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OHP 903

SPENCER: Today is February 19, 1985. We are in the Department of Archives & History Building in Jackson, Mississippi. My name is Debra Spencer, and I am about to interview Miss Anne Moody on her life and times after the civil rights movement. Most of the background material will be available in her book COMING OF AGE IN MISSISSIPPI. Also in the room is Sasha Strauss, her son, who is back with her visiting in Mississippi. We probably will get some comments from him, I hope. First of all, one of the things I noticed in your book, in COMING OF AGE, you don't really talk about a whole lot of why you became involved. It's obvious that injustices and the accumulation of events in your life were...

But was there any specific event that made you stop and say, "This is really something, and I've got to do something about this situation?"

MOODY: Well, I think when you get to the point in the book when Emmett Till was murdered, right? We were exactly the same age, and up until Emmett Till's death, I think, these things were not real to me. It became more real to me, and I became more aware of the fact that it happens to not only adult black men but children my own age. It just was the whole injustice of it happening to such a young fifteen year old.

SPENCER: Could you talk a little bit about some of your feelings and emotions? Anger? Sadness?

MOODY: Well, in the beginning, I said, no this was in a class at Tougaloo just recently we were discussing it, and I think I used to kind of because it was hush-hush in the house, and whenever adults and grown people spoke about it, they spoke about it when children were not around. If they were talking and a child walked

into the room, they would right away stop the conversation, and you would know by their immediately interrupting the flow of conversation that they were discussing something that was forbidden to you.

So, I'm this very curious type, when this would happen, when I would walk in the room of course I would immediately go out of the room but hang around and peep through the door hole, or I would hang around and listen. They would think I would be outside playing in the yard or something, and I'm listening to all of this stuff, and it makes you kind of lose, it's not a matter of losing respect, you kind of lose a sense of closeness to your parents. It put a distance between you and them because here you are, like an innocent child, and, if especially you come from a family like my mother...

We went to church every Sunday, regardless, and I was very, very active in the church, and here you see your relatives, your mother, your family, and they are sitting around, and they are talking about these things. If you are from a religious household... It's more for a child who's been brought up in a particular faith to experience this, I think. It becomes sort of a very shattering type of experience for that child, and it creates a barrier, of not just communication, but a barrier of feelings, too. You begin to build a wall around yourself, but it's very weird.

I was very close to my mother and loved her very, very much. I'm thinking now. I'm not even thinking when I was there. This is like hindsight. It's like, I just couldn't understand why they didn't get together, why were they whispering about it instead of getting together and

talking openly and trying to do something about it.

SPENCER: Do you think this was typical of most black families?

MOODY: Oh, of most black families. I mean there were very few, if any, who actually spoke out really. The ones who did were killed. They were used, like Samuel Quinn, for instance. All they had to do was to set an example, and the others would know that. In order to prevent this from happening to me, and from happening to my child and my family, then I've got to toe the line, so to speak.

SPENCER: It seems incredulous...

MOODY: It is, but that's the way it was. It really was like that.

SPENCER: It's such a typical thing that most black children in Mississippi at that time experienced this type of fear, and it was almost to them fear of the unknown. This brings me around to something I was really interested in, was the frustration, that you seemed to experience as you were going about movement activities trying to get black people to register to vote, trying to get them to become involved in the movement and running up against this stonewall almost, of the same type of thing we're talking about. Could you comment on the frustrations that grew out of that?

MOODY: It goes much deeper than just frustrations.

SPENCER: Well, talk about...

MOODY: You can be frustrated over the fact that a curl doesn't hang in the right way.

You see what I mean; that's a type of frustration. You can be frustrated over the fact that you failed an examination in physics. I was a pre-med student at Tougaloo, and I had all this physics and biology and blah-blah-blah, and many times I was frustrated in my studies because I wanted to... I was doing all these activities. I was involved in the movement and all this stuff, and it gradually became very much a part of my consciousness that I was not cut out to be a doctor in the state of Mississippi or anywhere else as long as I was a black person, and these black people didn't have any basic rights in this country, and probably in a lot of other countries.

The mere fact that I was a black person limited me as a human being in other people's eyes. So, it was very important for me to do something about correcting this injustice. So, when you get

frustrated; when you get fed up; when you get very disappointed, and it's something you either resolve... Me, I'm the type of person like this; I'm a very introspective type. A lot of people see me; they think I'm very outgoing and gregarious, but I'm really not that way. Like I said last night at the reading, when I'm in pain, and if I hurt, or if something is bothering me, I'm not like a lot of people. I go blabbing and needing other people to help me through this. I do it myself. When I was suffering in Mississippi, and I was in pain; I would get headaches and stuff like this. I never told my mother then why I had the headache. I had the headache because something had happened, and I didn't tell them about it, and I knew I couldn't tell them about it. I'd turn it internally, and I would reflect upon this, and I would silently bear the pain of this.

SPENCER: You said you told your sister you were thinking in the book...

MOODY: Yes, yes, yes...

SPENCER: ..."what's wrong with you?" - I'm thinking.

MOODY: Yes, I know, and see some people don't understand when you are that way. With me it just goes so deep. It's like my whole being, and when I'm repulsed by something, when my whole being is affected by it, then I know what I must do if it affects me; so then I know. I mean like becoming a doctor did not touch me with such depths. I thought I would become a doctor in Centreville. When the hospital was all integrated, I mean segregated, and they had very bad medical facilities for blacks and not any black doctors. I would be the one to take care of my people medically, but then, even I think, I realized even

before we came to that point, you've gotta survive as a race. I mean you've gotta survive as a human being with dignity and with grace, and we didn't have that, we didn't. So what's becoming a doctor. It's a prestigious thing to do. It would be fantastic if, here I am, the only black doctor in Centreville, or something, or Woodville, and I just couldn't do it. I'd say I had enough credits at Tougaloo in Biology. I had more than in anything else so I just took a B.S. in biology, and I became a full-time civil rights worker making $25.00 a week.

