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DeVinney/Blue

Treatment #201/1st Draft

August 1, 1988

[The following treatment is based on pre-interviews completed so far. These interviews have tended to be SNCC people or at least representatives of one of the major civil rights organizations. We still need to go deeper into community people and identify more whites, both those sympathetic to the movement and those who could be labeled "white resistance."]

EYES ON THE PRIZE, 1965 - 198?

Program #201: "Emerging Voices, 1965 - 1966"

Fade up to scenes of the March on Washington, August 28, 1963. We hear Martin Luther King's famous words.

M. L. KING:

I have a dream....

(Impact on
whites ")

Fade under immediately.

NARRATOR

In 1963, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. des-

cribed his vision of America. But not everyone agreed with his view.

MALCOLM X

No, I'm not an American. I'm one of the 22 million black people who are the victims of Americanism. One of the 22 million black people who are victims of democracy. And I see America through the eyes of the victim. I don't see any American Dream; I see an American nightmare. These 22 million victims are waking up.

Having introduced this new voice, one which challenges the traditional civil rights movement, this program will explain where it came from, why it said what it said and the powerful influence it will play in the future of American civil rights.

Through archival film of the Nation of Islam, CORE, Urban League, Civil Rights Congress, and NAACP, demonstrations, and northern leaders like James Farmer, Albert Cleague, Adam Clayton Powell, we learn of the many groups vying for the attention of northern blacks.

In 1959, a New York anchorman brings the Nation of Islam to television audiences in a documentary entitled "The Hate That Hate Produced."

MIKE WALLACE

(documentary)

While city officials, state agencies, white liberals and sober-minded Negroes stand idly by,, a group of Negro dissenters is taking to street corner step ladders, church pulpits, sports arenas and ballroom platforms across the United States to preach a gospel of hate that would set off a federal investigation if it were preached by southern whites.... These home grown Negro American Muslims are the most powerful of the black supremacist groups. They now claim a membership of at least a quarter of a million Negroes. Their doctrine is being taught in fifty cities across the nation. Let no one underestimate the Muslims.

MIKE WALLACE

(Blackside interview)

When you think about it, nobody in the white community had heard a great deal about the Muslims at the time. They were, well, I found it difficult to believe. Louis Lomax was well-connected with that whole crowd, knew a great deal about it and, in the course of doing it, I began to learn about Malcolm who was at that time the heir apparent to Elijah. He was the Bishop Sheen to Elijah's Pope. And they wouldn't let me work on that broadcast. That is, the Muslims wouldn't because I was white. So Lou did a lot of it.

MIKE WALLACE

(documentary)

Reporter Louis Lomax asked Malcolm X to further explain the teachings of Elijah Muhammed.

LOUIS LOMAX

(documentary)

In the same context that Mr. Elijah Muhammed teaches that Islamic faith is for the black man, he also uses the Old Testament instance of the serpent and Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. And he sets up the proposition there that this is the great battle between good and evil. And he uses the phrase "devils" almost interchangeably and synonymously with the word "snake." Now what does he mean by that?

MALCOLM X

Well, number one, he teaches us that, uh, that never was a real serpent that went into the garden.

LOUIS LOMAX

What was it?

MALCOLM X

But as you know, the Bible is written in symbols.

And this serpent, the snake, is a symbol that's used to hide the real identity of the one whom that actually was.

LOUIS LOMAX

Well, who was it?

MALCOLM X

The white man.

That same year white policemen beat Johnson Hinton a Nation of Muslim member. Semiconscious, he is taken into custody by the police. In less than an hour, fifty Fruit of Islam members face the police precinct, frightenly quiet in rank formation. Temple leader, Malcolm X enters the precinct, demands medical attention for Hinton and gets it.

JAMES HICKS

And I remember when Malcolm left the precinct, by this time there must have been four or five thousand Muslims standing there at that street corner -- the Sisters in their white and the Brothers -- it was eerie. They didn't make any sound at all. I tell you, it was just the most eerie thing. And Malcolm didn't say a word. He just gave this wave. And within five minutes, they were gone. Not a sign of them anywhere on the streets

at all. And the police commissioner, I remember he stood there in the doorway to the precinct and he says to me, "That man has too much power."

