

Civil Rights History Project
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Interviewees: Betty Garman Robinson

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Interviewer: Emilye Crosby

Videographer: John Bishop

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START OF RECORDING

Female 1: From the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

EMILYE CROSBY: This is Emilye Crosby with Betty Garman Robinson on December 8, 2015 in her home in Baltimore and we're here with the Civil Rights History Project, co-sponsored by the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, and also here is John Bishop and Guha Shankar. Thank you very much.

BETTY GARMAN ROBINSON: Oh, it's my pleasure.

EC: Can you tell us when and where you were born and about your family?

BR: Sure. I was born on January 8, 1939 and I was born in New York City. My father was a professor at, maybe, I don't know, a full professor at--now that I know assistant, associate, and whatever, I don't know what kind of professor he was. But, he was a professor of physics and chemistry at New York University, and he had grown up on a farm. So, he got a college opportunity at Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania and then he went to NYU and got a PhD, and that was like big for his family having--actually, his parents were Pennsylvania German. They barely spoke English. So, for him, that was big to be--to be catapulted into this position. Then, and my mother was born in New York City in a working-class family, born in--I don't know if she was born in Flushing but New York City, anyway. Her mother was the daughter of an Irish immigrant and her father was the son of German immigrants and she grew up. She was the first in her family to go to college. She went to NYU also, which is where she met my dad. Then, I was born in [19]39. My brother was born in [19]42. What else do you want to know about that?

EC: Well, what was your family like? What was your growing up experience?

BR: Okay, okay, so my growing up experience, both my mother and father, this was like during World War Two, right? So, my father moved, we moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts and my father worked at MIT in the Radiation Lab, which was the laboratory where the atomic bomb was being constructed. And he--I don't think he knew what part in developing the bomb he was playing but he had something to do with radar. So, we had moved to Cambridge. My brother was--well, we were both, preschool, kindergarten age when we lived there, and I can remember the air raids. I can remember the--blocking our--this is, again, World War Two. I can remember the threat

of war, so blocking our--the light from our house with dark curtains or turning the lights off or when an air raid would happen, hiding under the bed. I can remember all those things and I think that connected with my later anti-war sentiments because as a kid, when you live that trauma, you're not conscious of what those feelings are. But later on, it comes to the surface. So, there was that piece. Then, we moved back to New York and we moved eventually--by the time I was in second grade, we moved to a suburb, Pleasantville, New York, where there was a new laboratory that my father was working at. He was kind of the chief scientist of a--it was called General Precision Equipment or General Precision--GPL. It was called General Precision Labs first and then became General Precision Equipment, and then it became something else after that. But, so, it was in the era where these labs were consolidating and bigger companies were buying them. But, I can remember him coming home tormented and upset and really angry and sometimes crying because of the competition and the cut-throat nature of the job that he had and the people around him. And he was a very collaborative type of person and, as a scientist, I think he wanted that collaboration. But, there was a lot of jealousy and there was a lot of backbiting, and he was just tortured by all of that happening. So, I think then--and we'll jump forward ahead. Some of my feelings, like when my brother and I were in college, we talked about how we were not going to work in corporate America because of what we had seen my dad go through. [5:00] We were like, absolutely no corporate America for us, and that was my brother, too. He became a veterinarian but never worked for a big corporate firm. So, that was kind of a key thing in my values formation, I think and, again, reflecting back, I don't know where the values that I got, the progressive values that I got, actually came from. And there are other pieces, like my

mother was very prejudiced and very, very anti-black, anti-anybody of color, and I would push back against that, I think, on one level because she also was critical of every friend I ever had. And those were white friends. So, she would say, "I don't like her. Her parents are immigrants," and I would say, "But, wait a minute. Your grandmother was an immigrant." Or she would say, "I don't like this family because they are working class," or the first boyfriend I had was the son of a truck driver and I would be like, "Wait, there's a contradiction here, like you grew up the daughter of a carpenter." I mean, it just didn't compute to me. So, the fact that she was prejudiced and then some other incidents that happened which I can tell you but I'll let you ask another question. [laughs]

EC: When you talk about your dad and the work being very competitive and upsetting, how does that work if he's in the lab? Is it competitive with other scientists or is there pressure on him because of competition between companies? Do you have a sense of that?