SPENCER: ...in Canton, Mississipppi?

MOODY: In Canton, Mississippi.

SPENCER: And that's where you ran into a lot of problems in generating interest, particularly among the adult population?

MOODY: Yeah, yeah.

SPENCER: And this - did you ever...?

MOODY: What was that man named? Foot Campbell was his name.

SPENCER: Foot Campbell...

MOODY: Well you see, the register, the county register. The reason Canton was so important for the people in the civil rights movement is because it was a small place in which blacks so out-numbered whites that the whole world could see that it was ridiculous. Its incredible that they didn't have any basic rights there, and I, being a Tougaloo student and having all these feelings, was chosen to go in there. They didn't have to tell me much except give me the statistics, and I was ready to go, besides all the killings and murders and the intimidations and all

the horrible things I had heard about Billy Noble and these people. I was very eager to help gain some of these basic rights for the people. I'd given up my profession of becoming a doctor to do that, you see.

SPENCER: But do you think that they wanted you there?

MOODY: No, they didn't. They didn't at first. They didn't want you there. They thought... When we were canvassing and we would go around and knock on these people... If they saw you coming down the road they would pull that shade down, and you could see them face to face, see them pulling that shade down, and you can knock on that door until your fingers are bloody and they wouldn't open the door for anything. This is why Betty Poole and I...we were chosen because they thought a lot of people would get discouraged, right?

SPENCER: This is what I'm trying..how did you...?

MOODY: A lot of people...

SPENCER: How did you keep from getting discouraged?

MOODY: If it really meant enough to you then you would stick with it. You would really stick with it, and you'd say "okay, so if you don't open the door, I'm gonna knock, I'm gonna knock tomorrow, I'm gonna knock the day after tomorrow, I'm gonna knock..."

Sooner or later whoever is inside is gonna get embarrassed, and they're gonna say, "Oh she knows I'm here, I might as well open the door," which is what they did.

So gradually the doors began to open and I and Mrs. Devine, she was telling me just the other... Mrs. Devine was

selling insurance and I went to Mrs. Devine, and I said, "Look, Mrs. Devine, I mean, you people around here who are already going and knocking on these doors. They are opening that door for you because they are paying you these insurance premiums and stuff like this."

She was just telling it to me, and I said, "Look, when they open the door for you, and you sell a little civil rights too, sell a little voting rights, too - I mean, just don't go in there selling insurance. You gotta, you gotta help C...., you gotta help - I mean we need people like you."

We can't just come in here and say because... If you people don't help us then they're gonna say these are outsiders coming in stirring up trouble. Us black folks here in Canton...

This is what Billy Noble tried to preach that shit to us. The white folks and black folks in Canton get along fine. You folks just coming in here stirring up trouble. They don't even want you here.

I said, "Look, Mrs. Devine, you going in these homes, all these people know you. You're selling them that insurance and everything - they know you. You know what we are saying is the truth, I mean you know what I mean. You are making your living on this insurance you are selling them. Don't you think it's beholden upon you to also help them in other ways, I mean, you know?"

We were reminiscing about it the other night and I said, "Have you regretted one day? Have you regretted it?"

She said, "The only thing I regret is that nothing is happening now, you know.

You know, its just right now nothing is happening; it's so dead."

It was so much; Canton was jumping. Everybody got all psyched up. When I think back now on all my good memories and my bad memories they're equally treasured by me because it was all a part of...

SPENCER: ...life experiences.

MOODY: Yeah.

SPENCER: During this time of going around canvassing and that sort of thing, did the frustration and discouragement ever get to the point where you felt like non-violence was not the answer, and that you were going to have to...?

MOODY: Yes, in COMING OF AGE I felt that very much, and I stated in my book, it was on my birthday, September 15, when those

Kids were bombed in the church in Birmingham. I just, oh it was just so horrible for me that here were young... In fact, I went there to visit the church, and I took glass from the stained glass window, and I made brochures and things with things of mine. I put it engraved in there, and I sent it to a lot of friends, and it was so nice they thought, but that wasn't for me. It was a turning point in the sense that I never, I didn't say I would go out and pick up a gun, would not practice non-violence any more. I couldn't see myself going on a picket line and going on a demonstration.

SPENCER: To Woolworths...

MOODY: These were young kids sitting in Sunday School studying the word of God. Can you imagine the type of person that would come and throw a bomb in a church with young kids like that?

STRAUSS: ...he killed for God.

MOODY: When?

STRAUSS: He came about... He went and bragged in this bar with his friends about it.

MOODY: When was this?

STRAUSS: What? They had it in the newspaper.

MOODY: Yeah, but anyway, I mean this was fantastic, I thought, and for me this was...

STRAUSS: You showed it to me.

MOODY: No, this was in the NEW YORK TIMES magazine (Laughter.) I keep Sasha; I make him aware of all this history you see.

SPENCER: That's great because that brings me around to something else that I want to

talk about a little bit, and it was all connected. Ed King and I went up this summer to Neshoba County, and they had memorial services at Mt. Nebo church where the monument is and then went out to the church that was bombed where the civil rights workers had visited. One of the things I noticed there weren't any young people there. The people that were there were the older people that had experienced ...

MOODY: ...who remembered, who remembered.

SPENCER: ...who remembered what had happened, who remembered the bombing and then there were some little children there, that you know obviously were there with grandma and had been brought to the memorial services. The turnout was very good, but there were no young people. What you said about keeping Sasha aware of this - what do you think needs to be

done about that now? How can you keep these young people...?