Drawing upon available footage we will show several more key events in the emergence of Malcolm X, including his split with the Nation of Islam and his subsequent decision to go to Mecca in 1964.

We cut to Atlantic City, New Jersey. August, 1964. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party has been trying, without success, to get their integrated group accepted as the official Mississippi delegation to the Democratic National Convention in place of the all-white regulars. But their delegation is rebuffed by the credentials committee of the Democratic Party.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL

[The experience showed] not merely that the national conscience was generally unreliable but that, very specifically, black people in Mississippi and throughout this country could not rely on their so-called allies. Many labor, liberal, and civil rights leaders deserted the MFDP because of closer ties to the national Democratic party.

For the SNCC workers who were part of this challenge, it's been a long hard summer -- a summer which includes the deaths of three

of their co-workers (Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner). A SNCC leader (Jim Foreman) puts out a call for help. He turns to Harry Belafonte.

HARRY BELAFONTE

When I met with them, they really looked battle-weary. They looked quite drained, they were quite edgy, quite anxious. People were just absolutely exhausted by all the responsibilities that the leadership was trying to meet. And I made a proposition. I would raise the money that was necessary to go on with the program and I would raise additional funds with the understanding that if some kind of rotation basis could be worked out where the leadership could take off and just read somewhere for ten days or two weeks -- where they could cool out. Now I felt that it could not be done anywhere in the United States. So I made arrangements with Guinea. I talked directly to Sekou Toure with whom I had a relationship, and I got the Guinean government to house these civil rights workers who were coming, for them to be guests of the state, to move through the countryside and familiarize themselves with this country and the people there.

JOHN LEWIS

It was an education in itself to travel there, to spend some time in West Africa, to see people of color in

charge of their government after leaving Atlantic City where the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party was not seated, where people in this country at the time were struggling for the right to vote, the right to participate in a democratic process. A year earlier I had been speaking at the March on Washington about the whole idea -- one man, one vote -- and then going to Africa and seeing black men and women in charge of a government, the vision of power, it was very enlightening, very moving, really.

At the end of the tour, Lewis and Donald Harris meet unexpectedly with Malcolm X in Nairobi. At the meeting Malcolm X criticized American civil rights organizations for neglect of African affairs; spoke to his need to work with the radical groups within the civil rights movement and link OAAU with these groups.

JOHN LEWIS

He had been very critical of our use of nonviolence, passive resistance. He had been critical of the March on Washington the summer of 1963. But at the same time, I think what really happened he really got an education, he became more sensitive to the needs of people of the world, people of color during his trip to Mecca.

HARRY BELAFONTE

And I remember him coming back saying that he had been

to Mecca and he'd seen not black, not white, not yellow, not red. He'd seen all people, all the children of Allah. And I thought he was using that as the perfect leg to make the next step to point out that it had been a very limited view that he had professed up to that point, at least on the racial definitions, and that he was beginning to look at a much more broader base, and a much more unified, global view of the world and the movements coming together.

The result was the forging of links between Malcolm X and SNCC. Throughout the balance of the program, we will look for ways to show how Malcolm's Pan-Africanist perspective, his concepts of black self-defense and racial pride converge with ideas gaining acceptance in SNCC. We will look for film footage that depicts moments when Malcolm X and SNCC came together: December, 1964, Malcolm X speaks at a MFDP Harlem rally and, in return, Fannie Lou Hamer and the SNCC Freedom Singers speak to his OAAU rally; December 31, 1964 he speaks to 37 teenage SNCC workers from McComb, Mississippi (where -- New York or Miss?) -- again he emphasizes the "successful linking of our problem with the African problem, or making our problem a world problem." In February 1965, he addresses blacks at a voting rights campaign in Selma, Alabama.

On February 21, 1965 Malcolm X is assassinated in New York City. CORE and SNCC are the only two major civil rights organizations which attend the funeral.

JOHN LEWIS

[Malcolm X] more than any other personality, had been able to articulate the aspirations, bitterness, and frustations of the Negro people, forming a living link between Africa and the civil rights movement in this country.

Later that Spring, John Lewis and Cleve Sellers are arrested for staging a sit-in at the South African consulate in New York City.

