

The following program is produced in cooperation with Mary Washington College of Fredericksburg Virginia continuing a tradition of academic excellence in a changing world. [music] James Farmer's Reflections: a personal perspective of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. [Farmer speaking in the background] James Farmer was one of the most eloquent and outspoken voices of the struggle for racial equality. From the Freedom Rides to the sit-ins to the March on Washington, he motivated both blacks and whites and articulated for the nation the demands and the dream for racial equality across the country. Farmer in the 1960s: You have started a revolution in the past ten years since those historic words were uttered by the nine men of the Supreme Court. You have been in the streets marching, the staccato march of your feet punctuated by the clanging of jail cell doors have set the stage for this revolution.

ANNOUNCER: James Farmer is currently Commonwealth Professor in History at Mary Washington College. Tonight he continues last week's civil rights lecture on his search for missing CORE members in Neshoba County Mississippi during Freedom Summer of 1964.

FARMER:

Meridian Police gave us an escort out to the city limits to the uh boundary of Neshoba County. And they left us. There was a road block in Neshoba County, two sheriff cars and an unmarked car. We stopped of course at the roadblock. Sheriff, who was a stereotypically southern sheriff, large, especially large around the middle, larger than I am around the middle, um, chewing on the cigar, spitting, dripping, sweat stain, waddled over to the driver seat and I was driving, Dick Gregory was seated next to me. He said, what's yo name? I told him, and this is my friend Dick Gregory. Said, where you all going. Said, "we're going into Neshoba County, Philadelphia." "Whatcha ya'll gonna do there?" "We're gonna talk with Sheriff Rainey and Deputy Price." "Whatch ya'll gonna talk with them about?" "We're gonna talk with them about the disappearance of my three staff members, Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney." He said, well I'm Sheriff Rainey, the sheriff of this here county and this here's my deputy, Deputy Price. There was Price, ten, fifteen years younger than Rainey, standing there with a slight grin on his face. "Y'all wanna talk to us here?" "No, in your office." "Alright, come on follow us." I said, uh just a moment let me tell uh my other staff men in the cars behind us, there was a caravan of cars with uh, my staff people and tell them to follow. He said no they can't come. They can wait right here at the county line, just you and this nigra comedian can come. So I told my staff people to wait. I looked at the unmarked car, there was a tall lanky figure st, leaning against that car, with his legs crossed at the ankles. It was Colonel Snodgrass. I felt a little more comfortable. He was just uh surveying the scene but he was there. Gregory and I followed Rainey and Price to the city hall or courthouse or combination thereof in Philadelphia and there was an incredible scene when we got there. There was a crowd of hun, hundreds of men, all white of course, shirtsleeve, hot, standing outside but across the street from the building and there were so many of them they seemed to go all the way around the block. But on the building side of the block, circling the block were Snodgrass's state police. They too had ringed the block and were standing there, scarcely six feet apart, rifles pointed toward the mob, standing. State police also flanked the sidewalk that went up to the steps of the building. Gregory and I got out of the car, followed Rainey and Price down the sidewalk and up the steps and into the building. We also followed them into the elevator. The elevator door closed behind us, the elevator creaked and Gregory and I thought of the same thing at the same time as we looked at each other; we never should have gotten in that closed elevator with those two men. As I looked at them, I had the feeling that I was looking at killers, had a very strong feeling. Now in this elevator, they could claim we had jumped and tried to take their guns and they had killed us in

