

ORAL HISTORY T-0021
INTERVIEW WITH ERNEST CALLOWAY
INTERVIEWED BY RICHARD RESH
BLACK COMMUNITY LEADERS PROJECT
JULY 31, 1970

This transcript is a part of the [Oral History Collection \(S0829\)](#), available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at shsresearch@umsystem.edu.

This is the eleventh in a series of oral history interviews sponsored by The University of Missouri at St. Louis. The interviewer is Professor Richard Resh, my assistant is Mr. Franklin Rother. Our guest today, July 30, 1970, is Mr. Ernest Galloway, Assistant Director of Research for the Central Council of the Teamsters Union.

RESH: Mr. Galloway, could you begin by telling us something about yourself. Are you a native of St. Louis?

CALLOWAY: No, I'm not a native of St. Louis. Originally, I came out of the coal fields of Eastern Kentucky. I'm...I guess you would consider me as being one of those unique persons... a black hillbilly. Come out of Appalachia. Usually you think about the Appalachians as white, but my family was one of the first black families to move into the Eastern Kentucky coal mines. When coal A was discovered back in nineteen, oh, nineteen-twelve. And I've been associated with the trade union movement, first the Mine Workers Union, since, I would say, the late twenties. And worked with a number of unions in Chicago, organizing the other sections, many of the sections of the country.

RESH: Could you tell us a little bit, backing up to your very early life, about your parents? How did your parents get to that part of Kentucky?

CALLOWAY: Well, my father was a coal miner in West Virginia. And, of course, coal miners, that peculiar breed, were constantly looking for what we used to call "high coal", you know. And, of course, the new mines that had opened up in the Cumberlands represented a new vein of coal. And he was able to get about two other families, black families, to make the trip into the Cumberlands.

RESH: About what year would this have been?

CALLOWAY; This would have been around about nineteen-twelve, nineteen-twelve. This, of course, when we got into the Cumberlands, they had not built the railroads at that time. They was still working on some of the mines. Some of the mines were ready to be opened. And, this is where he lived for the rest of his life. Of course, I left there; they sent me out in nineteen-twenty to go to school, which was down in Virginia which was our original home, Williamsburg. And I went to school, went to high school, in Virginia and then I ran away from home, ran away to New York. I come back in 1925.

RESH: What pulled you to New York?

CALLOWAY: I just don't know...the spirit of adventure and that sort of thing. I got tired of school and quit. And I had heard quite a bit about Harlem, you know, because Harlem in 1925 was altogether different from Harlem you know. Carl Van Vechten wrote a book called, "Nigger Heaven", and this got to any southern black coming out of the South going North. And, to me, it was one of the most delightful places in the world.

RESH: Could you tell us something about Harlem in that period. . .because that was during the New Negro movement.

CALLOWAY: That's right. You had the new Renaissance. Of course, I was not acquainted with all of this at the time...of what was going on. I was primarily impressed by all of the superficial, you know, aspects of Seventh Avenue and all of the fine looking people strolling down the Avenue. And all of the bars or "speakeasies", the night clubs, and theatres and everything. I had a job on the Hudson River Bay Line. It was a fine job as a dishwasher for the Hudson River Bay Line. And I would say in about six months, I was completely, very sophisticated...wearing all of the proper suits and that sort of thing. But, after a while, I left New York and went back. My mother was dying, and I went back to the Cumberland, in there, and went into the mines with my father. I left the Cumberland again in 1930, I think it was...went back to New York and got a job for the summer and, after that summer, just bummed around the country. The next year or two...

RESH: Would you tell us about that bumming around?

CALLOWAY: Well, ...just hitch-hiking. And I saved up a little money, you know, doing summer work, but we just started hitch-hiking from New York, I think, and ended up in Los Angeles. Finally, down in Mexico, down in a very wild section of Mexico, I got lost in the mountains of Baja, California... you know, that part that sticks out like a tail. I found myself in Tijuana, as I'd crossed the border and, after a couple of beers, I tried to figure out what in the hell am I going to do now...I didn't want to go back to Los Angeles, so I thought, "Well, why not go to Mexico City, you know, next to Mexico City." But, someway, I took the wrong fork in the road and ended up in the wildest section you could find. I ran across a group of Mexican road workers, and they were getting ready to go for their tent colony; they had a little tent colony. So, I got up on the truck with them and, of course, we offered cigarettes and that sort of thing, and they asked me to stay and have supper with them. It was not dark yet and after supper I found...I discovered, that I was in the wrong section of Mexico. So, I wanted to know what was the next town, and they told me a little town called Ensenada, which evidently was the equivalent of about forty or fifty miles. And so I felt that, well, I can make, you know, this in one, in one thumb. But I found I got myself in those mountains completely isolated. Damnedest experience that whole night. Well, it was at this point, I finally found Ensenada, but it was a resort...it wasn't much of a town. So I began, I think this is the first time that, the morning after getting out of those mountains and that frightening experience, the first time that I really began thinking about myself and about people and what makes the world tick. Because what happened is that I made my way back to...over a period of months...I made my way back to the mountains of eastern Kentucky. There I developed an interest in writing. I developed the interest in California, but I can recall one of the things that I ran across, something new developing in the terms of getting kicks was the use of marijuana...this is in the early days. And I wanted to write an article on