*Agreed
report
LH*

LEWIS

The destiny of Afro-Americans is inseparable from that of our black brothers in Africa. It matters not whether it is in Southwest Africa or Mississippi, Alabama and Harlem USA. The struggle is the same.... It is a struggle against a viscious and evil system that is controlled and kept in order by a few white men throughout the world.

HARRY BELAFONTE

It was the appropriate thing to do. There was no question that we had an international link. The systematic way in which racism governed oppressed people globally

was not out of step with the way it was treating us. There were two things to be gained by this, not only to broaden the movement and to strengthen our own goals, but to bring pressure on our government and institutions and to let them know that what was going on was not just about Selma and Montgomery and Birmingham... but the world.

This film will also show what is happening to Martin Luther King during this period. We will show him traveling around the country, becoming more and more vocal about the problems of poverty in America and denouncing the war in Vietnam. But we find that there are divisions within his organization. Through interviews with Andrew Young, Hosea Williams (?) and perhaps other members of SCLC's staff, we will try to get at some of that.

HOSEA WILLIAMS

After we had a victory, SCLC would re-group and organize seminars and retreats and recuperate and re-think, as Dr. King said, "Where do we go from here?" And that would last anywhere from six to nine months. The history of SCLC will show that we tackled a new problem every 9 to 12 months. After the Selma-Montgomery March, Bevel was just obsessed with the idea of the movement going north. My position was, number one, our job is not complete in the south. Number 2 was, we

have so many people out on a limb, so many people have exposed themselves to the opposition and so many people are depending on us to protect them for a given period of time and if we leave now, a lot of these blacks who came out in the Selma movement and felt that bond with us, stood up with us and helped us, they still needed us to protect them from the hostile whites. But I do believe that Dr. King was forced into responding to the north before he was ready.

In archival footage, we see Dr. King traveling the country in search of a northern location where SCLC can launch a dramatic campaign. Harlem's Adam Clayton Powell, protective of his own turf, warns King to stay out of New York City. Similarly he is turned away from Philadelphia by NAACP leader, Cecil B. Moore.

King begins speaking out against the war in Vietnam. This becomes another sensitive issue with the SCLC staff who caution him against such statements. Indeed, his comments about the war incur the wrath of President Johnson -- at the signing of the Voting Rights Act in August, 1965, LBJ shakes the hands of those attending the event but conspicuously avoids King.

Only a few days after the signing of the VRA, the Watts section of Los Angeles erupts in a devastating riot, a riot unlike any the country has witnessed in the past few years. President Johnson warns that continued violence of this sort could take

*Plan
Johnson*

away many of the gains of recent civil rights legislation. King calls Johnson to say the riots are "a class revolt of underprivileged against privileged." But Johnson doesn't hear him, using the call to chide King for his criticisms of the Vietnam war. King is further stunned by the realization that the people of Watts don't recognize him as a leader who can speak for them.

TSU
only

Meanwhile, in Lowndes County, Alabama, John Hulett has tried unsuccessfully to lure SCLC into helping him register blacks to vote. Stokely Carmichael and members of SNCC are the first to respond.

Several months earlier, John Hulett became the first black to register in Lowndes County. Now, as the leader of the Lowndes County Christian Movement for Human Rights (LCCMHR), he is preparing to take on the county's white power structure. Although blacks represent 80% of the Lowndes County's population, no blacks were registered to vote until this year (1965). On the other hand, 118% of the white population is registered.

During the coming months, SNCC and LCCMHR work together to register black voters. At first, the work is agonizingly slow -- only 50-60 people are registered between March and August. With passage of the Voting Rights Act, the first federal registrar enters the county and registration increases. So does white resistance. Black tenant farmers complain of loan foreclosures

and evictions. Many demonstrators are arrested. And there is violence. Gloria House recalls being held in the Hayneville jail, after her arrest during a demonstration in Fort Deposit.

