that's the way it worked, so James Lawson helped to develop a really powerful understanding of nonviolence and he actually taught nonviolence workshops. All of these students had actually been prepared to demonstrate weeks before they demonstrated but they had waited until they had had enough nonviolent workshops to know how to guard against striking back. You had to be absolutely sure that anybody that went on our demonstrations would not strike back. You had to be sure that they did not have anything sharp in their pockets, no nail files, nothing of that kind that might be interpreted as a weapon by anybody. *(laughs)* It's a lot like trying to get through an airport now. We had to be sure that nobody displayed an aggressive attitude toward anybody, said anything offensive, and you had be sure that if you were pestered and pummeled or if something happened to you that you wouldn't in that moment be provoked and strike back because this movement depended on nonviolent discipline. There were times, I was told, when Lawson conducted these sessions in churches just before a demonstration and where people were asked to come up to the table in front of the church, perhaps it was the communion table, and lay down anything that they had on them that could be interpreted as a weapon of any kind and where there were several knives and even a gun deposited because these rules had to be very, very carefully kept. The members of the nonviolent coordinating committee and among the students were so dedicated to nonviolence that they really adopted it as a way of life—all of us adopted this as a way of life, not just as a tactic for a nonviolent demonstration. But there were many other people in the movement and especially as the movement went on over the years, for whom nonviolence was not a way of life at all; it was simply a tactic for the purpose of trying to crack segregation, so that led to some differences through that movement eventually. In this early stage, we'd pick chain stores—Walgreens was a favorite because there were northern Walgreens as well as southern Walgreens, F.W. Woolworth—picked some chains that are no longer in existence. There has been a lot of change in the retail picture since then—Grant's—as I recall, was one. I don't think there any Grant's around now. We'd go in and we had students picked out for sitting-in at a certain destination store, and you'd go and you'd sit at the lunch counters, and have another back-up group probably ready—people going from store to store checking meters, going around checking. If one group had gotten arrested, then other students would be sent in. Some of their first heavy demonstrations, before I had joined in--I was only in the movement for only a brief period of time—some of those early ones they had wave after wave after wave that came to sit-in and they were absolutely flabbergasted. They'd arrest one group, put them in paddy wagons and haul them off to jail and when they'd turn around, the lunch counters were full of students again. Now that brings up an interesting point, this was generational. This was a new generation of Black students and leaders in America. This provided an opportunity for young Blacks to become leaders in something that wasn't the church, that wasn't the law, that wasn't medicine,

but somehow in public life, and I think they enjoyed those opportunities for leadership in places that they hadn't had those opportunities before. Now, you'd go and you'd sit-in and the problem with sitting-in is that your back is turned to all your potential attackers. You're sitting on a lunch counter stool facing a counter, and if you're lucky maybe you see the mirror behind the counter and in that mirror you see your potential sources of difficulty. Some of them liked to come up and dump cigarette ashes down your neck and your collar, some like to come up and spit on you, some people would come and threaten to grind their cigarettes out on you, preferably maybe on your skin somewhere. There were all kinds of threats and sometimes toughs came out—now here's the crowd with the black leather jackets and the duck-tail haircuts and such—would come out and simply try to drag students off of lunch counter stool and beat them up and of course, a lot of times those attacks were against the white students who were sitting with them. There were some white students at Fisk University that joined in, in particular one by the name of Paul Laprad, he got viciously attacked on one occasion. Because they have these strange racial beliefs, they thought that white people who where doing this were betraying their race and so therefore they were more guilty than anyone else, and so it made those of us who were white rather conspicuous targets sometimes. I never really got attacked rather than spitting and some jostling and so forth but I was lucky. It was a very uncomfortable situation when you knew how vulnerable you were sitting on a lunch counter stool and it can get boring after a while, so you're there for a while and nobody is going to serve you anything and we only talked very little with each other. Some students had books with them to study—not an ideal place to concentrate on the contents of a book but there were some occasions when it might have been boring enough to do that. It was probably a little like the army, an awful lot of the time spent is boring before the action starts but it was a real discipline and occasionally, you got quite threatened so it kept you on edge. For one of the sit-ins—I was a sit-inner maybe two or three times at different places—one time I was also designated because of perhaps my seniority and age. I was a little older than the average college freshman/sophomore by that time I was in graduate school with a wife, a wife who was serving as a—my wife Dorothy served as an observer. We had official observers so that we would have witnesses in court if we needed them as to what was happening. She was quite pregnant at that point but she still wanted to serve as the observer. She was very close to the action, across the street sometimes during these things and could testify as to what was going on. One time, I was serving as a kind of liaison between sit-in sites and one of the more frightening events that happened to me was we were sitting-in at a bus station and I was linking back, going back to check on some other sites and I ran into Diane on the street and Diane and I needed to communicate what was going on. I told her I thought it was getting a little angry around the bus station and I was seriously thinking of pulling them out of there and she said that we should. We couldn't walk very far on the street because being black and white, male and female we would soon become conspicuous and would perhaps be too readily identified as part of the movement. I went to—so we parted and I went back to the bus station and talked to the students that were on the counter there quietly and told them plainly, after observing the situation for a few more minutes, I told them to pull out and I stayed to see what was being said, how this was being interpreted by the bystanders. And then one of the proverbial little old ladies there fingered me as one of the demonstrators and then it began to get a little antsy. The bus station was in a place with high concrete walls where the buses would pull in and park. Perhaps buses would be waiting between trips, and I realized that if I got back in there I'd be trapped by the crowd. I could really be beaten up if I got caught in this concrete enclosure that was the bus station, so I began to move sideways, right around to get out the door and out on the sidewalk, but the crowd was really quite angry and I felt really very close at that point of being the object of an assault. So our point was not to cause such incidents but to raise the question as to what