marijuana, which was new. at the time. And I wrote what I thought would be of some interest and sent it to Opportunity magazine, which was a Negro magazine on the National Urban League at that particular time. And they sent it back and told me they weren't interested in the article, but they would be interested in, since I was in the coal fields, you know, of eastern Kentucky... they would be interested in that. And now it's about '33. They would be interested in an article if I could work it out on conditions among the coal miners in the Cumberlands...in the eastern Kentucky coal fields. And, of course, I struggled over my first effort here and they accepted it. It was published, and out of that I was given a scholarship to Brookwood Labor College in New York... as the result of that particular article about conditions among black miners in eastern Kentucky. Then, of course, it was then that I came in contact with the radical movement.

RESH: This would have been A. Philip Randolph?

CALLOWAY: Oh, we were far more radical than A. Philip Randolph. But then, see, at Brookwood, it was a very interesting educational experimant in workers' education. It came about...two missionaries from China, Helen and Henry Fink, who had developed quite an interest in the Danish folk school system. And when they came back to America (they had an estate up here in Westchester County)...with the influence of the Danish folk school system, created Brookwood Labor College which became the first resident workers' education school in this country. Even prior to the school for workers at the University of Wisconsin. It was headed at the time by A.J. Muste. This was Muste's baby. When I first met Musty, you know, he was at Brookwood. Of course, he later left Brookwood because of the disagreement on...the political disagreement with the establishment there. And Tuck Smith took his place, who was a pacifist. I was there in '34 and '35 and it was a, oh, it was quite an experience for me. This was a brand new experience, even coming in contact with the radical movement...! mean the Communists, the Socialists, the Trotskys, and, oh, you had the leftists and rightists. It was the most confusing thing for me. For the first time, I had to figure all of this out.

RESH: Were there many Negroes at the Brookwood College?

CALLOWAY: No, at that time there were only two Negroes. There were only eighty students in the whole group each year. Two of us were Negroes. One was, I don't know, he came from North Carolina, I think. But most of them, I got the impression and still have, were young radicals, see and trade unionists.

RESH: It was a school

CALLOWAY: It was a trade unionist school to train professional organizers and that sort of thing. And most of us, many of us, are in places in the trade union movement now. It followed, after that, I ended up in Virginia, organizing the unemployed in Virginia. We finally created the Virginia...a fellow by the name of Henry Bernstein and myself...we created the Virginia Workers' Alliance during the W.P.A...organizing unemployed W.P.A. workers. And in '36, of course, at that time, the trade union movement completely ignored the unemployed. Most of the unemployed were being organized by radical groups, you know. The Socialists had their own Workers' Alliance, the Communists had the Unemployment Councils, the Trotsky's had the Unemployment Committees, and everybody had themselves an unemployed group, you know. So what happened is that in '36, there was a demand for

unity among the unemployed. And so, they had what they called a merger conference in Washington with all of the unemployed groups...Socialists, Trotskys, and Communists. Interestingly enough, one of the symbols of the unity was a young Negro, by the name of Angelo Hemdon, who had been organizing the unemployed in Georgia, And Hemdon, of course, he was affiliated with the Communists, associated with the Communists.

RESH: He wrote an article one time called, "You Can't Kill the Working Class".