MOODY: Well for instance, I was very surprised, but COMING OF AGE is required reading in the Canton High School. If these young people are still, and this is twenty years later, required to read about it then somewhere they've gotta be touched some way to do something. I was just there, and I did this radio program with Walter Jones is his name? He has this youth thing there, and it's a live radio show, sort of inspiration for the young kids, and some of the kids there, they had come over and brought their old copies of the book that they had bought and used in high school and was hanging around the radio station just to meet me. I think they are aware of the history. I don't know how much; I'm going back there, and I will spend almost a week there, just to be with them and to talk with them. I think

that's kind of important because I can bring them also. Even with the students at Tougaloo this past week. You know, I've been at Tougaloo. You were at my reading last night. The students there are just eighteen and twenty and twenty something years old. I'm twenty years older than they are, and this all happened before they were born, some of them.

SPENCER: They realize though. Do they realize how far things have come?

MOODY: They realize it when I tell them how it was. How difficult it was. I think they should all come down here now, and I'm going to make sure that Tougaloo gets them all down here to see that exhibit there because then they will see what Tougaloo students went through. I mean the library, can you imagine a library they would - a kid can't walk - now you can't conceive of it. You understand?

They don't understand, you see, but this is what I'm saying and when I was sitting there, and I was speaking to some of them. This was in the religious class, in Jack's class just yesterday, and I was speaking to some of them, and their eyebrows were going like this.

I said, "It's inconceivable to you, isn't it, because you..." And I say, "like how old are you? Twenty?" I say, "Wow, I mean, you know, it didn't even happen, the Woolworth's sit in yet. You know what I mean, and can't you imagine."

They were going like with the eyes like "really" what am I hearing here? It's almost like science fiction to them, some weird, surrealistic tale. But I think my visits help, and people when they come and share this with them and they are. They read about it. That it is good; it's good to keep them abreast.

SPENCER: Do you think that most people who worked in the civil rights movement, in Core, in SNCC suffered, talked about it earlier, battle fatigue? Do you think this is the reason why so many of the people were off licking their wounds and don't come back to make this next generation aware?

MOODY: You know you got that, I think, from my reading last night, but actually I think a lot of people - you don't know the effect that it has on you mentally. It wears; it tears at the root of your heart. It just - its like, look at George Raymond; did you know him, George Raymond in Canton.

SPENCER: From your book.

MOODY: But you know he died at the age of 29 years old, and he was the first. We went there and found George Raymond there. George Raymond was from New Orleans,

from SNCC. George Raymond, he was a fantastic person. He was just... It takes me time to warm up to a stranger, you understand, and then I'm always kind of looking a little out of the side of my eye at them, but he was just open arms and all. It was the type of person he was. He married a Canton girl, lived there, spent all, and then at the end...

Minnie Lou and Mrs. Devine were telling me, "I think the main reason he died, Ann, was because of all the betrayal from people he thought were his friends and how the things were going with the movement."

He just went away and died in New Orleans at the age of 29. That was so sad, but you see, had not I gone away it was the same. It was that I would suffer the same tragedy, because you cannot continue it without going... Its like going away to a spa somewhere; its not

anything so elaborate, but I crawl into a corner like a cat, and I lick my wounds, and I heal myself. You can't do it in the midst of all the turbulence, and you have to step away and get a different perspective on things. Sometimes you are too closely involved to actually see it. You are too closely involved; you aren't even aware of your feelings. Sometimes you don't even know if you are hurting and when you step outside, when you take a step or so backwards, and then you can look, you can see.

SPENCER: ...what bad shape you're really in.

MOODY: That's right.

SPENCER: Do you mind talking a little bit about the betrayal and the disintegration of the movement? You told how exciting things were in Canton and things were

really moving, and now there's just nothing there anymore. What happened?

MOODY: I was just trying to give you an imaging, and I didn't do a very good job of it over there at CBS with those people from CBS. It's like a tree, right? I had one in my yard once, and half of that tree, exactly half of it, was dead and all rotten, and the other half was very live and very vibrant. Now that tree had been nourished by the same soil, grown, and at the same time there's a dead side to it, there's one side that's alive, and that's going on. Now to me that could be a family tree of the movement. We would call this tree the movement tree, right? And then you can tag on to it; you could put the side that's dead as twenty years ago when we were here, and we were doing all the things we did, and we fought and everything. Then the other side is the generation, the young people now that I

see in Canton, that I see at Tougaloo. And they are alive, and they are feeding upon this other side. The reason this other side is dead is because it has fed this new growth, and they live side by side.

SPENCER: But what killed that one side? Do you have any ideas about that? What happened?

MOODY: In some ways we did it ourselves. It's a kind of strange thing because... Okay, say for instance you're married, right? And I was married for ten years to Sasha's father. Give you another example. When we got married we were very, very much like this (and I have two fingers together). I mean in all ways possible, but when we married we were on a certain level, the same level of growth.

SPENCER: ...of maturity.

MOODY: ...of maturity, that's the proper word, maturity. But then, he did not grow. Not only directions in which I was growing but sort of deteriorated within the marriage because he could not sustain; he was not strong enough; he did not have the type of history that I have of endurance. You understand what I'm saying? Whereas I continued a progression of a certain level of growth, and he did not. So I could not remain as I grew and changed. I could not remain inside this very stifling... Because it was stifling to me, who was moving at a rate now much faster than him, and then it created many, many problems.

Last night I talked about how the movement died. The movement died because it failed to come up with creative new techniques of protest. Anybody who's a very sensitive person, and I was a very sensitive person, and

many of the others, Doree Lattiner and these people were very sensitive people. It's no way we could have stayed in this structure if the movement was...

