

**ORAL HISTORY T-0016**  
**INTERVIEW WITH DEVERNE CALLOWAY**  
**INTERVIEWED BY IRENE CORTINOVIS**  
**BLACK COMMUNITY LEADERS PROJECT**  
**SEPTEMBER 9, 1971**

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This is Irene Cortinovis of the University of Missouri-St. Louis Archive and Manuscript Division. This morning, September 9, 1971, I have with me Mrs. Deverne Calloway, who is a State Representative from St. Louis District, and Mrs. Calloway is making a tape for us for our Oral History Project. The first few feet on the tape of what Mrs. Calloway said is a little bit inaudible, so I will just briefly recap a few sentences. She ..told us that she was born in Memphis, Tennessee. Her father worked for the railroad in the roundhouse, and they were very poor...money was really hard to come by. And along with this, she belonged to a very religious family. But she began early to question this connection between the deep religion felt by her parents and the actual material conditions under which the family lived. After that, then, the tape is all intact as she made it.

MRS. CALLOWAY: So, the two brothers and myself got a pretty good orientation in terms of taking care of the things that children could take care of. We helped with the family laundry. I had certain cooking days when I was in grammar school. I even started out on a day which I prepared the meal according to my whim and fancy. Sometimes the family was very hard put to figure out what they were eating, but I was permitted to do this and serve whatever I wanted and fix whatever I wanted...this is in grammar school! And, then, later on in high school, I really took over most of the preparation of the food for the most part every evening.

CORTINOVIS: You were born in Memphis?

CALLOWAY: Yes, I was born in Memphis. And the family was deeply religious in the sense that all of us went to church. And, of course, we went to church on Saturday, which is what the Seventh Day Adventists call the Sabbath. My father was a church elder, and I spent practically the whole Saturday in church from about the time, well, I could just begin to read... until I got up in high school, and began questioning some of the practices of the Seventh Day Adventists and found out that they were not compatible to the things I was running into with my friends. So then I began to go to church on Sunday. For about four years, I went to church on Saturday with the family, and then went to church on Sunday with my friends in order to conform. And, of course, all of that...we had a meager existence... but I would call it a happy existence, because of the effort put forth by my mother and the father to see that we had just about everything that a child needs; that is, in terms of the comforts. We had adequate shoes and clothing, and we had food and we had shelter, and some of the little joys that come around Christmas time and holidays. So, I would say that I had a very happy childhood creature-wise, of creature-comforts, but in terms of philosophy, I very early

began to question and to have doubts, serious doubts, about this deep religious devotion that my father had, because I could not see a payoff. In other words, he worked very hard and he went to church all day, but he still had a lot of mean things happening to him because he was black. I could never relate this. I just couldn't get ready for a total commitment to a religion that didn't seem to have any practical payoff. So, I began a sort of search, I suppose, into the whole "why" of religion...and in high school, I began delving and reading into the, oh, in Buddhism to the Jewish faith, and to all kinds of religious books, trying to find out...because at that time, I was relating ail of this irrelevancy to the Seventh Day Adventists. And I just figured it was something they had worked out, and it was rather foolish, in my mind, that we could be so devout and give so much attention to faith and God, and then have all the trials and tribulations that went along with a growing family. So, I became what my father considered a rebel, and he and I used to have some very serious discussions on it. And, of course, when I got to college, I completely broke with the whole pattern of religious behavior in terms of going to church. I stopped going, and I substituted for the religious training... for the religious service, I got involved in community things. One of my very earliest participations in college was to join...I can't remember the house...but it was in the nature of a settlement house. And I volunteered to join this staff. I was a college student, but I faithfully went there every evening after school to work for under-privileged youngsters and to teach them crafts. Fortunately, I always had a knack and a gift with hands. So, I was teaching the youngsters how to sew, how to weave, to do basket work and other arts. But this was my substitution for the religion that I felt was failing. So, I would think about two years of my college life, I spent, as an extra-curricular type of thing, in the settlement house. And, then, it was about the period of time when the southern tenant farmers were mobilizing and organizing themselves. I don't know whether you've heard of it, but sharecroppers were having a...I think within the whole area of agricultural workers... there was something of a revolution going on...and...

CORTINOVIS: About what year was this?

CALLOWAY: This would have been in, well, it would have to have been in the thirties. I finished college in '38. So, it had to have been around '35, '36, '37.

CORTINOVIS: Where was this?

CALLOWAY: This was Memphis. I went to college in Memphis at a school called Le Moyne.-it is now Le Moyne-Owens, but it was then Le Moyne Institute and became a college. It's operated by the Congregationalists. And we had on that college campus a wealth of training, because for the most part, the teachers were selected from throughout the country. We had very few local people teaching. We had teachers from the New England area, teachers from New York, teachers from Washington. And so we had a very good...I think, an extraordinary background in terms of ideology. Through the effort of one of these professors, I became interested in helping to work with the southern tenant farmers. Of course, Mississippi and Arkansas are very close to Memphis and, therefore, we had the spillover of the people coming in. Memphis sometimes is referred to as the capital of three states, because Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee are butted together there about where the Mississippi River passes Memphis. So, I did get involved in that and through that...I consider that became my first social awareness of a vast difference in the economic life the people around me. Up until that time, I had more or less taken for granted that people had jobs, that they worked,

and that they were able to relate to the world around them, because they had a regular job, a place to be employed, and a place where they could weekly get an income. Then, I found out that the sharecroppers were only paid...or they only made money... when the crop came in, and most times, if the crops were bad or if there were some other adversities, then, they didn't get anything. So this, to me, was also, I guess, a traumatic experience. And, so, about then, I thought I was going to just stick with this until I could see some headway in terms of having a decent way to live. Of course, I didn't... beyond the point of working with the sharecroppers... and when I say working, it was attending meetings, getting leaflets out, and traveling around with a man who had come down from the East to organize them.

CORTINOVIS: Was this a volunteer job?