CALLOWAY: That's right, that's right. And he had been sentenced to death in Georgia because he led a demonstration against the capital and, of course, the notion here...this was insurrection. And insurrection was...called for the death penalty in Georgia. And, of course, this is what happened to Angelo, but a national movement...finally the Supreme-Court freed him. And so he was... this was his first week out of jail, and he became a symbol of unity at this conference we held in Washington. I think about the second day of the conference, a fellow by the name of Dave Lassar was the chairman of the conference. Second day of the conference, one delegate takes the floor and on a point of personal privilege or something, and he points out that he had been at this meeting for two days, and he's not had a thing to eat for those two days and that he didn't have a place to stay, and that it was his feeling that about seventy-five percent of the delegates in this meeting in this room (we were meeting in the Department of Labor auditorium)...about seventy-five percent of the delegates at this meeting are hungry and had no place to stay...and his point was, "Mr. Chairman, I want to know, 'What is this conference going to do about it?'" Of course, for about an hour or so, we had quite a discussion, more and more delegates would take the floor, announcing that they had the same problem. And so, it was finally decided that we would all...we would adjourn the conference (there must have been about two thousand persons at this meeting)...march on Congress, and that a committee would be created to go to check with certain key people in the House and another committee to check with certain key people in the Senate to see whether a special resolution couldn't be adopted immediately... that the Federal government would grant relief, you know, for food and a place to stay for these people. And, of course, when we got out of there, of course, it was raining by the time we gathered out on Constitution Avenue and, of course, by the time we gathered all of the newspaper cameras around. We marched up to the steps and there we were met by a tremendous number of policemen. We discussed the problem and finally they agreed to let us go in. But we couldn't go in all together, go in in small, in smaller groups. Course, what happened, we finally got lost up there in the corridors, you know. Finally, somebody evidently had the presence to pass the word around to meet at the House restaurant, you know. And there, we...we put up a picket line, you know, at the House restaurant, kept the Congressmen from going in for lunch, you know. So the thing, things were getting pretty rough there after a while...Herndon was the only person who could quiet the group, you know. And what happened, we failed on the committee that went to the Senate; the House rather was able to get the resolution adopted. But it failed in the Senate because of some parliamentary maneuver...they heard it was going to be introduced, so some parliamentary maneuvers took place in the House. Now I don't know, I remember vaguely coming to the front of the House, and there I saw Dave Lassar and Harry Hopkins and a couple of other people... Harry Hopkins, at the time, was the W.P.A. Administrator...rushing for a cab. We were told, all of us, to go back to the Department of Labor auditorium from the place over there. And then, about afternoon, Dave Lassar came into the Department of Labor auditorium with stacks of money. I never knew where he got it from, but I got the impression that through Hopkins' influence that they were

able to collect, you know, the money there in Washington. Many, many years later, I was in a restaurant in Paris and across the room, I thought I recognized Dave Lassar, and it was Dave Lassar...Dave Lassar and his wife; Dave, I think... Dave now is head of research for the... I think... it's the Machinist Union, or something. And I was so happy to see him after all these years, but I had on my mind finding out...I thought maybe I could find out, you know...where in the hell did he get that money from...back in 1936...I think it was, in that demonstration here in Washington; but I completely forgot, you know, I completely forgot to inquire. Of course, in...after the experience with the unemployed, I moved into Chicago. At that time, I was associated with one of the left-wing groups, the Lovestone Group. I broke with the Lovestone Group along about '39, I think. I tell you this because, hell, I'm not looking for any federal job. I told the federal government this once. In order to avoid...oh, it must have been about six or seven years ago, I got a call from the State Department; they wanted me to serve as a consultant, going around to black colleges getting Negroes to come into the State Department. And I checked with Harold Gibbons, and he said, "Oh, go ahead, that's all right." But, later, I discovered that the program they were trying to recruit Negroes for was the CIA, what is it, the AI . . .

RESH: CIA?

CALLOWAY: No, not that.

RESH: AID?

CALLOWAY: AID program, which is a front . . .

RESH: For the CIA.

CALLOWAY: For the CIA. And I lost all interest, you know; I lost all interest in the damn thing. And so, when they finally sent me a damn questionnaire, you know, rather than tell them, "No, I don't want to be bothered, you know, with any of this crap," I just put down all of the past. But I was associated with the Lovestone Group and went to Chicago on the colored ride from New York to Chicago with Erwin Brown who was very shattering personality today in CIA operations and that sort of thing...and Lovestone there in Washington. But, at that time Erwin Brown was regional director for the Automobile Workers Union under Homer Martin who was a captain with Lovestone. And I had been instructed to go to Detroit to get a job in an automobile plant. And so, I thought I'd stay around Chicago a couple of days and then go on to Detroit. But what happened...while I was in Chicago, a friend of mine called me and said that he ran into an interesting development and that I should take a look into it. The development was that the redcaps of the Northwestern Station and several other stations were trying to organize into a union. And I finally went down to the Northwestern Station to check with some of the redcap leaders who were trying to organize. And after two days, I got really interested in the possibilities. And, of course, they had some very peculiar problems; they weren't considered employees of the railroads, they were independent concessionaires. That is, they did not receive a salary; they, you know, took tips and the railroads would permit them. And so it was out of this, putting it off from day to day, that I decided that I would stay and see if we couldn't organize a union of redcaps in this country, and this is what took the next twelve years...doing it, and finally, we carried our case before the Interstate Commerce Commission and I won it; the redcaps