GLORIA HOUSE

It was while we were in jail there in Hayneville that we heard the news of the Watts rebellion in Los Angeles. And we all had the sense we were living in a very, very important time. All of of there in the jail had that feeling. Wow, things are beginning to open up.... We are part of something very important. After about a week, I think we may have ben in jail for about eight days, all of a sudden that guards just came to us and said, okay you're going, you're being released on your own recognizance. And, of course, we were suspicious of this.... But they forced us out of jail at gunpoint. Yeah, being forced out of jail at gunpoint. Right.... Some of us thought, okay, lets walk to the little store here and get a drink, have some ice cream, whatever. We headed to a corner store. Just as we turned on to the main drag of Hayneville, gunfire broke out. We realized the gun fire was coming in our direction. Some of us just fell to the ground. Jonathon Daniels was hit immediately and we think he must have died immediately.... It seemed to me it was hours before anyone appeared on this road in Haynevilled. Everyone had been informed, of course, that something was going to happen. So this curiously deserted highway or main road was silent because that was the way it was intended to be.

Black workers question whether they really want to be part of a Democratic Party which has kept them second class citizens.

FRANK MILES, JR.

It didn't make sense to join the Democratic Party when they were the people who had done the killing and had beat our heads."

JOHN HULETT

We sat down and discussed our problems..., whether or not we were going to join Lyndon Baines Johnson's party. Then we thought about the other people in the state of Alabama who were working in this party -- George Wallace -- the Governor, Al Lingo who gave orders to those who beat the people when they got ready to march from Selma to Montgomery, Jim Clark -- the sheriff of Dallas County. These people controlled the Democratic Party in the state of Alabama. So we decided it's useless to stay in the Democratic Party or the Republican Party in the state of Alabama. Through the years, these are the people who kept blacks from voting in the South and in the state of Alabama. Why join the Democratic Party?

Through research, the movement discovers an obscure Alabama law which allows residents of a county to form an independent political party. We will search film archives for footage of SNCC

and LCCMHR workers going through the county soliciting support for the new party. We also hope to find a resident who still has the political "comic book" which described the party, hoping to reach the broadest possible base. (NOTE: we are investigating a claim that Dr. King came into Lowndes County and encouraged the area's blacks to join the Democratic Party.)

The Lowndes County Freedom Organization becomes official in March, 1966. But the choice of an emblem would, in some minds, obscure the party's purpose.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL

In Lowndes County, we developed something called the Lowndes County Freedom Organization. It is a political party. The Alabama law says that if you have a party, you must have an emblem. We chose for the emblem a black panther, a beautiful black animal which symbolizes the strength and dignity of black people. An animal that never strikes back until he's backed so far into the wall, he's got nothing to do but spring out. And when he springs, he does not stop. Now there is a party in Alabama called the Alabama Democratic Party. It is all-white. It has as its emblem a white rooster and the words "white supremacy for the right." Now the gentlemen of the press because they're advertisers and because most of them are white and because they're produced by that white institution never calls the Lowndes

County Freedom Organization by its name; but rather they call it the Black Panther Party. Our question is why don't they call the Alabama Democratic Party the White Cock Party?

Local supporters of the LCFO do not see their party as a separatist effort, but rather as a response to the reality of politics in Lowndes County. The organization is open to whites, but no whites in the county wish to join.

One of the big issues SNCC has to confront in Lowndes County is the carrying of weapons. Robert Strickland was a resident of Lowndes who carried a gun and, despite Carmichael's best arguments would not give it up. As the Lowndes County Freedom organization prepares to hold its convention for selecting a slate of candidates who will run in the Fall election, it is clear that blacks will carry arms to assure they can take part freely without white harrassment. (NOTE: it may be that the Deacons for Defense were part of this protection and, if so, will be part of this consideration.

May 3, 1966, the Alabama Democratic Party holds its primary. On the same day, 900 black Lowndes County residents, many traveling 20-25 miles to attend, come together for the first LCFO convention. They elect a slate of seven black candidates for local county offices. Participants will describe their excitement at seeing so many black people involved in this burgeoning

political movement. Their actions have helped them overcome a justified fear of white repercussions and has helped build a new sense of confidence in themselves and their ability to govern.

Five days later, an event occurs which signals a change in direction for SNCC. At a SNCC retreat held at Kingston Springs near Nashville, Tennessee, John Lewis is defeated in his bid for re-election as national chairman.

JOHN LEWIS

I was accused of being too nonviolent. We needed someone to tell Dr. King what to do, tell Lyndon Johnson where to go.