these segregated facilities meant and we didn't want to misinterpret—our cause of events to be misinterpreted. The main point of the whole demonstration was not just to demonstrate, the point was to bring about negotiation. The nonviolent theory is that you discover patterns of discrimination, you identify them, you demonstrate to the public that they exist, and then hopefully you hit them hard enough that the owners of these facilities are interested in negotiating with you and what you first want to negotiate is to have them open their facility, but we had a little extra leverage because by this time we're getting support from students in New York, Chicago, and other cities, Los Angeles—they are also interested in the fate of the movement and they are putting pressure on the department stores and the drug store chains that are desegregated in the north but segregated in the south, so we were getting some help from those quarters and eventually they did negotiate and eventually those negotiations did succeed, but later students that came into the movement later, sometimes thought well the main joy of all this thing is to demonstrate and is to disrupt things as much as possible and there are times when you do truly want to disrupt things. After all, you're disrupting the lunch counter, there is nobody going to be able to sit down there and do anything if you've got a whole lineup of people who are there to be served but of course they won't serve. Diane Nash once pointed out, I think you've seen it, it was in the *Eyes on the Prize* film, that the very first demonstrations, the waitresses were not ready for this at all. She said she thought that the waitresses must have dropped and broken about $1,000 worth of dishes. They were so nervous and couldn't understand what was going on. And of course, if anything happened, if anybody slugged you, if anybody attacked you, then they arrested you not the person that hit you because you're disturbing the peace by what you're doing there. There is a total inversion of justice. I remember, too, I went to Vanderbilt to a common room where students relaxed between classes and so forth and I thought, "I'm going to get some manpower to join this movement here." I gave a strong speech to see how many students I could get to come down and demonstrate with us. I got one student out of that matter. Somebody says you know that no more than about 10% of the students at any given time are activists, so you can't get more than 10%. I got one out of a room of about forty to fifty students and I thought, "My powers of persuasion are really just absolutely wretched here...

Muirhead: *(laughs)*

Bushnell: I'm a total failure at this." And then the guy I talked into coming--he joined the picket walk the next weekend—somebody grabbed the picket sign out of his hand—this is a lesson, don't use a very strong pole to put a picket sign on, it could be used as a weapon against you—grabbed his picket sign out of his hand, hit him over the head with it. He got really honked, a wound on the head there, and then he got arrested but he was trying to keep his family from knowing what he was doing. He was a good side boy, families did not approve of joining actions like this and he gets arrested and we learn the hard way that you've got to put up your placards on flimsy sticks and so they're not used as weapons. Well, we learned as we went. Nowadays there's television and almost all such demonstrations are made with long-handled signs that stand up behind the group that they are filming, so now tactics are very different. Demonstrations are for the cameras. What we were worried about was the police. The police were the people who were going to give us trouble, and it's where we learned the language of power structure. We discovered what power structure means. This is a word that just came into the language at this time; sociologists began to use this word, "power structure." I had learned it when James Lawson—I got a call at Vanderbilt University that said, "James Lawson is about to be arrested." I said, "How does anybody know?" They were giving out the information that he was about to be