CALLOWAY: This was volunteer and, as I said, this did not last beyond finishing college, because then, once I finished school, it became a question of employment. And I had a mind to try to find out..."What's going on in the rest of the world?" And I never wanted to see myself as finishing college and getting a job in Memphis teaching and continuing there. I had burning yen to find out what was going on everywhere else. So, I took employment out of Memphis. My first teaching job was down in Georgia...a place called "Cedartown"... not too far from Atlanta. I had in mind, at that time, completing my education by getting a Master's. I was a sociology and English major, and I had just about then decided that I would go ahead and get the Master's in English. But my inclinations and my interests began to be sociological. So, the teaching experience there in Georgia was the first time that I had ever been away from home... ever lived away from home... and there, I got a chance to really see the deep South. I had lived South all my life, but I had never been in the deep South. And I thought that there was something terrible, and I became quite militant, in terms of my reaction, and was constantly having confrontations with the authorities, the board of education, the superintendent, and some of the local store people. At that time, black people couldn't try on shoes or clothing. If they wanted to purchase them, they could just come in, point to them, pay their money and get out. And I became very militant about that, as I said,... constantly taking on somebody and causing friction. It was all a personal matter, because nobody else was paying any attention to this, and the people just figured that I was some sort of a crackpot. Sooner or later, the superintendent of schools, told me that I was alien to that community, and I was having a difficult time adjusting and he would suggest that, for the happiness for everybody concerned, maybe I had better find somewhere else to teach the following year. So I did. I didn't seek a renewal of my contract. I decided to go into other areas. Of course, from that experience, I still wanted to learn, so I accepted a scholarship which carried me up to Pennsylvania to a Quaker school called "Pendle Hill," because at that time, I was still deeply concerned about the very different phases of the religious life, and I still had a burning concern to try to give up the Protestant faith which I had been brought up in and to find out exactly where this thing had gone wrong, in my opinion. So, I went up to Pendle Hill, which is a religious school, and I studied all that summer some further religious courses. That, I think, was possibly the turning point, because after I had this experience in studying there at Pendle Hill, I found out that the Seventh Day Adventists' group that I had been so critical of and I had broken with, were hardly any different from any of the rest. So, I just decided that I would have to find another way to express my religious tendencies, and it developed that I would do that by way of working with people and seeking to help them find some better adjustment to whatever life they might find difficulty in. Now, then, about that time. World War I was declared, because I remember I was in Philadelphia and...

CORTINOVIS: World War II, you mean?

CALLOWAY: Yes, World War II...I'm sorry...! was just born a little before World War I. But, World War II was declared, and I had gone to Philadelphia and started working with a lawyer who was also a judge. And he was a judge who had to be elected, and that was my first brush with politics and campaigning. I was doing secretarial work for him, but in the course of that, I often found it necessary to attend meetings with him to help him prepare speeches for groups, and to get related to the methods and techniques that he used to get himself elected. So that was my first brush with politics, back there in Philadelphia in about 1940...well, it was '40, because '41 was when we were brought into the war. So, I was on my way...the day of Pearl Harbor...on my way to his home on a Sunday morning, because he had a siege of gout. And I was on my way to his house to help him get a speech prepared for a political meeting that would be coming up that following week. And from that point on, of course...

CORTINOVIS: Is this a black judge?

CALLOWAY: Uh, huh, he was a black judge. And, I suppose, that that was my beginning as far as politics... in terms of the techniques... because I learned how to relate to his precinct workers, to set up meetings for him, and to... uh...really, just fell right in, and sort of felt that I'd stay right there in Philadelphia and try to get into politics myself. It fascinated me. So, now, I suppose, you want to get to what happened.

CORTINOVIS: Yes, you were working for this judge, and this was your first taste of politics, and then...how long did you work for him?

CALLOWAY: I worked for him better than a year. But as I said, then War came, of course, then everybody was, oh, greatly taken up in terms of the war. You know, it was a major catastrophe in a sense and a major occupation. And I met through the judge a very dynamic woman. Recently, I see she was cited by the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority...she's an attorney by the name of Sadie Alexander... and she and her husband both are lawyers. They were, I would say, some of the most dynamic... two of the most dynamic people...in Philadelphia fighting for civil rights and projecting in terms of the black man's fight. Raymond Pace Alexander was his name and Sadie Alexander was hers. And they were sort of, I guess, you would call guiding lights. They related to me. They were glad to see me interested in politics and civil rights. And, I think that, perhaps, if I had stayed there, I might have entered the political scene, because they were both involved, though not elected, people. They were both involved in the political scene. The war diverted me to the extent that underneath all this deep concern for people, I always in my years earlier had a deep yen to get around and see what made people tick...and whether they ticked in one place like they did in another. So, it was a travel bug, I guess you would call it, and possibly...! don't know...an effort to escape certain things I felt were wrong...to go to see if, maybe, there was somewhere else, something better. So, I joined the Red Cross. First, I joined the U.S.O. to find out if I could relate to men and if I could handle myself and do the work that was related to military people. So I did a stint in Philadelphia with the U.S.O., and all the exciting idea of traveling...! got myself assigned and volunteered to go out to Arizona with the U.S.O. After I found out that I could relate and I could work, and I didn't buckle, I was able to hold myself together as a woman and still work

with the forces...with the military people... then I decided I'd volunteer and I travel and go abroad, because I couldn't see myself ever being able to afford any abroad travel. So, I volunteered to go...to the American Red Cross. I didn't realize when I did this that they always made you give your history...in terms of where you came from...and, I, of course, had come from the South and was adjusted to a warm climate. I really had wanted to get into a European theater, but in evaluating my record...realizing that I was from the South...and having been acclimatized to warmness...in addition to having a brother in the European theater and one in the South Pacific...the powers that be thought to send me to India. And, so, if I had been as wise as I am now, I would not have mentioned the brothers' locale, because they try not to send the Red Cross personnel into any field where they had relatives or possibly husbands. So...I don't know why...but that was the policy...but that's what happened, and that, of course, occupied my time for about 1943, '44...and I stayed there in India until the war was...well, it was not ended, but a declaration was declared in the European theater.

CORTINOVIS: That was in '45...June, 1945.