He loses to Stokely Carmichael.

G66h

LEWIS, CONT.

I felt very bad about it, but I saw, because what was happening, we were losing that sense of community and what Jim Foreman used to call "the circle of trust" and "the band of brothers and sisters." That night I saw that being destroyed.

Archival footage may capture popular sentiment of the time about this change in leadership. Also, we will get reactions from interviews with SCLC members (Hosea Williams?, Andrew Young) as well as SNCC members working in Lowndes County (Bob Mants and

others). Statements from SNCC should indicate that Stokely's election was an expression of the hope that SNCC could awaken Afro-American political consciousness as an initial step toward building a new social order.

June 6, 1966. James Meredith is shot in Mississippi while leading a "March Against Fear." All the major civil rights organizations rush to his cause with promises to continue the march for him.

Conflicts quickly develop. Through interviews with Floyd McKissick (CORE), Andrew Young and Hosea Williams/James Orange? (SCLC), Stokely Carmichael, Cleveland Sellers? (SNCC) and other march participants, we will piece together comments on march highlights.

Carmichael leads the attack in setting up SNCC's militant stand right from the very beginning. As leaders gather to define a purpose for the march, he is adamant that the march should focus on the importance of eliminating black fear, not on legislation. His hostility toward NAACP and the Urban League results in those two organizations abandoning the march immediately.

SNCC also questions whether white people should be allowed to be part of the march. Dr. King does his best to offset that strident attitude. In rallies along the way, he welcomes white supporters.

[NOTE: we are looking for a means of including the SNCC expulsion of whites -- this might be a point where narration does a "throw forward" to include that historical fact.]

The Deacons for Defense (Ernest Thomas) provide protection for the marchers and this causes yet another controversy. Dr. King tolerates their presence, but does not condone it. "I'm sick and tired of violence. I'm tired of the war in Vietnam. I'm tired of war and conflicts in the world. I'm tired of shooting. I'm tired of hatred. I'm tired of selfishness. I'm tired of evil. I'm not going to use violence, no matter who says it."

We will also examine media's coverage of the march, asking participants if reporting was as accurate as it had been in the past or did it play off of the disagreements so much that it fostered greater disagreement.

June 18. Stokely Carmichael excites an audience in Greenwood, Mississippi with shouts of "Black Power." The phrase catches on among the marchers. King is concerned that the phrase may drive an even deeper wedge between the civil rights movement and white supporters, already fearful since the riot in Watts. Ironically, his fears appear justified by an event taking place in California: in the gubernatorial primaries, Ronald Reagan wins overwhelmingly on the Republican ticket -- a sign, political observers believe, of a conservative trend sweeping America.

June 21. The march stops in Philadelphia, Mississippi to observe the second anniversary of the disappearance of the three civil rights workers who died during Freedom Summer (Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner). The marchers are attacked by a crowd of whites. Local police do nothing to stop it until blacks begin fighting back.

Two days later, June 23, state troopers use tear gas when marchers try to set up tents on school grounds in Canton, Mississippi. King is heard to say, "The government has got to give me some victories if I'm going to keep people nonviolent." He and Stokely go on to Jackson in anticipation of the march finale. The speakers at that night's rally in Canton include John Lewis who has just arrived on the march.

JOHN LEWIS

That night in Canton, I felt like an uninvited guest. It's hard to accept when something is over even though you know things have to change. In the beginning, with the sit-ins and Freedom Rides, things were much simpler, or we thought they were. People just had to offer their beliefs and it seemed like that would be enough, but it wasn't. By the time of Canton, nobody knew what would be enough to make America right, and the atmosphere was very complicated, very negative.

The march finally ends in Jackson on June 26. During the length of the march, 4,000 blacks in Mississippi have registered to vote, the most successful voter registration effort the state has seen yet(?). SNCC supporters affix "Black Power" bumper stickers to Jackson police cars. Dr. King sounds weary in his address to the crowd, a speech in which he admits that his "dream has turned into a nightmare." Stokely Carmichael is cheered when he declares that blacks must build a power base so strong that we will bring [whites] to their knees every time they mess with us. As SCLC's James Orange encourages marchers to take up a chant of "freedom, freedom," SNCC supporters shout back "Black Power.".