were employees of the railroad company within the meaning of the term "employee" under the Railway Labor Act. The Commission finally agreed with us. And the next month, the wages and hours law went into effect in 1938 which immediately under ordinary circumstances, if these are employees of the...if these are workers, railroad workers, then they are subject to being paid 25cents an hour under the new wages and hours law. But the railroads refused to pay them the 25 cents of course, we complained to the new Wages and Hours...we had one of the first cases before the Wages and Hours Administration...on this. What finally happened is that the railroads relented on that position and forced the redcaps to report their tips, and they would pay the redcaps out of these tips, you know. Then we sued all of the railroads for the recovery of these tips that these employees had reported. Before that case, before that case _____, I mean on that particular case, the railroads shifted again and paid the employees 25 cents or 30 cents an hour, whatever the law required at that time. But they instituted this fee for baggage service... that a passenger would have to pay 10 cents: for the handling of a bag by a redcap, and the redcap had to turn this 10 cents in...back to the company. But I remained with that group for about twelve years until about, I would say, 1948. And then I went to England. I got a scholarship, transatlantic scholarship...! guess it was sponsored by the British Trade Union Congress. Spent a year at Ruskin College at Oxford. And while I was at Ruskin...

RESH: This is about 1948?

CALLOWAY: This is '48 or '49...in that area. While I was at Ruskin, the Fulbright resolution was adopted in the United States setting up these counterpart...the us of some of these counterpart funds in Europe for scholarships and that sort of thing...which became the basis for the Fulbright scholarship thing. Ah, Eric Sewell and I, with the Seaman's Union, you know, we were very close at the time. He later became secretary, national secretary of the Socialist Party. We were very...we found a very interesting situation there in the American embassy...that the labor attaché had more influence than the ambassador. Because the labor attaché, the labor government...the...what government was that in England?

RESH: Attlee.

CALLOWAY: Attlee government...had just gone into power. And a fellow, by the name of Sam Burger (we knew from years back out of Chicago was the labor attaché. And he had spent most of his time with the labor party people and the trade unionists. And he knew more about what was going on, you know, in England in terms of the new government than most anyone else seemed to. So he...so the ambassador...had to depend on Sam Burger to a great extent because most of the other people had been horsing around with the Conservatives, and all the other frou-frou, you know, in England. And so, we talked with Sam Burger at length, and also with the cultural attaché at the embassy with the notion of setting up two special scholarships under Fulbright dealing in the field of adult education. Two special scholarships. And, of course, the U.S. Educational Commission in England was made up of English educators who went along with the idea and, of course, the whole thing was finally agreed to, I guess, by the American authorities...the State Department...or what have you. The point is that Erwin and I made the first two applications of those special, you know, special Fulbright Scholarships. Of course, Erwin was a little more fortunate than I was. I had money problems in England at the time, and I fin-ally thought I'd better get back, you know; I didn't hear anything from the scholarship people. And I had planned to stay in Europe and do some work

with the Quakers and on the Continent. If I'd received the scholarship. But I finally made my way back to this county, and got an assignment from the CIO to go South in the CIO southern tribe. And that December, I received word from the State Department that my application had been approved, and I should prepare to return to England, you know. I was in the middle of this campaign in tobacco—R. G. Reynolds—and I got them to postpone it until the following September. But, in the meantime, I got into quite a hassle with the director of the campaign...we had a strong difference of opinion on tactics and that sort of thing. Of course, we lost the election at R.G. Reynolds, which is the reason R. G. Reynolds is, today, one of the only anti-union, the only nonunion cigarette today. Out of that, out of throwing that election away back in 1950. So, I returned to Chicago and ran into Harold Gibbons one night in the cocktail lounge. And he heard that I wasn't with the CIO any longer, you know. And he said, well, he had a very interesting operation going on now in St. Louis...health center and that sort of thing. He wondered whether I would be interested in coming down to St. Louis and setting up a research department for the local...you know...Local 688. And so, I thought maybe I would stay three months, and then I'd go on back to England. But I came to St. Louis and found one of the most exciting developments I've ever seen in terms of a local union. So what happened is that I finally cancelled the scholarship... and that was twenty-one years, you know twenty-one years ago.

RESH: I wonder if we could just back up for a couple of minutes into the World War II period, or really, the period where you went to Chicago and were working with the redcaps, trying to organize the redcaps. Did you receive any help at all from the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters?

CALLOWAY: Yes, a tremendous amount of help. It was Phil Randolph, and this was the first time I became very closely acquainted with Randolph. I think it must have been in '38. We were able to get Phil Randolph because of his national prestige to call a national conference of all redcaps around the country. And I don't think we would have been able to pull this thing in Chicago if it had not been for Randolph. If it had not been for Randolph.

RESH: Of course, he had his prestige. The year before, he had won recognition for the Brotherhood.

CALLOWAY: Oh, yeah, that's right.

RESH: '37, it was.