BR: No, I think because it was called GPL, General Precision Labs, but it wasn't a laboratory, per se. I mean, they were involved in the first television production. They were involved in a lot of different equipment. The competition was mostly from, if I can remember this well enough, from non-scientists who wanted to be in his position in the corporate structure; in other words, the corporate ladder. So, he had--was given a particular role because of his knowledge and his library. He had books all over his library, all of these scientific magazines and every night he would be reading and pouring over all this kind of cutting edge science because this is the late 1940s, right where science is just blossoming, right? And--.

EC: But, his work is more managerial?

BR: But, his--yes, his work is--.

EC: But not scientific?

BR: Exactly, more managerial because of the knowledge that he has, so he's not really a--he's not--I mean, he is overseeing some of the scientific work but he's not-- but it's not pure scientific. And so, he's feeling this competitiveness and this absolute backstabbing and that kind of thing. So, it was kind of like this turmoil and this tension that he brought home almost every night and then it bled over to my mother and her anxieties about her life, having grown up working-class and being--both of them are feeling not accepted in their new class. In other words, they're both feeling very uncomfortable when they go to a party or when they host somebody at the house. They're like very--almost like having six thumbs. They're--and they don't talk about that, but you can tell that that's their discomfort. They never joined a country club. I think that would have been--like they didn't have the, quote, "social graces," that was-- that they thought was expected of them. I'm sure some of the other people were also going through the same thing but because nobody talked about anything then, nobody shared any of their deepest feelings, so--.

EC: Did you have a sense of this when you were young, or is this sort of looking back and trying to make sense of what you did experience?

BR: It's partly looking back but it's partly I can remember the tension around-- I can remember my father's anguish, and anxiety, and anger. I can remember that very, very vividly but I didn't--I didn't know how to piece it together. I didn't understand the class stuff until I got--until I was out of SNCC, probably, or in SNCC. I don't know. I didn't really understand that and I clearly didn't understand the racial prejudice. Like,

when I was in high school, my brother and I worked at a YMCA camp and there was a black woman who was a Vassar student who was a counselor. Now, you have to understand my mother wanted me to go to one of the hot shot women's colleges and I was like totally resistant to that. "No, I'm not going to Smith, Vassar, Wellesley, Radcliffe. No, I'm not going there." So, I picked Skidmore, which was kind of up in those ranks but it was like a "lesser than" school, right? And, of course, my shock when I got to Skidmore was my roommate brought in thirty pairs of shoes and this is in 1956, right? And I'm like, "What is this?" So, I thought I was [10:00] rejecting this upper-class-like life at these other colleges and bumped right smack into it. But, anyway, Vassar was one of the schools that my mother had wanted me to go to and even look at. I refused to even go visit these schools, right? So, here we have an African American woman, a Vassar student, on the staff of the YMCA day camp. My brother and I, because we're the brother/sister team, we decide to host a party at our house. So, we host a party at our house. All the counselors come. We have a great time. Then, everybody leaves and then I'm looking for my mother. It's like, "Where is she?" My dad says, "Well, she's down in the basement." She had a little room, a little room, like an office room where she did sewing, and crafts, and stuff. So, I go down there and she's in tears and I'm like, "Well, what the heck is going on?" and she's like, "We'll never live this down. You brought a nigger into the house. What will the neighbors think?" And I'm like, "What?" Well, my first comment was, "Well, it's dark. Nobody--nobody saw." I mean, that was like the utilitarian way. But, the second thing is, well, wait a minute. This is a woman who we work with every day. She's a Vassar student; like what objection could you have to that? But, because of that, whatever that prejudice that had

been built into her life, and I don't know if it was from the immigrant experience, when I look back, for example, she went to Flushing High School. When I look back at her pictures, she's got black kids in her class in the 1920s, right? I'm like, well, I don't get it. I don't understand the disconnect, right? So, anyway, so those were some of the early experiences that I had, both my mother criticizing who I associated with and my mother criticizing anybody of color. The Puerto Rican mailman was going to poison our dogs; the this, the that, I mean, incredible depth of real--and I think it came from her own insecurity is clearly where it came from, right?