SPENCER: ...the structure of CORE?

MOODY: No, no, no, I'm not talking about that. The structure of the movement as a whole, not just an organization. I'm not talking about an organization, because the movement to me goes beyond organization. But we failed to come up with creative new techniques of protest. We, I mean people, when all the novelty had gone out of this, the sensitive, creative people, regardless to how dedicated you are, regardless to how... You would crack up in a situation like that. You see what I'm saying?

George Raymond was cracking up in that thing, because day in and day out; he, from what a lot of people have said,

drank so much and was becoming an alcoholic. Just was relying too much on the liquor. It wears you out, but if there were ways in which we could start anew and could renew in fresh new ways of doing this, but it's never, it has never once happened.

Even Martin Luther King had pushed non-violence to its very limits. When people here had become adjusted, what did he do? He went into Chicago, and then he started going into new areas doing the same things, stirring up exactly the same thing. Now maybe sometimes to do exactly the same thing over and over and over... Then what's left behind for the people here? I mean they are left, stuck with the all, organizational-wise, technique-wise, you understand what I'm saying?

SPENCER: Do you think then that the movement took the people so far...

MOODY: They couldn't go any further because they failed to come up with creative new techniques. This is what I said before, people just would tur... Some people got so bored with seeing all the marching on the television they would just say,"oh, just another demonstration" and would flick it to Archie Bunker or somebody. You see what I'm saying, flick it to some entertainment. Oh it's just another demonstration, and turn the television off.

SPENCER: Do you think that was the responsibility of the people involved in the movement, or do you think the responsibility lay with the people at the grass roots level; those people that were pulling the blinds down on you?

MOODY: No, no, no. I think when people are brought to us; now the one main thing that the movement did, it did bring people to us, certain consciousness that

raised them, their consciousness, and it made them aware of certain things where there would never be any turning back from that point. But what it didn't do was to give them solutions and give them sort of guidelines, and stick with them in planning. It sort of made you see that you didn't have the right to vote. What you could do once you got the right to vote. Even now, they were telling me in Canton, they have gerrymandered the blacks totally out of the power structure just about. If you're not flexible enough to readapt and readjust to each new situation in a new way... If the game changes; if the rules of a game change; something as simple as basketball and you are going to play, and I was a basketball player, and if you are going to play the game you can't go on that court and play it the old way. To win it you're gonna have to play it the new way and go by the new laws. So when the game is changed on you, you

can't just run in there and do the same old trick you've been doing before because not only do the new rules... You have got to respond..

SPENCER. Right.

MOODY: A different response and a different...

SPENCER: Where do you think though that this leaves the movement today? Is there a movement?

MOODY: There's not very much of a movement today. I mean a movement in the sense that I... There are a lot of organizations, the NAACP of course has... They are now celebrating their 76th anniversary I think, now, right?

SPENCER: And Southern Christian Leadership.

MOODY: ...And the Southern Christian Leadership, Operation Push. There are

lots of organizations still. There is a CORE; there is a, I think, SNCC; I'm not sure. There are still a lot of organizations, but there is no movement.

SPENCER: They're not playing by the new rules.

MOODY: No, there's just no movement in the sense that there's no connection to a broader... Now Jesse Jackson has tried to do something that's very interesting with his Rainbow Coalition, and it could turn out to be something very good in this country, but still it's not rooted, I don't think, in the type of basic almost... It's very difficult; it's very difficult for me because I like Jesse Jackson. I think he's a fantastic orator; he can speak like nobody I've seen today. He's the black leader.

SPENCER: Definitely.

MOODY: But I think his personality alone carries this, more than the will of the people who support...

SPENCER: Without Jesse Jackson there would be no Rainbow Coalition.

MOODY: No, I'm saying his personality alone carries this.

SPENCER: It's the glue.

MOODY: The glue but in the days of the movement it was not that way. The movement, the people, the struggle was bigger than any one person who represented it.

SPENCER: Do you think that the quote, enemy, unquote, was clearer at that time?

MOODY: Oh, yes, it was much more defined .

SPENCER: Could you speak to that thing, the subtlety of prejudice that has evolved today?

MOODY: It's not so subtle. I mean if you think about what I said about the Confederate flag and those people waving it at Ole Miss at football games and singing "Dixie," that's not subtle. And also, if you think about the Reagan administration and the Justice Department now fighting against laws that were passed under previous administrations, to undo all these things that we fought for; that's not subtle. That's the Federal government trying to undo what we've done. That's not subtle. That's a racist administration as far as I'm concerned. And that's more detrimental than, say, a bigot policeman standing on the street corner here in Jackson.

It's more sophisticated these days. It's in higher places these days. Reagan is so popular, and Reagan is in power because Reagan has made deals to keep him in power. Some of these deals are that we will undo this; we will do that; we will revert these rights back to the states; we will let you run your own; govern your own people. That way you are throwing the ball right back. When we were fighting in those days the Justice Department was on our side. When they were sending down people to protect us and to see the voting when they were monitoring the voting polls. Now it's a different game. You've got the people voting in people in supreme, the head of, power who's gonna fight the battle for them?

They can sit back and say, "Okay, we'll see; we know our man is in now."

So we've given up a few seats here and there. We've done this, and we've done that, but it's much more to me. It's much more serious and much more dangerous. The trend, the conservative facists, I mean real facists. Fasciasm is about to take this country over. When you see how people are voting; the people who really back this administration; the things that they are doing with the money, and where it's being spent. When I first got back to this country they were talking about, I heard talk about Reagan saying something about a limited nuclear war, having a limited nuclear war.