CALLOWAY: In 1937, they had finally been able to negotiate a contract with the Pullman Company after about fifteen, almost fifteen years of struggle,

RESH: Right.

CALLOWAY: And I would say this is one of the classic struggles in this country. What happened there in terms of the sleeping car porters. And, of course, at that time the Pullman Company was the largest employer of black labor in this country. And he had a most difficult...he had a roost difficult time. And... but the following year, he agreed to serve as coordinator for our conference in Chicago calling all of the redcaps' groups around the country. Some organized, some independent. There we had been struggling for about nine

months, sending people into different stations, sending leaflets by Pullman porters to different stations and, you know, a sort of a barrage of redcaps who might unite and organize and that sort of thing. And we had been able to organize a few groups around the country. But with the support of Randolph, I think, this is when we formed the national organization...the national organization at that time. And, of course, I could see after a few years that, in terms of the direction in which the railroad industry was going, sooner or later redcaps would be out of style, you know; they wouldn't need them. And, one of the arguments I got in with the leader, a fellow by the name of Willard Thompson, we finally...we had a hell of a time getting him to...we changed the name of the organization to United Transport Service Employees Union, after our convention. And then, in 1942 we were finally getting him to agree to affiliating with the CIO and, of course we did affiliate with the CIO, and he went on the Executive Board of the CIO. But I could see later on that this thing was not going to last too long. That type of work in railroad stations. And then, when I came back from England and worked a short period in the South, there was an effort at the time being made to oust the Communists in the CIO. I think one of the reasons why I was sent into Carolina was because of this kind of a situation. I felt at that time that here was an opportunity to carve out a new jurisdiction for the transport service which would be in the whole field of fertilizer, something very fundamental in the South and southern agriculture. And also tobacco. But at that time Thompson, who was being wined and dined and presented nationally and internationally as a showpiece, evidently wasn't interested in that sort of thing...it was out of that that we developed our differences. Because I really do believe that today we could have made a tremendous impact in certain industries along the eastern seaboard, especially in fertilizer, which we had organized some of the fertilizer plants. And we had organized a number of leaf houses, tobacco leaf houses. And that this should replace what I felt was dying at the time, the whole question of redcap service at railroad stations. Now, pullman porters are completely out. Course, we know what has happened to the railroad industry. I was talking to McNeal the other day. That union, I don't think, will be able to survive another year or two. Mac is getting ready to retire anyway. I think with the retirement of McNeal, the union will just move out because railroad services . . .

RESH: Right. That's no longer a moving thing.

CALLOWAY: That's right.

RESH: As a means of transportation. During the, again, the second World War period, were you helped or hindered by the fact that the country was at war, and there were all these other priorities?

CALLOWAY: Of course, in the first instance, I was a conscientious objector on the grounds of racial discrimination. I had the first...mine was the first case, you know. I refused to go into the Army as long as the Army was Jim Crow. And, oh, this was a battle for about two years. Over local draft board and state appeals board. I don't think they ever actually settled the case...I think the case is still on the files somewhere...they just forgot about it. But I had pointed out on my questionnaire, the military wanted this questionnaire that I was given, the question was asked, "Are you a conscientious objector on moral grounds?" I scratched out the word "moral" and wrote in "special", social grounds. And then I submitted a statement to explain that on the question on racial discrimination, under no condition did I feel like I was obligated, you know, to accept service in the Army. Of course, the chairman of the draft