EC: So, you've talked about a number of these incidents. Do you remember what--when you first had some inkling of race?

BR: Well, I think--well, at this day camp I worked at, I was in college. In high school, there was one African American student in my entire four years that I was in school and he was a senior when I was a freshman, and he was the student body president. Then, the next four years, the next three years after that, there was never another black student. There were Jewish students and I remember not quite understanding what that was about, not quite getting it that there were differences in religious beliefs or practices type of thing. I remember, in terms of religion, my mother was Catholic. My father was Lutheran. But, we never went to church. So, kids would say to me, "Well, what religion are you?" and I'd say, "Oh, I'm Catholic," and they would say, "Well, we don't see you at church," and I'm like, "Well, I don't go to church," like it was some badge of honor, right, that I didn't go to church, and they would like criticize me. So, when I was a junior in high school, when I got my driver's license,

I started being the super-religious type, go to mass every morning. I got my First Communion. I did all that stuff, right? Then--.

EC: How long did that last?

BR: Well, it lasted probably into my--the zealousness didn't last after I got to college but I was pretty--I was pretty regular going to mass when I was in college until my senior year in college and I go to Cornell where my brother is now a freshman, and that's a--it was Easter Break. We go to Cornell and so I go to Confession, right? And I tell this priest that I knew--[Laughs] it's so funny. Everything was so disconnected on some level. So, I kind of know that it's not good to read these. I'm taking a philosophy course at Skidmore, and I kind of knew it wasn't--according to church doctrine, you weren't supposed to read this stuff because it would poison your mind, right? So, I tell the priest that I'm reading Locke, and Rousseau, and Hegel, and Marx, and so on. And he is like aghast, and he's giving me all these Hail Marys that I have to say and this repentance I have to do because I'm reading these scholarly books. I walked out of that confessional and I said, "I'm finished with Catholicism," and, in fact, I was finished except that I would--I'd go to weddings, and funerals, and so on, so--.

M1: Yeah. Where are we going?

EC: You've mentioned to me before that your godmother was Spanish speaking.

BR: She was Mexican. And the way that she got to be my godmother, is my father and her husband worked on a book together [15:00] and he was a scientist, and they had moved here from Mexico. I never really understood the circumstances or how

that happened. But, anyway, they worked on a book together, and so I'm sure in the process of working on that book that my mother got to know--Lucy was her name, Lucy Droz, got to know her, and asked her to be my godmother when I was born. So, then, later on, I would say to my mother, "Well, if you're so anti--and she would also criticize Lucy, my godmother. She would say, "She speaks broken English. She--." I don't know, all the other things that she would think of about a Spanish speaking Mexican woman at that point in time. So, that was like in the early, like 1940s, mid-1940s type of thing. But, I mean, I think I said it to her later, probably in the 1950s. I said, "Well, how come you asked her to be my godmother if you have such contempt for her [and] her persona?" and my mother said, "Well, she's the only Catholic I knew at the time." So, that also speaks to me of my mother's isolation. That she didn't have a lot of friends, and she never really did have a lot of friends in her life except later on when she started doing a lot of service clubs and things like that; going to the nursing home and giving gifts out to people who were sick or going to the children's home, to the orphans' home, or whatever, whatever it was in that community at that time. So, it spoke to her--to me, it spoke to her isolation and her fear of having a conversation about things with people, and I don't know. Was that her upbringing? Probably so. It probably was very closed and very--and also another thing that's funny is she would talk to me about this woman who lived on her block in Flushing who was a Communist, and so she had total contempt for Communism, and I was like, "Well, what does that mean? What's that about?" I mean, all these things just didn't sync, right, and then later on, of course, when I was both in the movement and when I was a graduate student, I began to understand about the Communists organizing around the globe and what that meant, what it signified and, of

course, the Russian Revolution was very much in people's minds at that time when I was a grad student and the African liberation movements and so on. So, I was like, steeped in all of that, studying all of that and understanding the contradictions. So, it all kind of fell into place. But, I never really--my mother never really explained the depth of her anxiety about that stuff.