self-defense. There'd be no witnesses; it was too late now, the elevator doors had already closed. So when the elevator reached the third floor and the doors opened and we followed Rainey and Price out I breathed a sigh of relief and we followed them down the hall to an office at the end of the hall, obviously Rainey's office, Sheriff Rainey. In that office were three men, he introduced them. This here man was Mr. So and So, he is the the uh city attorney of the city of Philadelphia. This here man, Mr. So and So, he's the county attorney of Neshoba County. And this here man is Colonel Snodgrass head of the Mississippi State Police. Snodgrass was there; I thought there was a quick smile on his face which quickly was erased. Gregory and I sat down without being invited to. Sheriff Rainey cleared his throat and said now I got laryngitis and I can't talk real good, so this here man, the county attorney will talk for me. The county attorney looked at me and nodded. I have to say the ball is in your court. I said um, I'd like to uh find out from Deputy Price what really happened yesterday when those three men came over here. Deputy Price has given conflicting stories to the press. At first he told the press he had never seen them, he never saw them at all. Then he told the press, yes he saw them, in fact he arrested them and put them in jail and then let them out several hours later, so I'd like to know the truth. The county attorney looked at uh Deputy Price and nodded. Price said well I'll tell you the God's truth. I did see them boys, said um, they were speedin'. They musta been goin over 80 miles an hour in a 25 mile zone and I arrested em. I asked what time that was. Oh I guess around two o'clock in the afternoon, 2:30. And I arrested em and um kept em in jail until oh about sundown. I asked him why he'd keep uh people in jail for speeding that long. He said well I had to call the justice of the peace to find out was he was gonna fine em and the JP wasn't at home, had to wait til he got home. And uh, when he got home he said he'd fine em fifteen dollars and uh, uh the nigra boy Chaney, who was driving didn't have no fifteen dollars but uh that Jew boy Schwerner had fifteen dollars so he paid the fine and then I took dem boys out to uh a outs, the outskirts of town on Meridian side of town, put them back in their car and I watched their taillights headed for Meridian as long as I could see their taillights going toward Meridian. And that's the last I saw of them and that's the God's truth. I uh then told him that uh I'd heard on the car radio as we were coming over there that the Ford station wagon, 1962 model, which was owned by CORE incidentally, registered to CORE, had been found, burned to the ground on the other side of town, opposite to the Meridian side and I would like to uh go out there and see the ruins, the remains of my organization's car. Naw, we can't let you go out there, the county uh lawyer spoke. We can't let you do that. I said why. Because uh, you might destroy evidence, you might destroy some fingerprints or something. I couldn't understand how fingerprints could be on a car that was burned out, but you know, might be. I then said um, well now I have about twenty young men waiting at the county line. They are anxious to um search for their missing colleagues and friends and so we want the green light to begin a search. But they got excited at that point, what, sir, sir, where you gonna look, wha, wha, what, wha what you gonna look for. I said any place that bodies could be hidden, in the swamps or under leaves, in the forest, in anyplace around here, in creeks. Bu bu but bu but he says uh [making stuttering noises] nobody can, who's going to lead them. I said I'll lead them, I'll be with them. Dick Gregory said I'll be with them too. Said, yeah but you know the swamps around here are lots of lots of water moccasins and rattlesnakes. I said well we'll get some high boots. Said naw but this is private property around here, people will shoot you for trespassing if you go out. Said we'll take our chances. Naw, we can't let you do that, we don't want nothing to happen to you down there here Mm Farmer. We can't let you do that. Um, Dick Gregory was getting angrier and angrier by the minute. He then stood up and said, now look I know that some of you here know a lot more than what you're

saying about what happened to those men and I want you to know that we're not gonna drop this matter; we're gonna find out what happened to them and uh if a crime has been committed as we think that there has been, the criminals are gonna be found and they're gonna be prosecuted and they're gonna pay the penalty. We want you to know that. And Gregory sat down and I then said uh I don't see any point in going on further with this meeting. Mr. Gregory and I would like to be taken back to our car and rejoin our friends at the county line. Rainey and Price took us back. The uh, caravan made a u-turn and we headed back to Meridian and I called a meeting of my staff then. Incidentally, this uh, this narrative of what happened in the disappearance and the search is somewhat at variance from the docudrama, a documentary that you may have seen on television. Uh that documentary is uh inaccurate at various points. This one, this version is accurate, of what actually transpired. I uh called a meeting of my staff there in Meridian and uh told them that I wanted George Raymond, my chief of staff and I announced that we wanted two volunteers for a very dangerous assignment which may turn out to be a suicidal one. And there were three qualifications for these volunteers. They were that the persons be, the volunteers be young, black, and male. Well the staff members protested, some who were forty or older said why do they have to be young, we can do anything these young guys can do. Those who were white said why black, we are as much members of CORE and the CORE staff as the blacks are; you're discriminating against whites now? And females said why males; you're discriminating against females now? This is sexism. I said well wait til you hear the nature of the assignment, I think you'll understand, the need for those requirements. We want two volunteers to slip into the town of Philadelphia in Neshoba County, tonight. Not by any main roads, if you go in a car, get out of that car long before you get to Philadelphia, walk in by back roads or by woods into the black community, surreptitiously, gotta keep the authorities from knowing that you're there, if you see a car, hide, duck. Under no cir, conditions, let Rainey and Price know that you are there or who you are, leave your identification behind. When you get there go directly to the home of a black minister whose name we'll give you. Wake him up and tell him that I sent you and I want you to be put up, taken in and that would happen in the black community, they'd take you in. That's the extended family idea that is uh in existence in the black community especially in the south. Either the preacher would put you up in his house or he'll get in touch with one of many of his congregation; Sister Jones'll put you up. And uh the instructions to these volunteers would be for them to keep quiet, not ask any questions until they were accepted and trusted by the people in the black community. The belief, my belief was and still George Raymond's belief was that uh somebody in the black community knew what had happened to these three men and had probably seen a part of it happen to them. That's usually the case, eyes are everywhere but they are not about to tell any federal agents or any police or any FBI or anybody else. They didn't trust them, didn't know what had happened to them. But if they trusted these two young men after they'd been there for a while and the young man ask, asked them questions, they might tell. And so we got lots of volunteers and picked two. The others were mad that they weren't chosen. The two men, young men, got into Philadelphia, didn't hear from them for more than a week. Then began getting reports, I told them by the way, if you call, don't call from a home phone, call from a phone booth and don't use the same phone booth all the time. If you write, don't have a return address on the envelope and don't mail it to the CORE office, send it to uh my secretary's uh my secretary at her home address. We got reports and we knew basically what had happened. In the meantime however I had learned that the men had been fingered by a black man whose office was clos, in the same building where the CORE office was in Meridian. He had been overheard by a black maid talking uh, in a phone booth, speaking to someone,