arrested, so I got a car full of guys--of people from the movement at the school. We went down to the First Baptist Church, it was the oldest Black church in town, Black Baptist church, and when we got down there, there were the television crews with their long extension cords looking for a plug-in at the church. They had lots of time. They had been given plenty of notice because the power structure wanted this to be big news. The newspaper reporters were beginning to gather and they discovered this old Baptist church. My God, you'd plug those things in you're bound to blow all the circuits in the building, so they actually went all the way down to the fuse box and took it off the main line down there and the television cameras—this is the day of all those heavy cameras that sat on people's shoulders—were just so heavy, you had to be like an experienced tuba player to do that sort of thing.

Muirhead: *(laughs)*

Bushnell: But at any rate, as they did this, they were getting ready for the arrest of James Lawson. This was a blessing, so the city fathers, somebody in the power structure had decided, Lawson has got to be arrested to make a demonstrated case about Lawson for the public. So how do we show any support? Well, we go into the church and we try to be supportive. He's in an office with Pastor Kelly Miller Smith, who was one of the great leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference at Nashville **[inaudible; 43:50]** and he helped us prepare the students for this—Kelly was a magnificent minister—and he and Lawson were in the office. Eventually, a couple of cops showed up after all the cameras are ready, surprise. These are tough motorcycle cops—you know the leather things on their shins, chewing cigars, hats askew, just really making a power play here—and they'd go in, get Lawson out of the office and **[inaudible;44:30]**, march him out of the church. And I decide well the best I could do was stay within sight and watch what these guys were doing, so I'm right behind him. Well, they took a picture of this, as we're coming out of the door of the church. I think I look more like a plain clothesman than I do a supporter of Lawson!

(Both laugh)

Bushnell: I really am disappointed. But that picture was in *Life* magazine the next week and it was particularly good because unknown to anybody else, the newspaper reporters and the T.V. cameras hadn't noticed that on the bulletin board outside the church was the text for the next Sunday's sermon and the text says, "Father forgive them." That was the text that comes with the arrest of Lawson in the doorway of the church, and some of these moments were powerful theater, sort of street theater. That was the most dramatic one that I was in. I walked all the way out to the paddy wagon behind him and noticed what kind of a hitch they take with the guy's belt in the back here, and you practically pick a guy up with one hand after you've done that and boosted him in the leg, and we were afraid of what they would try to do to Lawson maybe in jail because it's out of sight, you know, you never know what's going to happen. At that moment I heard somebody cry and I looked to my left and it was Dorothy Lawson, his wife. And well, our wives were both named Dorothy and we had grown up it turned out, about forty miles apart in Ohio. Jim was from Massillon, Ohio and I was from Wooster. We had—somehow our paths had crossed here in Nashville, Tennessee. I grabbed Dorothy and got her back to the curb and up. My car was just parked a couple spaces ahead, and I got her into the car and took her home. And people who had T.V. sets in town saw this apparently. The T.V. cameras had picked up the whole sequence of Lawson getting arrested and put in the car and of me grabbing his wife and helping her off, and the Black community loved it. My neighbor stopped talking to my two-year-

old son because he saw this kind of involvement and got to other side. And my little son would say, "Why didn't Jack say anything? Where'd Jack go? Jack would go in the house," my next-door neighbor, and it gave me this creepy feeling of how deep segregation runs, how deep racial attitudes run that you cannot even talk to this two- or three-year-old child that you've been accustomed to playing with a little bit outdoors. You pick up your cues from things like this. You learn about the nature of racism and the nature of segregation and the problem of course was that it wasn't just in Nashville or Jackson, Mississippi, or Baton Rouge, Louisiana, or St. Augustine, Florida, it was also Chicago and all points north, that this was—racism was national. It was just segregation in this extreme form was more southern, but just a few years before, I found out later when I started to teach this stuff, there had been sit-ins in the Loop restaurants in Chicago in the 1940s as they tried to desegregate places like that and we found out from our global Black History project that when Black soldiers came back from WWII and tried to get a cup of coffee in a restaurant down here on Bloomington's main square, that they weren't welcome, that it really did take a convulsion in modern American society. And the beauty of it was that this was a movement that came out of the Black community and one of the reasons I did not want to be identified very prominently with some of these marchers, I stayed aside, because I didn't want them to be able to claim that white people actually from behind the scenes were manipulating this movement or leading in any fashion. This was an honest, direct expression of Black anger and determination not to live as second-class citizens any longer, and that's the message America needed to get and that's what made it a powerful movement, so it represents more than enough time. I usually talk in fifty minute segments, I'm programmed.