CALLOWAY: '45...well, it took a little time to get us back, so something about '46... because they just couldn't...just break you down, and haul off and send everybody back at once. But, I had some very interesting experiences in India which were all mainly on the racial...because there we had a very strange situation in regard to black and white soldiers. I was assigned to Calcutta, and assigned with a number of Negro girls and women, to a black club...and there was a white club for the white soldiers. And some of the black GI's took exception to this, and this, of course, carried over to the feelings of the Red Cross girls. And the thing that really burned the black soldiers up...and they were all very angry about... was the American forces built a fabulous swimming pool for GI's in Calcutta, and they decided that there would be a big celebration and opening and dedication of this swimming pool on the 4th of July. They decided that they would let the black soldiers and black Red Cross personnel celebrate the opening of this pool on the third of July and, of course, the GI's were angry...they decided they would not respond to this and, of course, being with them, the Red Cross girls decided they wouldn't participate. So, what was supposed to have been a ceremony, developed into a pure fizzle and, of course, the Red Cross personnel were very disturbed, because this meant that we had disobeyed rules and regulations that had been set up. And they had quite a set-to with us...and I was considered the leader of this rebellious reaction. In order to try to placate me, they suggested... in order to prove to me that they did not have a pattern of discrimination in the Red Cross...that they were merely following the military plans... and that they worked with the military... they detached me from the club where I worked and fit me in a...I suppose...a higher post. It was a higher post, in terms of the pay, within the American Red Cross office where there were no blacks working. And, of course, this was their way of saying they were not discriminatory. None of the charges we made, of course, had been against the Red Cross, we had plenty of Indians, always, but no chiefs in regards to Red Cross personnel. So they decided...well, okay, we'll make you a chief. This, of course, rubbed against my grain, and it separated me in daily activities from the other women...black women...who were in the Red Cross. All of us had demanded that- we be sent home. There were about ten of us. And, of course, they could not do that, because of regulations of travel which had to be done by the military. The most they could do was to continue to employ us, and hope they could get us back on the ship that would get us out of there on an early date. Consequently, when the war was over, we were among the first to be sent home, because we had been demanding that we be sent back home. It was a voluntary thing, and if you asked to

be sent home, they would send you back at the earliest military convenience. So, that was very interesting, because that was my really first confrontation...although I had been waging some little battles, individually, against racism and against prejudices and discriminations. This was the first time I had ever participated in a group reaction, too...! guess, it would be aimed at confronting and fighting a force. It was, in the end, very frustrating, because the other people... once they found out that there were difficulties and...difficulties were placed in our path...in terms of facilities, in changing us around where we lived, and everything... then, the others sort of got cold feet.

CORTINOVIS: Did you consider this harassment?

CALLOWAY: It was not done in the method of harassment... it was all done in the name of trying to placate us for the grievances that we had presented. Having told us that the Red Cross couldn't do anything about the military, what they did was allegedly begin to try, individually, to make us more comfortable. "Actually what it really...I mean in terms of our assignment... we had made charges about the type of equipment that we had...was second grad to the equipment of the other club, but our living facilities and all those kind of things...by breaking the group up...actually what was really happening was...they were detaching us from the relationship with the GI's because among the GI's...now, what was happening was...they were attempting to detach the Red Cross girls, the black Red Cross girls...to detach and separate them from the black GI's. I guess I ought to tell you about the GI's club there. The recreation clubs there were run by the Red Cross...were for the purpose of providing wholesome recreation, and some services for the American men. We would help fellows who had problems back home and write letters...we had scheduled hours in...we would arrange, for instance, on a big scale...parties and dances...try to relate to the local women in the community who- would participate with such things. We would arrange tours for them...these were really for men on leave...to help them have some wholesome outlet on their leave time. Most of the men who were serving in the China-Burma India...who were serving that theater... were up the road... what they called the "Burma Road"...came into Calcutta on rest leaves, and sometimes on sick leave while finishing a term in a hospital. We had a couple hospital bases around in that vicinity. And so what the Red Cross did mostly was listen. In the morning there... about ten, eleven o'clock... we would find four or five GI's drifting in...Red Cross girls would be available to play ping pong, to play checkers, to eat breakfast at the canteen there, to serve them breakfast and, hopefully, it would be closer to the type of food they got at home. We had fresh eggs, and they could have eggs...which they didn't have in the service... which were powdered eggs for the most part. And, so, it was the Red Cross' policy to attempt what they called "the home away from home." Sometimes, even like mending... a guy would bring in his coat and say his button was off. He could do this, but he liked the idea of a woman doing it. And, of course, we planned tours out into the area, and we'd get trucks and we'd take fifteen, twenty guys out sight-seeing, and we'd come back with refreshments. In other words, it was kind of like a babysitting job.

CORTINOVIS: I think you enjoyed this job.

CALLOWAY: I enjoyed this job, but it was the disturbance that came when the GI's began relating their problems with the racism. You see, when they began complaining to us about problems that they were having and, then, of course, when they resisted on this business of the swimming pool, well, then, it just seemed that there was nothing more left that we could

do than absolutely refuse. This is really what happened. They couldn't refuse to do anything, because they were under their military orders. But, well, they could refuse, but they could get grave punishment. We could refuse, and so we refused. This is what really happened on the swimming pool deal. Black Red Cross women refused to participate in the ceremony that the blacks were supposed to have. By our refusing, there was no ceremony. Of course, as I said, we were doing this mainly because we could do it, and the GI's couldn't. And, of course, I resented it also, but personally, none of us had any grievances, as far as racism by the Red Cross... except that we were set in a separate club, and we found on several visits... that we were able to make going to the supply room....that we did get...well, I guess, that was the politics of the game...that the person that was running the white club was able to get ping pong balls more frequently when the ship would bring in some. Supplies were at a minimum at our club... whereas at the white club, they were never...we were constantly borrowing and going over there to get something. I figured this was the politics that went with whoever was running the club. That they just knew how to pull certain strings and get supplies. But, personally, Red Cross girls did not have any discomfort. We had ample and adequate and equal to what the white Red Cross girls had. But our big problem was relating to those black GI's... listening and trying to understand what their problems were...and that was really the key to the whole explosion. It did not get too much press... although we wrote back... a couple of the papers did indicate... and we had some black reporters there, and they sent back some stories on it. But it was the pattern during that time... during the war...to minimize any racial outburst, any reactions... so it was really a tiny explosion...in relation to the problem that existed. And a couple of GI's, of course, were squared out...sent away...because they were considered to have been the real ring leaders in having fomented this rebellious act...that is, not obeying the plan...not following the plan that had been set up.

CORTINOVIS: In the light of your experience, it is probably interesting for you to read the experience with the Army now, because we don't hear much about racial discrimination or resentment during World War II...but there's a lot in the papers now.