EC: How do you spell "Droz?"

BR: D-r-o-z.

EC: Okay. Can you tell us about your experience in college at Skidmore?

BR: Sure. So, I think I was kind of like a regular, middle-class college kid. I don't think I stood out at all. I don't think I--I don't remember anything, any--. The thing that I begin to remember is when, in my sophomore year, I ran for student body secretary, and I ran against a woman who beat me. And then a woman came up to me and she said, "Would you like to run for NSA secretary?" So, that's--NSA was the National Student Association, US National Student Association, which was the organization that represented college student leaders all around the country. I had no clue what that was and I said, "Sure, why not?" So, I obviously was into some kind of service or giving back or being engaged in the civic life of the community. So, I ran for NSA secretary or maybe it was NSA vice-chairman, I think it was, because there was a chairman and a vice-chairman. And, as a result, I was allowed to go or given an opportunity to go to Ohio Wesleyan that summer to the National Student Congress. So, it was--that was the life-changing experience.

EC: Now, is that the meeting every summer that brought people together?

BR: Exactly.

EC: But, that wasn't the several-week seminar that Connie Curry was running. No, that actually--.

BR: No, that's different.

EC: That started later.

BR: Well, this was 1957, I think. Was it 1957? Wait.

EC: I think she started in that job in 1960 so--.

BR: So, 1958--this was the 1958 student congress and it did bring people together from all across the country, and there were people talking about South African Apartheid. There were people talking about segregation in the South but not as intensely as a few years later. [20:00]

EC: You said that was life-changing?

BR: That was life-changing because here were all these students that were engaged in talking about the world and talking about political formations, and organizing, and movements, and oppression, and all of those words that I wasn't really familiar with, right? So, I go back to campus. I was a psych major before that so I change my major to political science. Well, first, I was a math major. Okay, that's another story. I was a math major because my father anticipated the rise of computers and the importance of computers, and he said to me, "You've got to be a math major. Look, you're very good in math," which I was, "and you've got to be a math major." So, I go to Skidmore. There is one professor in the math department, a woman, who I just didn't feel synch--I didn't have any synchronicity with her. So, I changed my major to psychology when I was a freshman. But, then, I come back after my experience at the National Student Congress. I come back and change my major to political science. And that's when I

begin to really delve into political ideas, and debates, and ideological discussions, and all of that kind of thing. So, that's kind of why that was life-changing. Then, the next spring, I run for student body president, in the spring of my junior year, which is 1959, spring. I lose to the same woman that beat me for secretary and then I'm asked to run for NSA chairman. I do that and so then I go to the National Student Congress. That summer it's at the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana. Again, students come from all over and you have this incredible experience. You learn what--and then for some of us, the initial thing that we got involved in was Student Voice on Campus. So, it was about having a say in how good or bad the professors were or having a say in the college life. Mundane things, like what the dormitory hours were, or whether we had an honor system in the dorms and there were a lot of different things that we wanted to take on.

EC: Did women have different rules on Skidmore's campus than men? Was there a--?

BR: Well, it was a girls'--it was a women's college.

EC: Skidmore was all--.

BR: It was all women until more recently.

EC: Oh, I didn't realize that.

BR: Yeah, it was all women and--but we had pretty strict rules and we had this thing called "in loco parentis," which meant the college was standing in the place of your parents. And so, it was very regimented and there were women who went out on a date and came in the back window. Somebody helped them unlock the window and come in so they could sneak past the house mother type of thing. But it was very--it was a very cocoon-like type of thing so--.