SPENCER: And having lived in Europe, you understood this.

MOODY: I said, "What the hell, a limited nuclear war, my God."

Now it's just all the star wars. I haven't yet understood what this is about. What do they plan to do with this? What is it all about?

SPENCER: Who knows?

MOODY: No, but they said it's to take the whole nuclear thing into space.

SPENCER: Well, they're not nuclear weapons.

MOODY: They're what?

SPENCER: They're laser weapons.

MOODY: Laser weapons?

SPENCER: They will knock the nuclear weapons out.

MOODY: Out? Oh, that's what its supposed...

SPENCER: But the technology has not yet been developed.

MOODY: Developed to do it.

SPENCER: Who knows whether it will come about or not.

MOODY: Oh, it's not actually the weapons themselves?

SPENCER: No, they're going to use laser defense mechanisms to knock the nuclear missiles out of the air when they're fired.

MOODY: But you see'I think, I think, oh, wow...

SPENCER: But this kind of pulls back a little bit. After the movement here in the state of Mississippi, after your experiences in Canton, you left the state. And that's more or less where COMING OF AGE ends with your leaving Canton.

MOODY: 1964.

SPENCER: Just briefly, or take as long as you need, tell us what happened. Where you went, what you did.

MOODY: I got on a bus in Jackson, Mississippi; that bus was headed for Washington, D.C. I ran away from Canton when a kid had gotton his brains splattered all over the church grounds down in Canton.

I came into Jackson, and I just said, "This is so fantastic. People outside must know what it's like."

When I saw that bus going to Washington and I yelled up there to Bob Moses where it was going, and I was just gittin', no suitcase, no clothes, not a toothbrush, nothing! I just ran and got in it and sat down, and I was in Washington without anything but what I had on my back and shoes on my feet.

SPENCER: No money.

MOODY: Nothing. Not a penny. And I ended up in Washington living with David and Carla Cohen and travelling all over. David and Carla Cohen's friend, his name was Marv Rich, was the head of publicity at CORE in New York City. When I was travelling all over speaking in the Washington area, they told Marv Rich what a great speaker I was, and they wanted to get me to go and speak at this convention to replace James Farmer. I went there, and that's when I raised $20,000.00 just at one speaking engagement, and people were so moved. Then I became a speaker for that whole summer, raising money for CORE.

SPENCER: That one convention was UAW?

MOODY: UAW. It was a big UAW convention in Atlantic City, and this is when Walter Reuther was president and Governor Hughes was... I met Walter Reuther, president of UAW. After my speech they

introduced me to everybody. Everybody in that convention was so moved, and my speech, I told you, was based upon the fact that I had just met Mickey Schwerner, and Goodman, Andrew Goodman, and Cheney.

The week before they disappeared I was in Meridian. We were sitting on the church steps and talking. That's the first time I had ever met them, and I really liked them. We were joking around. Just the week before they disappeared.

We were joking around, "Boy, how can you people stand this? We hear this is a mother-fuck'n bad area up here."

This is the way the guys were talking to each other. I'm sitting around listening, and we were so hungry. We had driven all the way from New Orleans, and we didn't have the money. We were an

integrated group, and we didn't want to stop in these little towns, and we were in a van. Then a week later; after we were just sitting there kidding around, they had disappeared. It was three months before it was actually discovered they had found them. But then, I knew that they were dead, and so when I spoke at this UAW convention, I was so upset; I worked myself into such a state, I just started crying and just couldn't speak anymore. Everybody was moved, and then I was speaking at all the union meetings, for all, not just UAW, but for chemical workers. They were organizing these, and then I met Jackie Robinson, and I was assigned to work with Jackie Robinson on the community center that would be built for the three civil rights workers.

After that then I got very... People said I was...because of the McKinley incident, you know seeing his brains

splattered all over Canton and all this stuff. I was shipped. To the New Yorkers, and to the Easterners and people. I was like shell-shocked. I was half out of my mind. Crazy, almost. Jackie Robinson wanted me to write a book, and I couldn't write the book at the time because I was really too hurting. The UAW official wanted me to take a small portion of the money I had raised and go off to Europe and live for some years outside of the states, the United States.

But then I said, "No, I just need to do something different."

So I took the job working for Cornell University. I worked almost for two years then I called up Jackie Robinson.

I said, " I'm now ready to write that book."

He sent me to his editor and COMING OF AGE came out of it. It was very interesting after I had written the book; it really wiped me out to do it.

SPENCER: Did you expect it to be a best seller?

MOODY: No, no...

SPENCER: And become the hallmark that it has become?

MOODY: No, I didn't at all. I just knew when I was writing the book. I just knew in the whole time I was working at Cornell. I told you I didn't do it when Jackie wanted me to do it because if I had written it then it would have come out like propaganda from the black side. It would have come out with too much hatred, not showing the good sides of the state, not explaining things the way it should be so people could really understand it. I was not in a position

to be giving objective critical analysis that would make it a lasting book, if I had done it when I was so shell-shocked and in pain, and so I waited until I could have absorbed some of the pain and the hurt.

Then I could do the type of book I felt that would make people really understand and be sympathetic at the same time and be moved but not just black people but white people and all people. The white people would see what an injustice it is; the black people would see. People all over the world...

That book is in seven different languages around the world. I just got a Japanese translation; even the Japanese are using it in high schools and colleges as a textbook. I will be going there.

When I look back I don't think that I was that smart, but I must have been, because I can look back now, and I can say, "Now I really made that decision and I did it."

Now when I see the book is still lasting, required reading in Canton and high schools and colleges all over America, all over the world, then I'm very much pleased.