CALLOWAY: Yes, well, see...during the war time this was suppressed. There were many incidents relating to the GI's I could...oh, possibly, if I had the time... relate incident after incident which occurred in the States before these men were sent abroad. Where, for example, at Camp Hood...there was a tank destroyer company, mainly black men, who...and the town had been... this is Ft. Hood, Texas ....the town had been somewhat unkind to blacks when they went in. And there was an occasion when the company of tank destroyers carried a lot of tanks into town...I mean, they rode them into town...for the purpose of razing the town! And, yes, I mean, they were just going to destroy the town! They did quite a bit of damage...it happened they were suppressed...and the company was moved out within an hour, as it happened. And they came to Arizona where I was then, but then they were under some sort of strict regulations of not getting out of that post...and they shipped them straight overseas. But there were many incidents of a rebellious nature by the black GI's, but they were, as I said...because of war time, those things were suppressed.

CORTINOVIS: So your experience working with the sharecroppers, and then working with the judge and going into Calcutta with the Red Cross, these were putting you in training to be an activist.

CALLOWAY: Now, I have to tell you that all this time, I was taking copious notes. I mean,

making diaries, keeping notes, because by this time, it was coming into my mind that the one big thing that I could do to contribute to society to solve any and all of these problems was to write the great book... the great novel which would somehow tie up all of these relations and put these things together. Another thing that happened to me in India, I found out the Indians were in a hell of a lot worse shape than the blacks... in terms of their economic conditions...because there they had the caste system. It was just beginning to be outlawed. And there was a man by the name of Ambedkar, I believe, who led the fight to try...and, of course, there was Gandhi...who had started a whole movement to eliminate the caste system in India. But the caste system was far more vicious than war. Well, if there's evil at all, I don't think that you can say that one evil is worse than another, but... physically... the caste system was even, I think, more physically damaging to those persons who were of low caste than the situation that the blacks had lived in...I would say.

CORTINOVIS: Even more constricting and degrading, yes.

CALLOWAY: When I say "physically"...! mean, the fact that they starved on the street in sight of people... with no one giving them food. I don't think that even in the slavery conditions, you had that kind of physical depravation, because it was to the advantage of the slave owner to keep the slaves fairly healthy, in a sense. I mean...they might not have had what they wanted nutrition-wise ... or needed, nutrition-wise...but they would not starve. But in the caste system, a low caste Indian could be lying in the street dying, and upper caste people would just walk around him or even step on him. This was something... I mean, that experience had an effect on me...and made me a little less bitter...a little less bitter, in terms of the plight of the blacks. 'Cause I could see here...where we got problems...but here was a problem that was equally as bad and there was apparently no movement going except that of Gandhi to try to do anything about it. The poor man was listless and so ill-fed, that he just lay down and died. And I saw many bodies, many bodies, on the street debilitating, deteriorating...people that were still alive but all they could do was to raise their hand to make a gesture asking for some help. GI's were, of course, very generous with these people and were constantly pitching them —the lowest common denominator of money there was...the ana (?)...which was considered a penny - but the GI's were constantly giving them anas and, of course, other Red Cross people never failed to give money to these people who were in the street... dying. Well that...I brought that in to say that I had been making all these copious notes and I was going back to the States, and I was somehow going to put all this down in one great book that was going to be something I guess that was going to revolutionize the whole pattern of treatment of people by the upper class, of course. But, there again, you see, is another story... because I never did write the great novel!

CORTINOVIS: Do you still have the notes?

CALLOWAY: I still have some of them. But, later on in Chicago, I did start when I got back from New York. And, then, I went to Chicago, and I began to do a lot of writing. And then, I began again to take care of myself. I began writing professionally and trying' to work on the novel in odd hours. I was working with a magazine professionally.

CORTINOVIS: What magazine was that?

CALLOWAY: Well, it was called "Our World"...it was the forerunner, really, to "Ebony"...it



was done out of New York...it was a pictorial-story magazine. And the job that I had was to seek a story with a photographer and feed it to "Our World" magazine. Subsequently, "Our World" went out of business because the publisher... he got a little too lavish and began spending more time in the islands and flirting around than he was giving to his work...and of course, paper was a great problem at that time...but the magazine did survive the war.

CORTINOVIS: This was '46, '47.

CALLOWAY: This was '46, '47 and '48. And, of course, by this time, I began working in a secretarial capacity...this was where I always earned money...as a typist... and, at that time, did some shorthand. So, this was how I met Ernest Calloway. I went to his union to work. And it was just a part-time thing where they needed some extra secretarial work... and then, I began to get involved with him and his union-organizing work.

CORTINOVIS: Was this the Redcap?

CALLOWAY: This was the Redcaps. I went to work temporarily there.

CORTINOVIS: I have listened to the tape Mr. Calloway made.

CALLOWAY: That's the point when I ran into him. I was trying to do the writing and, of course, it was not a very lucrative income, and so in order to augment that, I would do bookkeeping for some firm on a temporary basis. And this opening...I don't recall who it was that led me to this...but I worked there for a period of several months, and then he and I met at that point. I think the most striking thing that I can recall about him was the great turmoil in his office. He had papers and books...and I decided the greatest thing that I could do for this man...I wasn't working for him...I was working for another fellow there in that union...the greatest thing that I could do for him would be to clean up. And that's how we met...because he wanted to know who in the hell had come in there and messed up his office! I had organized it to the nth degree. So, it was from that that he and I met and, of course, subsequently we married. But, in the meanwhile, I had not related in Chicago in that period...I had not related to any of the civil rights efforts or anything. Because at this time, I was in the process of trying to get on with the writing. So, I went to the meetings... but it was all more on an observer level participating level on anything at all on civil rights or any kind of protest...as I said, I didn't get involved in that. Only I did...as I recall...I did register to vote, because I felt it was very important always to vote. Somehow or other, I had come to the conclusion that all this relating that I had been doing to the NAACP and the various organizations that the big payoff, really, had to come through participation in politics. But, in Chicago, I didn't do any of that relating to it, because...as I said...I was trying to write then.

CORTINOVIS: Did you belong to the NAACP at that time?

CALLOWAY: Yes, I always belong and supported them financially. As I said, I didn't go to meetings and participate actively.

CORTINOVIS: Were there any other organizations that you belonged to as long as that.