BR: So, when you start going to these NSA meetings, are you--is there any sense on campus of rebelling against this sort of strict control or is that just--.

EC: Some of it's there. I don't think that's the major thing. I mean, I think one of the things that the first campaign that I kind of got involved in was around the National Defense Education Act and I think it's because this was an NSA campaign. So, this was to fight against the loyalty oath in the National Defense Education Act, which said if you were going to get a scholarship or a loan from the federal government, you had to swear that you were not then or had never been a Communist, a member of the Communist party. I forget how the oath went. But, I had taken the civil liberties course from this fabulous professor about loyalty oaths. One of the pieces was about loyalty oaths, that you shouldn't be forced to take a loyalty oath. So, I am applying my political science and getting involved in this campaign. So, we had students writing letters to their local papers in their hometowns and we had people sending postcards to their congressmen and that kind of thing. So, that's--again, it's this connection to what does a--what's the role of a citizen in a democracy and how can we encourage that citizenship and that involvement? So--and that was, again, that was--the big NSA mantra was involvement in your life of your community or your college or whatever, so--.

M1: I need you to pause for a second. () back.

EC: Do you remember hearing about the civil rights movement or thinking about it much?

BR: Well, yes. In fact, what happened is that in the--this is--when we're doing this National Defense Education Act campaign, this is early 1960 and I--okay, yeah, so I'm the NSA chairman. I'm getting all this information through NSA, either through

phone calls or through letters, and [25:00]1960 happens and the student sit-ins happen. So, we--and I don't remember if NSA encouraged us to do something but we had these big meetings on campus. We had a Woolworth's in our town, in Saratoga Springs, so we began to have these student meetings where we debated what we could do to support the Southern students or if we should. I think part of the question was should we support the Southern students and I actually have a leaflet which I should have gotten out to show you. I can get it later. It says--it's something like, "The right to eat--it's a human right," and "Black students," it says, "Negro students in the South don't have the right to eat at lunch counters and this is outrageous and shocking and we need to come together to discuss this and talk about what to do," and so we did. We did that. We came together and we decided after four very heated meetings--it was my first experience with what democratic discussion and debate might be like because we had every point of view in the book. So, we decided we would plan a protest and we took two hundred women students from campus down to the Woolworth's, walked around the Woolworth's, and came back to campus. So, there were a couple freshman students that said, "We can't stop here," or actually a freshman and a sophomore student. They said, "We can't stop here. We can't do this. We've got to keep going." So, we sent four students. The plan was we sent four students every hour the next day to picket at the Woolworth's, right? The first four students that went got picked up by the police, taken to the police station, and one of the students' father was an attorney. So, she knew that you couldn't--you didn't have to give your name or your address until you were actually charged with a crime. So, the paper--the front page of the Saratoga paper that day has four students like this with their hands over their eyes, blocking their faces, and the article is, "Skiddies--

more than they bargained for,” [Laughter] and the editorial says we were unladylike, we never should have picketed, what was that about? The police are prepared to charge the students with a union--with a statute that was meant for union busting, basically; no picketing within one hundred yards of something or other. But, the Woolworth’s is private property, so shop--this is the beginning of the shopping center boom where the-- this whole square and the parking lot are owned by the corporation and so you can’t go next to the store to disrupt the business and all. So--.

EC: Can I interject?

BR: Yes.

EC: So, you said the first--that the plan was to send four every hour--.

BR: Yes.

EC: --and the first four are arrested. Do people continue after that or--.

BR: No, nobody continues. No, the panic button is hit. The president of the college calls us in. We sit down in his office. He reads us the riot act. He tells us we have to cease and desist, that this is not appropriate. It’s not right. So, we--and actually spring break was the next day so we--the spring break dissipated the energy and, as I--go ahead.

EC: Were you surprised by the arrests? Did they--.