board thought I was kidding. And I insisted to him that I wasn't kidding. I pointed out to him that if I was going to die then I was going to insist that it be on the basis of equality, you know. And, of course, finally, finally I did. Finally, the Communists wanted to take over the case in Chicago...then I get a telegram from Walter White of the NAACP that the NAACP would be interested in pushing the case. And White suggested that I contact the Legal Redress Committee there in Chicago, at the Chicago NAACP. And I went down to meet with the Legal Redress Committee which included such people as Earl Dickerson and some of the top black lawyers, you know, in the city of Chicago. But I found myself on the defensive because they were primarily concerned on...to determine what was my political background and my attitude about war in general. At that time, I was associated with the Keep America Out of War Congress which was headed, I think, by Norman Thomas... Norman Thomas, at the time...and a number of other liberal, socialists and liberals. And after about an hour and a half of this being on the defensive, trying to explain myself, I finally pointed out to these, to the lawyers, that I'm here at the invitation of Mr. White...that he asked me to come down and said the NAACP was interested in the case... that they would like to pursue the case of discrimination in the Army, but if you fellows are not interested in this, and I do not have to explain my political, you now...political motives and that sort of thing. That I can take care of myself, you know. I know what to do to take care of myself. Then I walked out of the room and, of course, one of the young lawyers followed me and he said he felt that I was right, that he would like to work with me on the case. And finally I was called into the office of the State Appeals Chairman who happened to be a Negro. And he wanted to know what was, and, of course, evidently a lot of publicity was being given to the thing, the national magazines, the black press, and that sort of thing. As a matter of fact, we had decided to form a little organization of our own, which included Sinclair Drake, who at that time was working with Horace Keaton on that Chicago, black Chicago project, Enoch Waters who was the editor of the Chicago Defender at the time, and a number of other youngsters; we were all youngsters. That was something like... Committee Against Jim Crow in the Army. And what we had discussed was the question if we could ever get a public hearing before the Appeals Board...we could put on a show, you know. And this was what we were after, you know. So, finally, the Chairman of the Appeals Board called me into his office. And he wasn't clear about what in the hell this thing was all about. Of course, there were two technical aspects to it. Number one, the local draft board had refused to issue me, at that time...what was called Form 47, which is the form that is supposed to be issued to conscientious objectors to build their cases, you know. And, secondly, he had denied me the right to appeal from the decision of 1-A. I couldn't appeal from this decision. Now we used to have more damn hassles, he used to, he called one day and he said, "You think you're a smart nigger. But you think you're gonna come in here and mess up this draft board, but you ain't gonna do it to my draft board." I said, "Well, you know, when I, when they, when I registered up here at the school, they told me I should look upon my draft board as a committee of friends and neighbors, and if I had any problems, I should discuss it with them, with the draft board." And I said, "Gentlemen, I got a problem. I ain't going into no damn Jim Crow Army. How we gonna work this thing out?" And, oh, we would sit there and argue like cats and dogs. And, of course, I had problems with my own organization, too, wly.ch was the redcaps union. The President of the Union, Thompson, felt that this would be bad for the union. Very bad for the union, you know. But the secretary-treasurer, we...I was very friendly with the secretary-treasurer... he felt I was not handling the thing properly...that I should keep from getting into arguments with these people and play it cool and that sort of thing. I said, "Well, John, you come on over to the draft board with me. Let me see how cool you can be with these guys."

And, you know, he said, "Mr. Calloway, let's look at it this way."...I think what they were trying to do is change my mind... he said, "Let's look at it this way. Two neighbors are fighting, like cats and dogs, and so one neighbor's house catches fire, what you do is stop fighting and help the neighbor put the fire out," he said. "You understand...you understand what I'm talking about?" I said, "I don't understand a word you're saying. I'm not going in any Jim Crow Army. I don't know who's fire you're talking about." But, anyway, then I explained to the Appeals Chairman the technical problems and he said, "Well, hell, they can't do that to you." He said, "You have the right to appeal the 1-A and you have a good case. And I don't know anything about this Form 47 for conscientious objectors, but I'll go and get you one of those forms." And he was a Negro, a Negro lawyer, and he said, "These people made me the chairman of the appeals board, but I been a black, too long...been a Negro too long, you know...I think you've done the right thing." He said, "I'm going to get you a...this conscientious objector thing...and I don't know, you talk about on social grounds, but it says something about moral. But you take as much time as you want, and you put your best foot forward." And, of course, I did work out the statement and submitted it to the Appeals Chairman. And I haven't heard from the case since. So, that's been from 1940, this was, of course, all of this was before Pearl Harbor. All, most of this was before Pearl Harbor.

RESH: Oh, I see, I see.

CALLOWAY: Most of this. And, I think, the problem that the administration had at the time was keeping down. I have often tried to figure this thing out...what happened and that sort of thing.

RESH: I think the Roosevelt administration was trying to soft-pedal the whole issue.

CALLOWAY: That's right...they did not and, of course, it was some several years later that Randolph set up his national committee.

RESH; The March on Washington Movement.

CALLOWAY: On the question of discrimination in the Army and then about in 1947 Truman issued his executive order

RESH: Right.

CALLOWAY: . . . eliminating discrimination in the Army, I think, I think it was in the Army.

RESH: Yes.

CALLOWAY: But it was a very delicate, it was a very delicate issue at the time. And, of course, what we did discover was that many young people who were already in the Army began making the same kind of noises. But I think, maybe the reason that I had never taken the oath and, you know, that sort of thing, that put my case in a little different, different situation.

RESH: Well, during the war then were, this after . . .

CALLOWAY: During the war, the FBI was trying to find out why I wasn't in the Army. They said, "You go over to the Draft Board." I said, "No. Somebody else will have to tell you why I'm not in the Army." They checked with me, I think, they checked with me twice on my military status or whatever it was, and I said, "I don't know a thing about it." But, of course, at the same time in Chicago, we were having a hell of a hassle in the CIO Industrial Union Council with the Communists. They had come in and had complete control over the CIO Industrial Union Council. And we'-made a ...

RESH: They were interventionists?

CALLOWAY: Oh, well, it all depends upon what period we're talking about.