CALLOWAY: No, the NAACP is the oldest one that, as far as permanence is concerned...during the period that I was teaching down there in the South, I related to the

effort to get the teachers' salaries equalized. At that time, black teachers were not earning the same money in the South as white. And so there was an organization at that time...and now I don't recall it... but it was a teaching group, and they were working to equalize the salaries. I belonged to that and I used to run over to Birmingham, Alabama, and make speeches and this and that, but I was relating at all times. These were really militant... way-out organizations ... they were doing something so daring as to take on the fight to equalize teachers' salaries and organize tenant farmers and that kind of thing. So, but those were temporary relations for me, because of my mobility. In other words, I'd relate to a group in one city, and in about a year or so, I'd be gone on to another. So after the war intervened, I didn't relate to anything at all, and I came out because I was trying to dig in with the writing...and you just can't write and run to a lot of meetings. You've got to sit somewhere and stay with the typewriter. So that is what happened...but then, of course, Calloway and I got married, and then my relationship really began to dovetail with his... and his, of course, was union. Of course, he got a scholarship to go away to school and while he was gone, I worked at a full-time job.

CORTINOVIS: Was this when he went to New York?

CALLOWAY: No, this was when he went to England.

CORTINOVIS: This was after you were married he went to England?

CALLOWAY: Yeah, I encouraged him to go, because he had the scholarship and the opportunity to go.

CORTINOVIS: What year was that?

CALLOWAY: This must have been '46...no, no couldn't have been '46...must have been '48 and '49. We got married in '48, and then he went the following year...must have been '49.

CORTINOVIS: So...when did you come to St. Louis?

CALLOWAY: When he came back from England. He was offered an opportunity... and I'm sure he's told you all about it...to come down here and see whether he could find this a challenge... to work with Harold Gibbons. He knew Gibbons. So he came here in '50, and for awhile, I stayed there in Chicago working...because, as I said...I had sort of gotten a full-time job and that was not so exciting. I was working with the Health Department... working in records. But it was a financial situation. I had a certain goal in mind in terms of a certain amount of money I wanted to save and a certain amount of getting ahead. I wanted to get back to the writing, so I stayed with the job. But when he came here and liked it...then, of course, I moved here. And it was with that that I really began to participate in things, because when I came here, I wasn't employed, and I had lots of time. That's how I really threat myself into NAACP and politics from that point on in '50. And it moved from just volunteer effort. I can remember when Averill Harriman and Adlai Stevenson were candidates ... who were potential presidents ... and I would volunteer and go down to where there were offices and places they had working here...in St. Louis...and worked on those. And I worked for Stevenson as a volunteer... for Averill Harriman, as a volunteer... and I had letters and some documents, you know, coming from both men, because I was a volunteer worker.

CORTINOVIS: You've always been a Democrat?

CALLOWAY: Yes, I always went Democratic in Chicago. In Philadelphia, the people I worked with were Republican. But I never did...first, I never had the residency there to become a voter and then by the time I had the register, I mean...the residency...although I was working there...I was not a voter, but I was working with the Republicans while I was in Philadelphia.

CORTINOVIS: So what about the really local politics... that is, the ward politics... city politics?

CALLOWAY: Well, it suddenly occurred when Calloway became president of the NAACP and I helped him to gather much of his figures and facts...figures relating to the black community. It just suddenly became very, I would say, it hit us like some kind of a bombshell... that here are all these blacks in the City of St. Louis with the potential to participate in politics and without the interest. So, we decided...we'll see if we can stimulate this... surely along the way, there must be some method by which you can get people to come out of their shell o" apathy and get involved. So, then it became a challenge to the two of us...how we could go about involving people and getting them aware of their potential in politics and getting them worked up to the point to give a little time and substitute for the money that is usually required...substitute a little of their own energies and initiative for the lack of funds...so that became a real challenge. That, eventually lead me into becoming an elected person, because I had worked through the black communities in trying to mobilize people to support candidates to the extent that...I could see that somebody's got to do this, you know... in other words, somebody ought to seek an elective post... somebody ought to go to Jefferson City. We had a couple of black representatives, but for the most part, the community wasn't really aware of the role that the legislature should play. And because one of these guys was ill .and wasn't going to run again...making a vacancy...and I had worked with some people and they suggested..."Why don't you seek out this?" Up until that point, I never really thought of myself in St. Louis as being an elected person, because I was, in a sense, a newcomer, and I thought this would be a hurdle to overcome... because although I had worked very hard, there were many people in the city who had related to the Democratic Party much closer and longer than I had. And I had never related on a local political level. I had always been on a level of helping some candidate for president, or candidate for the senate...! had never worked on a ward level with the ward people. I was an independent force...at least, I had always worked with an independent force...and you needed some organized force to make certain that you had enough votes...unless you wanted to get out and organize as a total organization to support you. But, fortunately, my committeeman of the 18th ward had been a regular politician for years...but was also related to independent efforts in terms of black candidates. So, he was willing to support me, and through him, he was able to get others in the political arena...the established politicians... and I'm referring now, of course, to Jack Dwyer, who was the committeeman of the ward in which I lived. And when I first ran, I had to run through four wards. And through the efforts of Senator McNeal, whom I had worked very hard to help get elected to the Senate on an independent level...then he had some powers of persuasion, and he was able to get some support for me. I had a tough fight, because there were other women in the city who felt that they deserved this, and in way, I felt, maybe, they did, too.

CORTINOVIS: What year was this?

CALLOWAY: This was 1962...that was my first time to get elected. So, I was somewhat a reluctant candidate...but a willing one...you know. In other words, these women had announced that they were seeking office, but they were not compatible to political forces that my husband and I had been associated with. They really wanted him to run, and he said, "Take my wife, because I don't have the time and I wouldn't be interested in going."

QORTINOVIS: This was 1962 when you ran for State Representative... that was the really first time you ever ran for an office?

CALLOWAY: Yes, that was the first.

CORTINOVIS: That's interesting. Well, let's talk a little bit about things you've been interested in up in Jefferson City. What do you think has been your contribution up there?