SPENCER: I think the appreciation that was expressed last night in the chapel after your reading is something that is typical because I felt the same thing. I'm not black, but I still felt like this taught me something.

MOODY: Yes. Yes. Well this is what I'm saying. If I had written it another way, being a white, you couldn't have related to it. You wouldn't have. You couldn't because you wouldn't have understood the depth

of my anger. I had to present it in that way by showing you this little girl, growing up in this particular house, you see what I mean, encountering these certain experiences, and how she gradually became what she became. And I think that's why COMING OF AGE... A lot of the other black books that have been written about the movement were not as lasting as this book was because the pain was not taken like I had taken, a certain kind of care that I didn't do certain things with it. I'm very glad that I did that because I could have sat down just when Jack... Some people would have just jumped to write the book, to be glad to write a book and to be glad to get a book published, but I'm not that way. I have nine new manuscripts. I've been working on them for years, and I would never release a single one of them for publication unless I knew that this book reflected exactly what I wanted and reflected me

and my beliefs about things, and a lot of times you write books you send to publishing houses and they come out a whole different thing. Fortunately I had a very good editor, and that editor was (garbled) Doctorow who wrote (garbled)

(FOR APPROXIMATELY 40 SECONDS THE TAPE WAS INAUDIBLE EXCEPT FOR DISJOINED WORDS AND PHRASES)

SPENCER: Okay, we were talking about some of your new manuscripts. The nine that you have yet unpublished and you're planning on getting them out. Well, can you talk a little bit about these? About Mr. Death.

MOODY: Well, Mr. Death is actually a spinoff of a major book I have called VARIATIONS ON A DREAM OF DEATH. At the time MR. DEATH was published I had only written those four stories, and when the editor at Harper & Row read them, I took it to

them actually, just to see if they wanted to do the whole book once I had finished it, and they liked it so much they wanted to bring it out, but the major book to that is called VARIATIONS ON A DREAM OF DEATH. I just have a list here of the ones, the books that I now have, the nine books. One of them is the sequel to COMING OF AGE, and the sequel to COMING OF AGE is finished. I thought maybe I would read last night from it at Tougaloo, but actually the chapter is too long. And not only that, but because all the people there had read it, and I thought it would create too much discussion afterwards, that would lead me into... I didn't want that, so that is why I read that story.

The sequel to COMING OF AGE is called FAREWELL TO TOO SWEET, and you know who Too Sweet was? Too Sweet was my mother. She died in 1976 and I came back to Mississippi, and I was in the hospital

room with her. The book began with her in the hospital room; it ends with her death. And in between I'm sitting there, and I'm reviewing my life, the part of my life that I've lived since COMING OF AGE with her. That presents a very interesting way to do the sequel, and actually I didn't think of it. I didn't even think I had all these other books going. Then I thought because my mother is the second major character in COMING OF AGE and her character really is a lot stronger than mine in a lot of cases.

SPENCER: And the relationship.

MOODY: The relationship between the two of us, so it gave me an interesting idea in the title. FAREWELL TO TOO SWEET is really, I thought, very appropriate so I've called it FAREWELL TO TOO SWEET. Hopefully it will be coming out in... I have it if you want it. This is a list, a chronological list. That's an outline

of all the events in my life since 1960, since the ending of the book, '64.

SPENCER: I'd love to get a copy.

MOODY: That explains everything that happened. I could just give you a copy of that.

SPENCER: Okay. I can run downstairs and copy it.

MOODY: Yes, okay, but anyway I can just say in 1964 the book ends there, and I was in Washington at the COFO hearings. 1964 to 1965 I worked for Cornell University. 1965 to 1967 I wrote COMING OF AGE; 1967 I married; 1966, just as I'd finished COMING OF AGE, I met a man, fell madly in love, I lived with him for almost a year and married him on March 9, 1967. He was a Jewish guy from Brooklyn, an NYU graduate student in philosophy. 1968 to 1969 COMING OF AGE was published. In December of 1968, Dial published COMING OF AGE. The first review of COMING OF

AGE was a raving review by Senator Edward Kennedy in the NEW YORK TIMES BOOK REVIEW. Charles Evers came up from Mississippi and was on the TODAY SHOW with me, and we were interviewed by Barbara Walters and Hugh Downs. It was a choice for the Book of the Month Club, and it received fantastic reviews from every publication. In 1969 to 1974 I lived mostly in Europe.

In August of '69 I was really fed up, very tired from everything that was happening with COMING OF AGE because when I had finished that book it had wiped me out so much and to do all this. I did a lot of publicity. I traveled all over for a few months, and then I had all these engagements from colleges and everything. I had gotten into a groove, and I was writing other books, and I just couldn't deal with it. I just wanted to go away quietly and recover.

SPENCER: This is rather personal, and you don't have to answer it, but I was wondering what kind of reaction you got from your family and your friends and the movement when you married a white man?

MOODY: Well, I just put it down here, those were the days of Rapp Brown and Stokely Carmichael and black power, and so a lot of my friends in the movement they came on with me and not to mention the subtle come-ons from my husband's parents, who were Jewish and his relatives because it was an integrated marriage.

The black press almost completely ignored me. EBONY magazine has never done an article on me, not once. I was in Chicago, and here I was on all these talk shows, interviewed by all these papers, and EBONY magazine completely ignored me. Never have they once done an article on me, and a newspaper in Harlem, they wrote a real put-down. It

was based solely upon the fact that I was married to a white man.

Actually, at first when I had told my mother that I had married a white man, she said, "Is he black or is he white?"

I said, "He's white."

She says, "I thought so."

And I said, "What do you mean by that?" And she says, "Never mind what I meant by that." And so, we just sort of ended the conversation.