apparently to Sheriff Rainey or Deputy Price probably the former telling him that these three men, two Jews and one colored boy, called em by name are in a white Ford station wagon 1962 license number so and so and so and so. They just left uh here, left Meridian; they're on their way to Philadelphia now. Yessir, alright sir, thank you very much, yeah you sure welcome, yessir, bye. Fingering them. The reports that came in from the two CORE men were that uh when the Ford station wagon entered the county, Deputy Price uh car was off the road behind a couple bushes and trees and he came out and trailed them, keeping a distance away from them. They went through town and out through that uh burned out church. He stayed quite a distance away and parked his car and watched as they got out of the car and kicked through the ashes and picked up mementos. When they got back in their car to drive on, he closed in on them. Chaney was driving the Ford station wagon and saw Price in the rearview mirror and he knew what that meant because he knew Deputy Price's reputation; he tried to outrun him. And he was speeding. Price shot the tire of the car, the station wagon and the station wagon came to a halt. The men were taken out and arrested, he was telling the truth on that point. They went in jail and were kept there just before sundown and then they were taken out by Price and were taken out to the outskirts of town but not the Meridian side, the opposite side of town, the side of town where the burned out car was found later and they were taken out there and turned over to a mob of twenty or more men in a vacant field. Price then joined the mob, Deputy Price. Now this we have from uh two eyewitnesses who were crossing that vacant field at two different corners. They were on their way to church, to a prayer meeting and they hid behind trees to watch the proceedings. Members of the mob held Schwerner and Goodman and pr, then the others proceeded to beat Chaney, probably to lifelessness. His prone body was there on the ground and they were still beating him with the weapons, sticks and chains, and stomping him and kicking him. He wasn't moving. Schwerner broke away from his captors and ran over to try to help Chaney and was clubbed once on the head and fell to the ground, apparently unconscious. At this point the beating of Chaney stopped and Chaney still wasn't moving, he was probably dead at the time and the mob whispered; the mob talked. Deputy Price then left the mob and got in his car and drove away. Now we speculate that he went to call Rainey. Well who was not there with the mob but was someplace. Uh Price came back after calling Rainey, after making the call or doing whatever he went to do. So we as, assume that he went to call. He came back, talked to the members of the mob. They tossed Chaney's body in the car, or lifeless form, or unconscious form and uh Schwerner had regained consciousness then so Schwerner and uh Goodman were shoved into that car and the cars took off. That's the last uh eyewitness account we had. We passed this information on to the FBI. The uh FBI had an informant who then told them that um they should look under a fake dam in a certain area of that county uh where there was a freshly built dam with no water. They did and they found the bodies. I received a call from the FBI from uh Cartha Deke DeLoach who was I think number three in charge at the FBI, with the title of Associate Director and he said uh Mr. Farmer I'm calling you first I want you to be the first to know because they were your staff guys. We have found the bodies of Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney. Uh, we found them under this fake dam after an informant told us we should look under such a dam, we pulled in a bulldozer and the first scoop of dirt unearthed the three bodies. Well the bodies were badly decomposed, it was clear that Chaney had suffered uh a most terrible beating imaginable. It seemed that every bone in his body was broken and he was doubtless beaten to death. Uh the other two men were shot once each in the heart. Now the FBI investigation led to the arrest of a more than twenty men, including Deputy Price and including a Southern Baptist preacher. And the federal government uh charged them with conspiracy to

violate the young men's civil rights, which is a federal charge, murder being a state charge. The men were convicted for conspiracy and sentenced and served uh time, all of them did including Deputy Price, and including the preacher for conspiracy. The state of Mississippi never charged the men with murder. Well that was um the one outcome of Freedom Summer. The positive outcome was that thousands of blacks were registered in the state of Mississippi. Probably tens of thousands were registered to vote and that has helped to change the face of the state. Uh politicians now no longer find it in their interest to uh campaign on the basis of racism. They campaigned for black votes as well as white votes and black votes are potent forces in the state of Mississippi now as they are in Alabama as they are in Louisiana, in Georgia and in South Carolina and in the other southern states. So in that regard in that important regard, Freedom Summer was a tremendous success. It also, combined with the Selma march of Dr. King led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which in turn produced more than 6,500 black elected officials, most of them in the south in offices ranging all the way from lieutenant governor in the state of Virginia. [music]