CALLOWAY: Well, see, I started out campaigning that my concern was going to be the social concerns and the education. So, I right away asked to get on the education committee., and I've remained on that...this is going into my fifth term...and I felt that I made some contribution there, in the fact that there have been a lot of changes in the financing policy...as far as St. Louis is concerned...since I went up there in 1962. And I could not and would not even try to take all the credit for this, but I worked very hard in terms of changing the method by which we get our funds.-.we have some complicated patterns, formulas and methods of funding in parceling out state aid. We didn't ...when I went up there...give the City of St. Louis any money for kindergartens from the state and, of course, now...we do. And I worked on that. I tried to get the message over to the other legislators when we had a vote and showed them how necessary this was. They had...out state...felt that this was a super babysitting job and..."Why should anybody have a kindergarten and then, again, if they want to have one, why should the State of Missouri have to pay for it? So...it was kind of a selling job, in a sense. I worked real hard on this. We were successful in getting funds for the kindergartens, changing the flat grant... the amount of the flat grant... the percentage of anticipated enrollment increased...in other words, we used to be able to go to the state and tell them we anticipate an enrollment of 10%, and we could get a certain percent of the money based on that. We increased that type of thing. In other words, I call myself an advocate of the urban area. Of course, back in the welfare area, I worked very hard to interpret that... the needs of the welfare people...and wherever there was threat and danger... The disabled and handicapped people are going to get a cut which we'll have to fight very hard for to get that money. I've worked in fields with the whites. When I went up, we didn't have public accommodations in the State of Missouri, and we got busy on that... trying to get the state to adopt a fair employment law...which it has. But I did not handle that, because I was a freshman...new and green...and I didn't go in to handle anything, but I did get busy...in terms of trying to sell this to other legislators and trying to get the back-of-the-scenes work. The work of a legislature requires a lot of back-of-the-scenes work to get anything made into a law. So, it's one thing to introduce a bill and wave it about, and it's another thing to really get in there and spend hours selling the men in the other parts of the state on the need for your particular piece of legislation. I did get one law passed and enacted. It happened to do with regulating the hours. While we have a regulatory law for the work hours for women per week, telephone operators didn't come under this, so they gave me this hot potato to handle. I was able to get this passed, and it was signed. I merely mentioned that...that was the only bill that I've handled that I got passed by both houses and signed by the Governor. Also, I

introduced the fair housing bill for the State of Missouri, and I did this for two sessions running, and then the Federal Government entered the scene, and some federal legislation was passed about housing and I got really lukewarm about it. That leaves it to the Federal Government, because the whole idea of having one on the Missouri level would be to put the machinery of the administration into Missouri hands and, in my own thinking, although it's a longer route, I would be satisfied with Federal intervention rather than bringing it to Missouri. So, I became lukewarm about housing. The only reason I would be interested at all in a Missouri...to get one passed... would be to make it stronger. I couldn't see any depth in the legislature of concern that would guarantee any stronger law locally from the state than the one the Federal Government had passed. So, I really just sort of... I introduced it...but another legislator introduced one that was not quite the way mine was, and we butted heads there at a certain point. In time, it caught up with us, and they were both lost. So...they were both on the same subject. I have had other concerns in terms of legislation and that is in regarding appropriations for Lincoln University and, of course, our own Harris Teachers. There's always a danger at the last minute when funds are being allocated that you're going to get short-changed somewhere in an area that concerns the blacks. So, we always stay on guard, and we've had to go into action at the last minute several times to save cuts, or to prevent cuts in programs that were vital either to the city or to the schools ...or to the schools...or to some program where the major benefactors are black. That has been a concern of mine.

CORTINOVIS: What committees have you been on?

CALLOWAY: My main committee has been education... and also insurance, which is a concern, but I haven't been able to get the depth into that committee. Insurance is such a complex field, and I've only served on that two sessions. I've been vice-chairman of the accounts committee which takes care of all spending of the House...and that one is kind of a responsibility. I have been on elections, but I only served one term on that. It was a sort of a dull committee, because it had not had too much affecting the urban area coming before it. So...I also have been on the state-federal relations committee, chairman of that, but it also was one that had limited number of bills coming before it. In the legislature, beyond the point of legislation, my biggest concern has been to do whatever I could do to weld the black delegation together. We start out frequently in the sessions with a firm commitment to a caucus on staying on top of the problems that affect the black community and, somewhere along the line, we sort of lose the initial enthusiasm because of the number of bills that come along. So, I have tried to be a catalyst. I have tried, as a woman, not to take a dominant role in leadership in this black caucus, because I have found that...in my experience in the black community...one of the biggest problems we have is a tendency...on the part of one or more persons...to want to be sort of a prima Dona and take the ball and run with it in a way that will get them the utmost and greatest amount of publicity. And that truly affected the outcome of the situation. So, possibly, I have played too low a key in my role, because I never wanted my individuality or my personality to transcend the issue. And, possibly, this has served to limit me, in a sense, in some things that I might have been able to get done. I have always done this on purpose and a great sacrifice of discipline to myself. If I see a man who seems like he has the potential, I'd prefer to support him and do everything I can to pull all the people around him...continuing to support him...if it means we can achieve in this fashion. In this fashion, the blacks were able to get a Congressional District drawn which would permit us to elect a black Congressman. It entailed a great fight in the legislature to

get these lines drawn to the advantage of the blacks. And in that particular situation, I considered that I played a major role...one that I could not take too much public credit for...because much of it was strictly holding the guys together and keeping one from knifing the other... which is, sad to say, one of our biggest problems. If we elect a leader, then surely, one or two others are going to try to work to do everything they can to diminish his leadership. And my role has been to always try to cut through all of that unnecessary animosity which is engendered whenever one seems to be getting a little bit more publicity than the other.

CORTINOVIS: Now you're speaking of the Second Congressional...

CALLOWAY: Of the First Congressional... in other words, the Clay district.

CORTINOVIS: The Clay district... what do you think is going to happen to that district now?