BR: I was shocked. I mean, again, you grow up with the Bill of Rights and the First Amendment freedoms and you think everybody has the right to express their opinion and we had peacefully done the march down--and this is maybe five or six blocks from campus. So, we went down and then around the Woolworth’s and came back, and actually in the Skidmore history book, there are some pictures of that fabulous picket.

So, yes, I think we were shocked. We were like, “What? Got arrested?” I mean--or taken to the police station, not charged formally, released in loco parentis, released to the father, the president of the college, right? So, yeah, so that was pretty--and so we really understood that we were fighting for our own right to be free and that there was a connection between supporting the Southern students and our own exercise of our own rights. So, that, again, for me, that was a lesson in how everything is connected; that if you step out of line, so to speak, and you protest something that’s not acceptable to the people in power, you also get, in this case, slapped down because no untoward consequence, nobody got a record, and nobody got fingerprinted, and nobody got handcuffed type of thing. But, still, you get--you get cut off from being able to do that kind of thing so--.

EC: You said that the spring break kind of dissipated the energy. Did you all resume any kind of protest activity afterwards?

BR: We didn’t and I really—[30:00] well, just another thing, that spring break was when SNCC was founded and I considered going to Shaw to be at that founding meeting. But I was terrified of my mother’s response and, in fact, that’s--I had had a letter in the Hastings newspaper. They lived in Hastings-on-Hudson. I had a letter in the Hastings newspaper just before I came home for spring break about the National Defense Education Act, which that like threw them for a loop. She told me, “Don’t show up in the house until after dark,” because she didn’t want her--and she was having some kind of women over for tea or something like that. So--but she didn’t want me to be--have any relationship with any of her friends or her--whatever, her service buddies. So, that--so then at the same time, I’m really terrified that if I try to go to Shaw, she’ll be really upset

and angry. So, I didn't push it. But, one of the freshman students who had pushed for us to go down and picket the second day, she went, actually. Her name was Linda Chase, and I've actually lost total track of her. I can't find her anywhere. So, I don't know. She dropped out of Skidmore or left Skidmore after two years, I think. So--but she--I'm always curious as like what was her journey after that.

EC: That would be interesting.

BR: Where did she go and what did she do, yeah, and I--.

EC: She's pushing.

BR: Yeah, yeah, because here she is, a freshman, and she's pushing that we continue and we escalate, and so on.

EC: Can you remember? I mean, can you go back and are you able to recreate what you were thinking about the SNCC conference or how you knew about it or what it meant to you?

BR: Well, I think--I think I thought the students were extremely courageous, the sit-in students. I just--and because I felt so--like the cover being pulled off the US for me. All the kind of the ideals and values that we believed in and then the contradictions showing up that black students couldn't sit at lunch. I was floored, I think, because, again, we didn't grow up with this. I mean, I grew up with a prejudiced mother but I didn't grow up where black people couldn't go into grocery stores or Woolworth lunch counters or whatever if they were--if they lived in those communities. I mean, I never--there were lots of things as a white person I never thought about. So, I didn't think about the absence of black people in my school or the absence of black people in my community. I didn't think about that, so--and I didn't understand the privilege that white

people had in that era, like especially the GI Bill of Rights or the FHA and the VA loans for houses that--where you were required to buy a house in a stable community and a stable community, for sure, meant a racially homogenous community. So--but we didn't--those privileges didn't really--we didn't have a good understanding of what--and nobody alerted us to the fact that there were these discrepancies so we saw students not able to eat at a lunch counter and that was the tip of the iceberg. You know, Miss Baker always, Miss Baker always--Ella Baker was very much a mentor for all of us. She always talked about it's more than a hamburger. So, we had to move from the lunch counter sit-ins to some bigger, bigger issues.

EC: Do you remember how you found out about the SNCC Columbia conference or the--?

BR: I'm not sure. It must have--it must have been through NSA and maybe it was the sit-in students because it wasn't called SNCC at the time, right?

EC: I was going to say--.