(Both laugh)

Muirhead: Programmed. Well we have time for questions. We're going to read material later, after we get back from break.

Bushnell: It was a great moment. I felt very lucky to have bumped into it. I got to know David Halberstam through this movement. David Halberstam was a young reporter on the staff of the Nashville Tennessean newspaper and he was recently from Harvard where he had been involved with the *Harvard Crimson*, the undergraduate newspaper there. He was a little conspicuous, the guy is about 6'3', was driving a little red MG around town, but he was friendly to us in the movement. And I used to go down after demonstrations, we've had—oh God, I got phone calls from the—from Diane and the people on the—the executives on the executive committee were having an executive committee meeting in the morning at 5:30—to be there. Oh yes, I guess, and you go in—or maybe 6:00 in the morning, had to be before classes. Can you imagine what going to classes was like after this? And I know one time I heard that my professor had been asking for me. The student said, "He really wants you. He really wants to see you." I thought, "Oh my God, my assistantship may be up for grabs here." And so I went to see him with fear and trepidation and he had this large office, oh it seemed like a football field across the office. I got to his desk and he asked me to sit down and he said, he had asked that question in class as to where I was and he said, "A student said, 'Maybe you should try Walgreens.'"

Muirhead: *(laughs)*

Bushnell: He said, "You have my support. Keep it up. Do it all you can do it." This was fabulous. I was really concerned that I wouldn't be supported by my major professor. It was pretty important but there are moments like that where you really know. Then the university

Board of Trustees threw Lawson out of Vanderbilt University, expelled him. We had a grand meeting with the president of the university and then a group of us signed on and wrote a letter to him and said, "We did the same things Lawson did, you haven't acted against us. What's the matter?" **[Brave; 52:47]** we didn't have any place else to go either. Lawson at least was in the news.

(Both laugh)

Bushnell: We started writing around wondering what other schools would take us, but they didn't have the guts to [expel us]. That would have been too much, partly because we had the support of the faculty of the medical school and that was their pride and joy. They brought in superb medical professors from Cornell University to help to raise the level of Vanderbilt's medical school and those faculty members were 100% behind us and they were threatening to resign if they acted any further in this manner, so we discovered we had some protection. But we learned then, you should never let these trustees get involved in the internal discipline of the students at the university and I've kept that in front of me at Wesleyan as well in case if any of those people that are on the board get interested in disciplining students, that's the job of the faculty and the administration of the school not the trustees. But at any rate, we learned so many lessons from this. This was more instructive than graduate school was in ways. For some of us it took its toll but it was a tremendous confrontation of the institutions of American society. And we learned something about ourselves in the process.

Muirhead: Well they mentioned, if I can start to look ahead, we assume now that given historic heroisms or recognize heroism which it is in the movement, that it is being part of the movement worth at least a world benefit, but in practical terms like you brought Nashville and took coming to Illinois Wesleyan, was it useful, was it a credential that you could count on as a plus in your…I mean, you know…