CALLOWAY: It is very difficult now for me to make any kind of assessment on this. We were able in the House to get a maximum support for our district that Clay could get elected from, but our real trouble on this district appears to stem from the Senate side. There, out of 34 people, we only have 2 blacks...and the leverage there... over on the Senate side... is not as strong as it is on the House... where we have 13 blacks, all Democrats. And I am not abreast now to what is going on. What happened was ...we reached a stalemate in the session...and it was my understanding that a court effort was going to be made to force the legislature to do its job. Some suits have been filed...which means that when we go back in January, we'll have to start all over again to try to get this district set up. Then, on the other hand, if we don't...and it becomes imminent that we don't, the court will have to do it...and it is difficult. I can't see how the State of Missouri... the leaders, the political leaders... could afford to draw a district that wouldn't permit a black to be elected. But stranger things than that have happened! It's very hopeful that the political leadership...whether this be done in the House in the legislature, rather by the court...that they will see the wisdom...because it is strictly a question as to which direction you take these lines. The only thing required by the constitution is that they be in conformity... that they be equal as possible, so you may take this line and draw it in any direction, and if the politics of this situation should prevail... then, I believe that we'll get...I mean, the democrat politics of the situation prevails... we'll get a black district. The Republicans, on the other hand...if the Republicans have gotten enough leverage within the power structure... they will have enough sympathy from those who are drawing the lines to give them what they are after... then, I think, we're in real trouble, as far as the black district...because we cannot get a black district and a second Republican district in the St. Louis area.

CORTINOVIS: Oh, so, you consider that really the crux of the district problem...

CALLOWAY: I think, politically, the Democratic leaders of this state are compatible with the idea of having a black Congressional district. I truly believe this, in view of the fact that we already have one. But, politically, the Republicans are asserting themselves in this state far more this year than any previous year in my experience. And it is they who are determined to retrieve the Republican district that they lost. When they gave the blacks an opportunity to elect, we impaired a Republican district. We destroyed it, in other words... there was a Republican district in St. Louis county...one of the Democrats in the Senate has

taken advantage of that political problem. In other words, to call his name. Senator Bob Young. He had drawn a map which Republicans were willing to buy...not so much that they were anxious to help Bob Young in his potential effort to help himself... but, because the map that he drew, gave them...the Republicans... the maximum potential for a second Congressional representative. They have one out of the. They argue, as the blacks argue, that they are entitled to at least one...on the basis of their political voting strength in the Democratic party... the Republicans argue that, in the state picture, based on the voting habit of the Missourian...that they are entitled to two. And that is the political situation. Now, if the Democrats prevail, then we got the black district ...but, as I said, if the Republicans have the leverage... then, I think, the district is in trouble. So, that's my estimate of the situation.

CORTINOVIS: Now, I don't want to finish without you discussing the abortion bill which you co-sponsored. Isn't that right...didn't you co-sponsor it?

CALLOWAY: Yes, I co-sponsored it, but I'm the major sponsor. The abortion bill is one that I agreed to handle. Now, number one...because it is a very touchy subject and it is a subject that most men really are afraid of...not only because of its many deep and various implications, but also because it has to do with the very nature of abortion... or, has to do with women and, predominantly... so that the male figure is not really worked up about it one way or the other. It happens that the law that we have on the books, in my opinion, is archaic, and really unconstitutional, in my way of thinking. And so that is why I agreed to handle it, because I feel that the law that we have is unconstitutional and we ought to change it. I would be in favor and support and introduce the bill that would make it possible that, with the doctor's decision, for the woman to make this decision on her own. Of course, she would have her own family, her own husband, and those around her participating in the decision. It's questionable, in terms of how far we are to go in liberalizing our law, but I'm definitely of the opinion that the law on our books is unconstitutional...in that it denies a woman the right to have an abortion if she so feels that she ought to. We didn't get anywhere with it...other than to having a hearing...a public hearing...by the committee to which it was assigned. The committee adopted a substitute for the bill that I had introduced which, of course, prescribed and limited the occasions on which an abortion would be permitted. But due to the lateness of the time and due to the fact that the House made some rules about legislation...what would happen to it...I encouraged the committee not to take action...we thought we had enough votes within the committee to get the amended...changed...version out. Well, we did not have enough time to even get it to the floor for debate. So, since we have a rule that anything that didn't come out of committee remains alive, it was my opinion that we should not try to bring it out. We have had an extended...and I would say...an exaggerated and accentuated effort on the part of the Catholics to really kill this bill, but so far, it is not dead. And I'm of the opinion that until the Supreme Court acts, the State of Missouri will probably do nothing about the law that it currently has on the books.

CORTINOVIS: Well, do you plan to re-introduce it...or, do you plan to try to get it out of committee?

CALLOWAY: Well, I don't really need to re-introduce it. It depends on whether I try to re-activate it, or it will depend on several factors. Currently there are some efforts being made in certain sections of the county to make a poll and get the opinion. We're trying to get some more public opinion in from the State of Missouri to substantiate the need for a change. Or,

the fact that the voters are willing to accept the change. At this time, most of the legislators feel that the voters and the public opinion is strongly against it, and with that kind of feeling...unless we can give them something substantial to go on...I don't feel that we'll be making any headway at all. Just reactivating it, I have got to have some kind of positive proof that the voters will not react in any kind of negative way, as far as those guys who vote...who might be willing to vote in favor of change.

CORTINOVIS: How do you think your constituency has taken your stand on this?

CALLOWAY: For the most part, my constituents ... those who've said anything to me about it...have lauded me, but I do have a number of people in my district who are Catholic, and they have taken the same position as the leaders of their church...that we don't need the change...and abortion is wrong. But I haven't had any great out-pouring from my district, one way or the other.

CORTINOVIS: Have you had any mail?

CALLOWAY: From my district? Very little. The only letters I've had are those that have been ground out by the Catholic parishes. In other words, I've got St. Ann's, and I've got Visitation. I've got some parishes in my district, and they get busy and send me mail and ask me not to, but as far as my voting constituents, those people I see every day who are reading the papers... they say, "Keep on.' Keep up the fight! I hope you get your bill passed. The professional people in my district... like the social workers and the doctors... they are in favor of the bill, and I've had one or two letters from those kinds of people. But other than that, the constituents, the abortion doesn't cut them one way or the other, for the most part.

CORTINOVIS: You mean...the issue of the legal abortion?