BR: Yeah. It would have been the sit-in students are gathering at Shaw in Raleigh and they're going to talk about the next steps or their strategy or something like that. So, I'm sure it was through NSA that I heard about it and maybe NSA invited some of the students who had been leaders on the campus leading the--because all over, one of the things we did was--of course, this is in the nature of competition and on this leaflet that I--that I've saved, we talk about how at Yale, and Wellesley, and Smith, and all, they're supporting the sit-in students so we need to be supporting the sit-in students as well, right? So--.

EC: So, you're doing the same thing. You're--.

BR: Yeah, exactly, exactly, exactly, so--.

EC: When you graduated, you went to work for the NSA?

BR: When I graduated, I was invited to be part of something called the International Student Relations Seminar, the ISRS. Is that right? Yes, the ISRS, the International Relation Students--the International Student Relations Seminar, [35:00] so that you [had to] live in Philadelphia for two months. You're--there were about twelve of us in this ISRS session. There were two women and all the rest were men, very intellectual men, and what it was, it turned out, only again in retrospect, it was the training ground for future NSA officers and for CIA service. So, the National Student Association's international program was funded by the CIA through a lot of subterfuges, through foundation conduits, and that kind of thing, and then when the student travelers went overseas to either Latin America or Europe or the Soviet Union or Africa, they took notes on who were the emerging leaders, who were the students that were organizing the liberation movements, what were their ideologies, were they sympathetic to the US or not. And then all of those notes went directly to the CIA. So, it was the way the CIA--the notes and, I'm sure, the interviews, I mean, there is a new book which is actually on my shelf over there, that red and blue book. Do you see right there? What's it called? *Patriotic Betrayal*.

M1: Do you want to hold it up?

BR: Yeah, sure, let's hold it up. So, this is by a woman who--she--and I believe her husband also--they had been in the CIA. They had been in the NSA and when they learned about the CIA connection, they were like shocked also. And so, she

set about doing this scholarship, doing this scholarship, and it just came out maybe 2011, 2012, 2013, something like that.

EC: I know that it was a real shock to a lot of people when they learned of the connection between the NSA and the CIA.

BR: Absolutely.

EC: With the students, this is a little bit afield, but with the students who were travelling overseas and taking these notes, do they know what they're doing? Do they know that that's--?

BR: Some of them do. Some of them do. The way it worked was this. First of all, in my ISRS, there was a guy who was already a CIA, on the CIA payroll. So, that's--

EC: He's also a student or a recent graduate?

BR: He's pretending. I don't know. I don't know his whole story but I guess he's pretending that he's in the seminar because he was a student leader on campus or something like that. So, there are plants. There are CIA plants in these seminars. There are also former NSA officers who have been recruited by the CIA who are the trainers for these sessions and, of course, we're going through a country by country synopsis; what are the student movements in those countries? What do they look like? What are the politics of the way governments are constructed, and that kind of thing. So, that's another piece. So, there are CIA agents in the ISRS. There are CIA agents who are former NSA officers and nobody tells you that they're CIA. It's all hidden. Then, the third thing is it's the way that they vet people for NSA office. So, if you're in this ISRS, you have this potential to become a vice--the international vice president, for example, of

the National Student Association. Then, what happens is that once the student congress happens and there is all this manipulation to get the right people in office. So, they're clearly looking for people who are going to be sympathetic to the US foreign policy constellation of issues and, therefore, sympathetic to the CIA's values. So, then, once you're in office, they take you out and they tell you that the CIA is bankrolling the international program and they make you witting, w-i-t-t-i-n-g. So, then, the code word becomes, "Are you witting?" and everybody--if you're not witting, you say, "Huh?" and if you are witting, you say, "Yes, I'm witting." So, then, they can have their conversations. So, whether--and I haven't read enough of this *Patriotic Betrayal* to know if the student travelers knew that they were feeding--did they know that the CIA had a hand in bankrolling their work because that's what happened. The travel fees and all of that were donated by the CIA through these foundation conduits.

EC: Well, I know that Tim Jenkins was active in NSA as a Howard student--.

BR: Yes.