Bushnell: I decided I couldn't hide this if I wanted to and that maybe I just ought to get out in front and say, you know, I've had some experience and I probably have a police record. I didn't actually get arrested, jailed, but the police were taking pictures from the other side of the street—probably the FBI as well. We always assumed they were, so if anybody wanted to check, they could probably find out. So I was up front about it. I got a job teaching in Arkansas first for three or four years and while I was working in Arkansas, I got a phone call. Head Start was starting and they wanted a site outside of Little Rock where there could be a Head Start program because you can't get approval for a program if only the capital of the state has it. Where did they find out about me? They found out about me through SNCC or through other channels. I wasn't sure, but I spent two weeks on the phone, running around between classes. My wife was constantly on the phone. I never—this was the first time and only time in my life that my ears were actually sore from holding a receiver to my ears so many hours of the week. It was Washington calling, it was Little Rock calling, it was Memphis calling or something like that to get this. So I figured I'd been—and I did manage to get the program put together before I left. Then the next year at my interview for Illinois Wesleyan, I told them about it and actually the Dean at the time, Everett Walker, said that he was particularly interested in the fact that I had had this experience. The students were asking for professors who were able to teach things that were more relevant to the world outside. The watchword was relevance. I came here in 1966, this was the spring of '66 when I interviewed her on an incredibly dreary March day, cold, rainy, awful, but I saw possibilities at Illinois Wesleyan, so I was interested. But what he did say was that this demand

for relevance made my candidacy stronger and so I was delighted that Wesleyan would like that. When, however, I proposed a course in African American history, I got a lot of resistance from the faculty committee that was supposed to approve those things. They turned it down. The chair of my department who was a North Carolinian and whose views, you know, you don't instinctively trust on matters of race, Bunyan Andrew, was a very generous man and wonderful and he liked the idea and he said, "You teach it as an experimental course it won't have to be approved until sometime after you've taught it." I said, "You're wonderful." "Bring it back and propose it to the faculty," and so I did and I got a huge enrollment for that first course and I started teaching it before I knew—I had had all the experience but then I had to school myself on so much more Black history, which I've done over the years, but this school—I began to get those standard answers, "Well does this mean that we'll have to have a special course in the history of every ethnic group in America in the curriculum?" No—and that sort of thing. I was frankly surprised but then they—the students were very interested and of course some of the most interested students were Black students because the Black students, as they told me down in Nashville and they told me here, they said, "We've never studied Black history, never got a chance to." It had not been offered anywhere. I was, in those days, trying to teach a survey of all Black history in America in one semester. I don't really want to go back to see what I taught.

Muirhead: *(laughs)*

Bushnell: I now teach three courses in Black history in America and those are topical and focused and it has evolved into that and it's far better now than it was then. I teach the course in the history of slavery, another course in the history of the civil right movement, and then I've got another course in between those which I call White Power and Black Leadership which covers in between. I'm not doing it all there even with three courses. We know that we have to pick and choose. I figured I'd take three big meaty pieces of the experience, but it wasn't easy. And of course things around Bloomington weren't so great for Black students in those days either as you well remember. It was quite a discovery, always a discovery.

Muirhead: Well we are—we have about five more minutes don't we?

Student: I was wondering how being a part of this movement affected your life as a student, how were you perceived by other white students in your community? Did you feel isolated?

Bushnell: Well I associated with the students that were more interested and committed to this sort of thing and a lot of us were married students at that time, graduate students, so I didn't experience any extreme disapproval but I knew there were people on campus that didn't approve. And there was, in the university, there were people in the English department that I wouldn't have wanted to deal with. There was a guy in the English department who was really very adamant against demonstrations. He thought, "Demonstrations are terrible. They're stirring up these bad feelings. They stir up these white"—and sometimes the upper class whites thought of those people as white trash, so you know, they're attitudes are really too angry and hostile when they're stirred up, so they'd rather keep it even. And that was sort of the attitudes of whites throughout a lot of our history, that if somebody white protests, then Blacks are supposed to cool it, you know, don't do anything, so that was very aggravating. I went to one of those meetings where one or two of these [from] English departments were speaking, a couple at Vanderbilt speaking. They had the tradition of the Southern Agrarians there, so yeah, those guys weren't tuned into this kind of stuff at all, but we had a lot of support from others. And some of the