CALLOWAY: I mean...whether we get a law that restricts or a law that permits it...they've got so many other things... this issue really is not one that they get turned on about. I mean...the question on whether abortion ..the question is whether it is morally wrong or right...! haven't entered into with any of them. And that isn't my position... whether it is right or wrong...my position is that the state has no right to interfere into an individual's decision about their life. Abortion is part of a woman and, my opinion, is that it is a woman's problem, not the state's. That is the position that I take. I don't want the state enacting a law that there had to be abortion...in other words, I would resist very much if we would try to say...some people want to sterilize women who have had more than one or two illegal children. I would be opposed to this, because I feel that the state is getting into the individual's life. I resist this. And, I think, that the state is now theoretically in a person's life...but abortion is going on, and that's the real thing that I resent... that the state says that there shouldn't be...but because of circumstances and demands that they can only interpret... women do have abortions in the State of Missouri. So, I feel that the law is a phony thing that's on the books. I don't think that the law or the state should intervene to regulate... as we do any kind of medical thing. Hospitals have licenses; doctors have to have licenses, these things we regulate, but to decide and to tell anyone, "Well, we say that you can't have an abortion"... the law says you can't...in my opinion, this is not constitutional.

CORTINOVIS: It looks to me like your service in the legislature is a combination of your



life, your education, the work that you've done, the ^experiences that you've had. I wonder what you think about the future in your work in the legislature...what you've planned to do in the future... how long you'd like to serve?

CALLOWAY: Well, now, you've asked a real puzzler'. We're now in the process of re-drawing all the ward lines...we have to have all the legislature lines re-drawn...we are losing in the City of St. Louis about eight legislative posts. There are going to be some great changes made in the legislative districts. At this point, I have not said to myself that no matter what the lines are, I will run again. I have done five terms. When I end this, it will be my tenth year, and I am not...as I said...at this time, I am not of the opinion that no matter what happens to the ward...I mean, no matter what happens to the district... I'm going to run. I'm playing what is called a waiting game right now to see exactly how these lines come out. And I am quietly thinking in terms of what else would I like to get involved in and how could I start getting involved...just in case...'cause if it's going to mean a knock-down-drag-out-fight...then, I do not want to do it. It's a question right now...I guess you call it political...! don't know what my committeeman's going to do...in terms of his own ward. I don't know whether he'll elect to run again. So, it's a waiting game right now. And I've got a whole year. The lines, I understand, ought to be announced. You see, we couldn't do it, and the commission that the Governor appointed couldn't draw it...they reached a stalemate... and so, now, the court is doing it. So, I understand it ought to be announced sometime the latter part of this month...they may be ready now...as I said, I'm not certain. I haven't made up a do-or-die thing about the legislature. It may be interesting for you to know that somebody's approached me already about running for the Senate, but I definitely would not be interested in the Senate, because of the extreme work that's involved. In comparison to the legislature, your work is about five times as difficult.

CORTINOVIS: I knew that St. Louis was going to lose some posts, but it surprises me to hear you say that they are going to lose eight.

CALLOWAY: Well, they may work it out...if. they let us take a lower percentage...we have a deviance that we can have...a certain percentage. If they give us maximum deviance below the norm, then we might wind up losing six or seven. It all depends on who's drawing the lines...that would be the only way...we would have to lose six definitely.-.but eight, if they insist on a strict compliance to the norm.

CORTINOVIS: Are the thirteen blacks serving in the Missouri House all men but you?

CALLOWAY: No, no, we have four from Kansas City...one of them is a woman... and then we have the nine here...so in other words, there are two women. However, the one woman from Kansas City is a replacement for her husband who was in the legislature...who was assassinated in a political assassination last year.

CORTINOVIS: And she was appointed to fill out...

CALLOWAY: No, she was elected to fill his unexpired term...then, she was re-elected to serve her own term.

CORTINOVIS: But you're not the first black woman to serve?

CALLOWAY: Yes, yes, I am in Missouri.

CORTINOVIS: Well, that's really interesting. I was going to ask you about your civil rights interests, but it looks to me like they have been so intertwined with your work, with your service, that they have been almost identical.

CALLOWAY: Well, I have discovered that there is no real sharp demarcation. I mean, say, you're interested in civil rights...but if you're going to stick with it and attempt to get something done and changed...you'll find that it also gets involved into the political, and it may also get involved into the economic. In other words, in order to effect a change, you might find yourself having to relate to a boycott of a certain product, so that this, in my opinion, is one of the greatest dilemmas that the black has to face at this time...which one of these approaches should the priority rest on? In my opinion, there is no wall...you can't say..."Well, there's a wall out there that represents the difference between the black having complete freedom and complete viability, and we're just going to tear that wall down."...'cause when you begin to tear the wall down...or you attack it...you find that it is buttressed by other faces and facets of the community. In other words, there may be a wall of stone, but behind that wall of stone there may be some steel that is under girding the wall, and it's related to something else. It might not break...it's steel...so then to do something about the steel...you have another problem. So, it's been my experience that there's just no one...you can't say, "Well, if we just had better education...and everybody was educated, we'd solve this problem," ...'cause once you find out you get the degree, then you run smack dab into the racism of the employer! And if you should get the job, possibly you run into racism on the job with the employees! So, it's all intertwined, and it's rather baffling to me...I've given a lot of thought to it...what the total outcome may be...in terms of the blacks. I sometimes come to the frustrating conclusion that, maybe, the militants are right...that it all has to be destroyed and built up all over again. But wisdom and experience teach me that there can be changes effected, and the key...in my mind...is to get a maximum number of people committed to making the change... maximum black and maximum white... committed to making the changes, and then you get success.

CORTINOVIS: So, your approach would more closely resemble the NAACP than any other organization?

CALLOWAY: Yes, except that I think that now the NAACP has sort of out-phased itself...! mean, worked itself out of existence... because it basically was redress and legal acts. So, we really have now...we've got the law on our side at last...I mean, from the Federal level. On the local level, it's a question of battling, but on the Federal level, we now have got the Constitution opened up and fully protecting the black citizens.

CORTINOVIS: It looks like sometimes people forget that the work of the NAACP was really the foundation stone of other black organizations.

CALLOWAY: Well, I don't think that the mass blacks really understood what the NAACP was doing or what it really was all about. It was never a mass organization, but it has been the most effective tool that blacks had been able to devise to really make an onset against all of the discriminations and repressions that had been an aftermath of the slave period. So, it will probably not be appreciated until time has passed and students begin to study and they

begin to see the overall picture...and they're not looking at it as part of themselves, they're looking at it out of time...then the NAACP will become a great organization.

CORTINOVIS: Well, I can't thank you enough, honestly, Mrs. Calloway. I've really enjoyed myself so much this morning and I know you're busy. I really appreciate you're taking this time out to talk to me. I think we really have a great tape here.

CALLOWAY: Well, I hope so.