RESH: Yes, but meant to say. . .

CALLOWAY: Well, that's the time, after the invasion, after Hitler invaded, what is it, Russia?

RESH: Yes.

CALLOWAY: Then they were... their whole position changed.. .and they all became military experts. And they all became extremely pro-American. And they all became strike-breakers, too. Because of American aid to Russia. And they, the thing that really, really was very damaging, is that they wanted to go slow on this Negro question. Because it may disturb the war effort. They were...they wanted to go slow on this whole question of the March on Washington. And the whole concept of fair employment practices. I ran into, it was in '36, I think, Angelo Hemdon, the hero of the Communists. But in '44, Angelo Hemdon was in hiding from the Communists because of certain things that were taking place within the Communist Party during the war, as far as Negroes were concerned. And I can recall being at a party, somebody's party in Chicago, and I saw somebody coming in the door and to me it was Angelo Hemdon and, finally, I went over to him and asked him. I said, "Aren't you Angelo Herndon?" And he says, "SH-h-h-h-h." I says, "What do you mean 'SH-h-h-h-h?'" He said, "When can we get together?" And invited him down to the union office the next day, and he told me the damndest story...that there had been a fight among some of the top Negroes within the Communist Party on this, and what they considered that the Negro was being sold down the river by the Communists. And many of them had left the Party, was quitting the Party, with the possible exception of Paul Robeson, and he was going to leave. And that the problem that he had, every town he would go into he would be hounded by the Party, it was very difficult for him to find work. So he indicated to me that he was getting on incognito and that he was trying to keep the Party from knowing where he was. Because they were very difficult on him.. he couldn't make a living. And I ran into the same thing with Claude McKay, the poet...

RESH: Oh, yes.

CALLOWAY: He died, he finally died in Chicago. But they felt that the Communist party was selling the Negro down the river back in '43 and '44 just in the interest of Soviet policy in terms of American aid. Don't disturb American aid. And they were doing the same thing in the trade union movement where they were willing to...they accepted Roosevelt's, what is it...

this no-strike pledge. No one is supposed to strike. But we had the situation where Montgomery Ward...where a bastard at Montgomery Ward.. Sewell Avery was kicking everybody around. And there was a decision that the union made that it would go on strike. And so we had a big fight in the CIO Industrial Union Council with the Communists opposing taking action against Sewell Avery and Montgomery Ward. And this is one of the ways...we didn't defeat them by red-baiting...we just took straight trade union issues the average guy could understand, and that sort of thing...his wages are at stake, his union is at stake... and he can understand this, you don't have to call them Communists. And it was on these theories, of these kinds of issues, straight trade union issues, that we were able. . .finally able... to rout them in the CIO and take over the leadership from them in the CIO Industrial Union Council. And, of course, we didn't get the support of the National, Phil Murray of the National, on this. John Brophy who was head of the Industrial Union Department, we had to do it on our own. It wasn't until 1948, after the 1948 campaign in the Progressive Movement, that the National CIO became interested in doing something. And in '49...and this is where I got this assignment...late '49 got this assignment to go into North Carolina where the Communists were very strong in North Carolina in the tobacco industry. But someone at the top of the heap, and I had heard that an agreement had been reached between the head of the Organizing Department of the CIO, fellow by the name of Alien Hayward, and Gordon Gray, who at that time was Secretary of War, and a powerful Democrat from North Carolina, see, he controlled both of the, many of the, major newspapers in North Carolina and was the political wheel in North Carolina. He was interested in doing something about the Communists and their strength with the CIO Political Action Committee in North Carolina. And I get the impression that many of us were sent into North Carolina, not necessarily to win elections, but to oust the Communists from the control of some of those unions. They had control of this R. G. Reynolds plant and many of the leaf houses around the state. And I got the impression that North Carolina was the jumping off point for the Communists in the South, because they were very dominant in labor there, they had taken over the CIO Political Action Committee. And, of course, this was told to me by one of the Communists' organizers that I knew very well...got to know very well there in North Carolina. And I have no reason to doubt that some sort of deal was reached at the top of the heap between Gordon Gray and the CIO, so many of us were sent in there to run these people out. And they had done a very good job in North Carolina, from the trade union point of view. And we ran into this from, on the part of, a number of workers.

RESH: When you were traveling around in various capacities as an organizer, what sort of reputation did St. Louis -have as a town for the laboring man, black or white?

CALLOWAY: Well, I had never thought too much about St. Louis. When I came to St. Louis, I thought it was a real desert, a real social desert. And I, ...probably it still is...but I've become, after twenty years, you know, you sort of get used to it. Getting around, you know, in such a place as Chicago, New York and this sort of thing, has a certain kind of sophistication...it has a certain kind of radicalism and that sort of thing...and an idea, you know, that you...there are a lot of things you can do, lots of things you can think about. Life is a little more exciting.