Months later I just called her up and said, "Have you got over your hump yet?"

She says, "Yes, I suppose so." And then that was it with her, that simple, that's all. That was it.

It was black power time; so that kind of affected my going also, because I wanted to have peace.

In 1970 the publication of COMING OF AGE was by Fischer-Verlag in Germany. Heinrich Böll, the Nobel prize winner, wrote the foreword, and he and his wife translated it, and it became a fantastic best seller in Germany.

SPENCER: Just to meet all these people after Centreville; Mississippi, and then, you end up running around Europe with a jet-set intellectual group. It's amazing. It takes an amazing person to get there too.

MOODY: Actually, it never really fazed me as anything like that. I never really thought about it in those terms. Heinrich Böll is such a wonderful person when he really is taken to something; he just goes all out. He came up there

and spent five days in Frankfurt. We did all the television, the radio. It was fantastic.

In 1971 I had a child and he soon will be 14 years old. He's sitting over there; his name is Sasha.

In 1972 I had full-time scholarship for the City of Berlin and they gave me a lot of money and a big fourteen room house, and we lived there the whole of 1972.

In 1974 we returned to the states. Upon my return I discovered that one of the most beautiful souls of the civil rights movement, Lucille Chinn in Canton, had been convicted of murder, for murdering a man who had allegedly been paid to kill him, and he was in Parchman prison. So I returned to Mississippi for the first time in eleven years.

In 1976 I returned to Mississippi for the second time because my mother was dying, and I started the sequel with my return to Mississippi because it provided the book with certain continuity with COMING OF AGE. It shows that my mother's death was really, really a very traumatic experience for me. The whole sequel and everything that is contained in the book is contrasted with my life, my past life in Mississippi, so it's very interesting, I think. I found it, actually, a very effective way of presenting my new... Actually, that's not going to be the total. I couldn't fit my marriage into that book so there's actually a third volume of my autobiography and that covers the years from 1974 to 1984. In the sequel, FAREWELL TO TOO SWEET, my marriage is introduced, but I found that it was so much; it was a whole life in itself, and it deserved special treatment.

A third volume has arrived and I just called it tentatively COMING OF AGE IN NEW YORK, and that discusses my marriage, ten year marriage, to Sasha's father.

The third book is ALTERNATIVES TO CONVENTIONAL MARRIAGE, and that book is a book of interviews with couples who found an alternative to the conventional things.

The fourth book is VARIATIONS ON A DREAM OF DEATH, and you heard one of the stories last night in the chapel. That book, MR. DEATH, which you have there, was published by Harper & Row, is actually a spinoff of that book. The fifth book, I call it my black woman's book, but that's a novel. Most people who've read it, and a lot of people have read it, friends of mine and others, have read my work and they think that

this is my most interesting piece of work.

SPENCER: Really. I can't wait.

MOODY: No. You know why? I had a letter here, if I could show you, I presented it to certain agents and this is from Rosalynn Todd. She's Hal Robbins agent. She really wanted my black woman's book. In person she told me she wanted to start with a black woman's novel. It's unfair since I think many women would relate to it whether black or white. That's the way I am. All of my books, I don't have no black white...

SPENCER: COMING OF AGE - when we talked earlier, you know, I could relate to it and I am a northern white girl.

MOODY: But people in seven different languages around the world can relate to it. That's the way my books are written. So

she wanted it; she thought it was a fantastic book, but that it was raw. It was some marvelous raw material, she said, that could be worked into a splendid novel. It is already as it is, in my opinion. Persons like Doctorow would know this, but not somebody who... She said to me she could make me millions of dollars with that book if I would just change it the way she wanted it to. When I discussed how she wanted me to change it, I saw that she wanted me to just turn it into some pap like Hal Robbins type pap, but I'm raw - that's me. It reflects me.

COMING OF AGE at that time is the first book that was published with all those mother-fucks and god-damns. The NEW YORKER MAGAZINE had wanted to serialize COMING OF AGE IN MISSISSIPPI. The head of Dial, the publisher, was named Richard Barron. Richard Barron called me into the office, and the condition on

which THE NEW YORKER MAGAZINE would serialize COMING OF AGE was that I cut out most of the mother-fucks and god-damns, and I said, "Are you kidding?"

SPENCER: That's not the culture.

MOODY: I said, "Are you kidding?"

What would my mother sound like without her "shits" - I mean that's so a part... I would destroy the total book if I did that.

He said, "Do you know what it means to get serialized in THE NEW YORKER?"

I said, "I don't care. I never heard of THE NEW YORKER before I came to New York."

I said, "I don't care about the New Yorker. I really don't care if it gets serialized or not. I care if it

maintains a certain integrity, you know what I mean, to my people, to my place, and to the people I know. Now that would just totally destroy the book."

Doctorow was beautiful and said, "She's right, Richard."

So I wouldn't do it for the LADIES HOME JOURNAL and THE NEW YORKER. The woman who reviewed it, (for the Ladies Home Journal;) she said we would do it, but... It's the most beautiful thing just as it is, and I don't think it should be touched, and I think it's going to be very successful without our serialization. I was talking about the black woman's book; it's raw, but I'm raw. I write a certain way on purpose. It is written in the manner in which it is written because...

SPENCER: It communicates...

MOODY: That's the way I felt was the best way to get the message across. I could turn it into a Hal Robbins. I could turn it into a Sidney Sheldon, but that's not me. You see what I mean?

I can sell being me; I've proven it. I have proven it. People will read what I write the way I want it, being myself on paper. I don't have to be anybody else; so that book is really...