people, well some of the people on the faculty really thought so much of us they thought too much of us. They admired what we were doing and they would've loved to have gotten involved; but they couldn't, I don't think, for their positions. Then others were just rather indifferent to it. It's really strange but it affected my life. It affects what I want to teach. It affects all that stuff very much and for my family too. My kids have grown up. It was legacy, you know, that sort of thing. I regret that I don't get to see some of those people that I was involved with, but my period of involvement really was a few months, part of a year. But it really changed my outlook and I felt before that period was up, that I had spent a fair amount of time living black and I felt that I had developed a sort of Black consciousness. I know that during the Black consciousness movement back in 1966, 1967, and 1968, most Blacks wouldn't have said that whites could share that outlook, but I felt that I did and other whites in the movement did too I think. But at any rate, we got so sensitive to racial matters that in a way it was defeating our purpose. We wanted to be able to get to the—well we called ourselves in SNCC, we called ourselves the beloved community. We were trying to bring about the beloved community and this is where everybody is equal and everybody's talents are appreciated and shared and it was again very close to New Testament Christianity. It was very communal. All the decisions made in SNCC and in our meetings were decisions kind of Quaker-style. We got a sense of the meeting, and if two or three people disagreed, then so we can't do it. We have to talk until those two or three people are comfortable with what we're saying. There was one demonstration, I remember, we were going to demonstrate the next day or day after next and I said, "I don't think it's a good idea. I don't think the time is right. We're disrupting—possibly disrupting negotiations. We need to be respectful of that. We demonstrated to draw attention, let's stay true to our principles and let's do that." Some others were very gung ho so I was the snag and thought, "Oh man this is putting me in a very awkward situation here. All my black brothers and sisters are sitting around here and I'm the one objecting." And then some of them started to see my point of view and before it was over—and Quaker-style decision-making is the most inefficient, long-winded sort of thing—but before we were over, they agreed with me and I won that one. And I felt respected by the group, you know, you realize that it may be inefficient but it's a very great way to maintain your sense of identity. This is the one SNCC did and then Students for a Democratic Society, SDS, things like this. Oh god, you talk all night and never get to a decision, but it could be rough.

Student: Were you still in Nashville when John Lewis lost his chairmanship?

Bushnell: No, no I was up here by then. That really didn't take place until after the Selma movement in '65. This is '60, so...

Student: Would you have seen any of those tensions on the horizon?

Bushnell: No, not so much then. We lived—we had each others' **(problems?; 1:07:38) to** an extraordinary degree. I felt rewarded when in the spring after all this had taken place, graduation time in Nashville came up and some of the women who were nursing students in the nursing school attached to Marian asked to have me come and participate in their graduation ceremonies. I felt really, you know, I felt real honored in that they wanted me as a participant with them, that some of them had participated, and they wanted it as an integrated statement of goodwill here too and I was very moved by that. That was an exceptional experience and I wasn't the only one. There were some others that were invited at that time too, but we really did experience an extraordinary degree of trust. And when we have reunions now, every now and then—I went to a

big one, took some students there in 1990 I guess it was—Oh what a homecoming it is for all of us. You just realize that we totally invested ourselves in each other and that this was a great experience and it's amazing. It's a little probably like military veterans. When you do something and you're scared, and we were, and you're doing something that's disapproved by a lot of people and that there's an atmosphere of combat here, and you go through those things together, share those attitudes, it is very binding. And some of the people did not come through this well. Some of the members of the Civil Rights Movement are casualties. It disrupted their education or it disrupted their careers or it gave them some, you know, kind of—it may have even given them some kind of emotional trauma that they couldn't outlive. One of the people of the movement that sort of suffered from it, Angie Butler, she wanted to get all of us jailed. Angie was really high-spirited, marvelous singer, musician but she did really want to get us all in jail. But Angie—I saw her maybe ten, fifteen years after these events—she was singing in a club in Miami, she was on The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. They showed part of her act and so forth and she just made it almost up the point where she had a career but it stalled out right there and I don't know what hurt it. But, you know, Angie is—I think kind of—I think her life has really been tough since then. And I know I ran into another guy, Freddy Leonard, who tells a fantastic story about their being prisoners in Parchman Penitentiary in Mississippi and the way he tells the story—I think he's a master at storytelling—and when I met him at the reunion—Freddy, unemployed, trying to get caught on to something and the poor guy is just—he had so much talent. I'm afraid that he hasn't gotten it together. So like I said, there are emotional casualties, there are career casualties and so forth in the movement and it happened but it wasn't just this movement that did it too. People in SDS, people in the anti-war movement, other people some of them beats, casualties, alienation—we were all kind of alienated, so somewhere along the line, after I got to Wesleyan, and my alienation did not end, I started growing a beard.

Muirhead: On that note...

(All laugh)

Muirhead: Thank you. I want to thank you so much.

(Applause)