RESH: There are more nuances...

CALLOWAY: That's right.

RESH: ...and complexes.

CALLOWAY: But coming into a town like St. Louis was really rough for me for the first three or four years. But, finally, I got involved in a lot of community activities and began to forget a little bit about the...at one time, I felt that St. Louis represented one of the most interesting... could be one of the most interesting...social test tubes that you could find in this country.

RESH: Why did you feel that?

CALLOWAY: I don't know. It was something...there was something dealing with the conservative nature of the community, the power structure wasn't a...the kind of a stringent thing, you know...that you would run into in the South. They take it easy, you know, and that sort of thing; they're sure of themselves, I guess. And they're, I think, and, of course, you had a problem within the black community which was extremely conservative and still is. But, in spite of that, there was some possibilities. Because I would say in terms of location between North and South, East and West, and this sort of thing. And I began justifying remaining here in terms of all that. I ran into all kinds of opposition when I became president of the NAACP trying to use some new approaches to things and that sort of thing. You have the problem of community habit and either you have to take that community habit on if it's not a good habit or else just become a captive of it, and I decided I would not become a captive of the kind of habits, black habits, that had developed. They're very class conscious, habits...very...they had strong, at that time. Of course, I don't know what we have now, because I never get out that much, but you have a strong class oriented structure here, to the leaders of the black community.

RESH: You mentioned the conservative nature of the black community... this is a problem which interested me. Do you suppose one of the possible explanations for this might be that so many black leaders in St. Louis in, the twenties and thirties and early forties were born in the South? Came from, say, Alabama or Mississippi...

CALLOWAY: No, not necessarily. I don't think the movement, St. Louis has been a very interesting town from that point of view; St. Louis has more or less served as a separation center in the movement from the South. The final destination, because of the nature of the, the nature of industry for blacks, has to be in Chicago, Detroit, Youngstown, Pittsburg, what have you. St. Louis, from a job point of view, held out little hope for blacks coming from the South. It's that it's -better for males, ...for males...for Mack males. It was a better town for black females, this is even-true today, because of the light nature of the industry. We have very little heavy industry. We had some that developed recently, like McDonnell-Aircraft.

RESH; And most of it's family owned industry, too.

CALLOWAY: That's right. And, of course, the other problem here in St. Louis, in terms of St. Louis, is the structure of St. Louis industry and the structure of St. Louis economy. Most of your plants are small operating units. Now I've tried to figure this thing out this way, is that the larger the plant the more impersonal the relationships, the easier it is to introduce an alien element like the Negro worker into this situation. But when you have a small plant whether five, fifty people or hundred people and it's a big happy, one big happy family of

Germans, you know, and that sort of thing...

RESH: Whose fathers worked there before them and their grandfathers.

CALLOWAY: That's right. And bring a Negro into a situation like that, you know, it's most difficult. And you have a tremendous amount of that kind of industry, small units, small unit industry in the city of St. Louis. And, of course, this reacts against large scale black employment. So, consequently, what has been the history of this community seems to me, in the terms of the black male, is that he would follow that Illinois Central Railroad coming up from Louisiana, Alabama, wherever, you know, that sort of thing. And this has been the movement of blacks in this country, to follow the railroad line, you know...if it is in the East, it's the Eastern Seaboard; the Southern, you know; if it's going West, it's the Southern Pacific from Texas and Oklahoma right out to California; and it's the Illinois Central brings them up from the South into central, central South. It's that you get to St. Louis, and you find you cannot find a job and just move into heavy industry, the heavy industry sections like Chicago in packing, steel in Pittsburgh and what have you. And, of course, this has been the thing that has pulled large numbers of Negroes. They have passed through St. Louis, but that does not mean many have not stayed here, have not remained here, but not in the sense that Chicago or Detroit or that sort of thing. You do have a large number of them. But you have, I would say, the old, of course it's hard to tell today... because the conditions have changed so...but, I would say, you take twenty, twenty-five, and thirty years ago, and you had an old black aristocracy here, and they dominated the community... the people of the community. That you don't have an aristocracy... I don't think you have an aristocracy now...because these black militants, you know, they don't care about name...

RESH: That could be a liability at this time.

GALLOWAY:.. or no one. But years ago, in the twenties and the thirties and the forties and the fifties, this, I would say, these older groups were the dominant influence. And what progress was made in this community was made by people coming from other sections of the country.

RESH; I see that our tape is running out. I wish we had brought another reel, Mr. Calloway, this has been very interesting. And I want to thank you very much for sharing your reminiscences with us. I think you prove that history is people.

CALLOWAY: History is people.

RES: History is people. Thanks again.