The next book is called THE CLAY GULLY, and it's a novel. The clay gully actually was a gully, a clay gully, in back of my grandmother's house, and we would play in this clay gully every summer. Every year we'd go and play and make clay pots. So I used this as a setting for the novel, THE CLAY GULLY.

The next one is WHO NEEDS A MOUTH? It's a book that I've written, but it will take illustration. A friend of mine,

who's an illustrator in New York, is going to illustrate it. WHO NEEDS A MOUTH? is based upon the fact that I have a brother in Mississippi; he can't talk. When he was a young child, say 7 to 9 years old, my mother sent him to Philadelphia to relatives there. He fell off a table, the kitchen table, and bumped his head and something had happened, and he can't talk. So my mother sent him to Philadelphia to live with the relatives there from my stepfather. They are very refined type of people, never any cursing or anything, very quiet. So he had lived with them for a couple of years. The wife was a nurse, and she had taken him all over everywhere for tests trying to determine whether he could speak, ultimately talk and what the problem was.

Finally she brought him back to Mississippi to the house, and I used to

see him sitting, when Raymond was running through the house cursing. Oh, he would be looking, and I could see him saying, "Who needs a mouth? Who needs to talk if this is the shit that comes out of it." Actually this WHO NEEDS A MOUTH? is based upon my feelings. Actually, it's a totally different thing than what I just described to you, but this was the creative input that gave me this idea to do the MOUTH, and what I do is I do all abuses of the mouth.

The next book is the GIRAFFE BOOK, and that's a novel. I think the giraffe is the most beautiful animal in the world, and this book is about a woman who has a zoo. She went out to California, and she married this very, very rich man who cut down the redwoods, the redwoods of California. She married him, and he had a heart attack and died. Then she had all this money, but when she was married to him she collected animals. She wanted

to take these animals and bring them back to Mississippi and open up a zoo as a means of integrating. All people could come, the little black children, the little white children. Anybody would bring their child to see an animal in a zoo. This woman, who already has collected many animals, decides to do this. It's very interesting, so it's called my GIRAFFE BOOK because that's her favorite animal. The next book is APARTHEID AND WORSE IN THE MARSHALL ISLANDS. This is a book dealing with the nuclear issue. All the testing of the bomb, the weapons and things there.

SPENCER: I have the feeling you have become quite involved in the anti-nuclear movement.

MOODY: Well, no, in Europe I was never active in it. I only got involved when I came back to America.

SPENCER: Oh, really?

MOODY: Yes, only when I came back here, and I met people from the Marshall Islands, and that's how I know from what's going on. But I was never involved in Europe. I only was writing in Europe.

SPENCER: I just assumed ...

MOODY: No, here in America.

SPENCER: ...because you know with the Green party.

MOODY: No, here ... no, no, they were formed after I was back. They just were very recently in power. But never in Europe, I was never active in anything in Europe. I did a lot of speaking. I spoke at pen conferences because Heinrich Böll was once the international president of Pen, and whenever he put on conferences, I was there and speaking at these conferences as a writer but never

as a political activist. I was never politically active in Europe.

SPENCER: That was a period of rest.

MOODY: Yes.

SPENCER: Well, just briefly, what do you plan to do now? Your're busy with your books and ...

MOODY: I plan to get my books published and I plan to ....

SASHA: (Inaudible)

MOODY: I plan to get my books published, and I plan to occasionally to do things like I'm doing now. Go to Tougaloo College ...

SPENCER: We are really glad, too.

MOODY: That's what I plan to do.

SPENCER: What do you think about Mississippi? You haven't had a chance to see a whole lot of Jackson yet.

MOODY: No, even when I came back in 1975. This is the first time I've been in the city of Jackson, Mississippi, since 1964, so that's more than 20 years now, so it's very interesting. You promised to give me a little ride through downtown, and we were just in the capitol over there.

SPENCER: What did you think of the exhibits?

MOODY: I think it's wonderful. It's really a great idea. That in itself shows me that a lot of progress has been made.

SPENCER: Well, good. Well, do you have anything you want to add?

MOODY: No, I just think that I'm looking forward to going to Ole Miss tomorrow and seeing what's happening. This is

really a learning experience for me now. I've been away from the country for a long time. I feel I've come back to renew myself and to keep abreast of what's happening.

SPENCER: Sasha, do you have anything you want to say? What do you think about Mississippi? This is your first trip, or were you here in '76? You probably don't remember a whole lot though?

SASHA: No, ma'am. Well...

SPENCER: Was it what you expected? Is it different?

SASHA: Huh?

SPENCER: Is it what you expected? Mississippi?

SASHA: What? Now?

SPENCER: The people? The place?

SASHA: No, I expected it to be a lot more racial overtones still.

MOODY: And why did you expect that?

SASHA: Why are you asking me questions? She did that in front of the TV...

MOODY: OK, he prefer that you do it.

SPENCER: Why did you expect that? Do you think its media indoctrination? That Mississippi has a bad name outside of the state? Why Mississippians?

SASHA: Probably.

SPENCER: That the media gives a one-sided picture of the state?

MOODY: That's what I'm saying. That's why when COMING OF AGE was written, and it didn't give just the bad side; that it was unique.

SPENCER: And when you were pointing out, very strongly, to the people at CBS, about the white lady from Vicksburg that had demonstrated her support for you; that those people were here then.

MOODY: And even before that, when I was a little girl growing up, they were helping me. They were in the minority by far, but still there were decent ones, and we survived, and I am as smart as I am because of that old lady, and I'm a writer probably today with that ability to push a pencil because she turned me on to stories. My mother couldn't.

SPENCER: Captured you.

MOODY: Yes. There are bad; there's good, and the good people must continue to stand up and have their say, and do their thing in order to counter the negative.

SPENCER: I think that's a good place to stop.