EC: --and student body president and he's told me that he had hoped to be the vice chair, [40:00] vice president for international affairs and got sort of maneuvered over into--.

BR: Into national--.

EC: --domestic.

BR: Yes, they probably didn't trust him. They probably didn't trust him.

EC: Of course, that--.

BR: He's a black student, too, and that's unusual in the NSA. It's somewhat unusual to have a black officer. So, he gets maneuvered over to national vice president, yes.

EC: Of course, it's interesting because then he's in the position of national vice president--.

BR: Exactly.

EC: --and the sit-ins start.

BR: Exactly.

EC: He becomes an advocate within the NSA.

BR: Exactly, exactly, exactly. So, the woman--there was a woman who was the international affairs vice president, the IAVP, and, apparently, the year before this, apparently, they didn't trust her, either. And so, they didn't make her witting, and the guy who was the administrator of the international program had to carry all that secrecy in the decisions and the strategy. So, there was clearly a lot of sexism as well as racism in the day, so--.

EC: Yeah. So, after you went--so that workshop--.

BR: The ISRS. So, I go to the National Student Congress, which is in Minnesota that year, and one fabulous thing about that--.

EC: This is the year you graduated?

BR: Yes, that's 1960. That's 1960. So, I go to Minnesota that summer and I can't remember. Is that when Tim is elected or he's elected--he's the year before? I can't remember. Anyway--.

EC: Tim is--Tim works for the NSA, 1959 to 1960.

BR: Okay, so he's in office when I go to the ISRS that summer, okay. So, what was I starting to say?

EC: You were talking about going to the conference.

BR: Oh, going to the congress in Minnesota, yes. So, one of the things that the CIA also did which you only learn about in retrospect is they brought Algerian revolutionary students to the US for a month under the auspices of NSA, to have a conference and meeting. So, I go to Minnesota a little bit early because I'm in this ISRS program and I experience the energy, and the enthusiasm, and the excitement of these students who are meeting and singing and they're in solidarity with each other in such phenomenal ways. I can't--I'm just swept up by the--by the energy that they're putting out in their meetings, right? I mean, I wasn't in most of their meetings but I was in some of their social gatherings and the singing and, of course, I didn't understand the words because it was in French. But, it was still--.

EC: So, when you're talking about the group, and the energy, and their support--.

BR: It's the Algerian students.

EC: It's all Algerian?

BR: Exactly, exactly, and these are the students who then become the leaders of the Algerian Revolution. So, go back--or maybe they're already involved. I can't--I don't know the dates of the Algerian Revolution but to me, that was just--that was a cathartic experience to see this excitement about fighting for freedom, basically, is what it was, right? So, after the student congress, I go to California. I'm--I have a boyfriend who is also in the ISRS who's going to be a political science grad student at Berkeley.

So, I take a job as a campus traveler to sell tours to Europe for NSA and I go to Berkeley. I live there. I actually lived in Oakland and I traveled to every college on the West Coast, Oregon, California, Idaho, Washington, etc., every single campus that existed at the time, and that was kind of--I did it by myself. I was on a bus going from college to college. Then, I get a call in November, late November, saying that the assistant to the president of NSA is going to resign and would I come and live in Philadelphia to be the assistant to the president. So, I do. I had broken up with this guy by then, so I don't have any other ties to Berkeley except I loved it out there. So, I come back to Philadelphia and I'm the one who organizes the National Student Congress for the next summer at the University of Wisconsin.

EC: So, that would have been the fall of 1960, then?

BR: This is--yes, this is November of 1960. I go back to Philadelphia and I live in Philadelphia from November of 1960 up until summer of 1961 when the National Student Congress takes place at the University of Wisconsin, and I'm the person, the logistics person and the one who figures out all the dormitory stuff, the rooms, the audio-visual set-up, the lunches. I go out to Wisconsin three or four times and negotiate with the university officials and that's kind of like a big step for me. [45:00] I'm a year out of college and I'm given this huge responsibility to pull this conference off, and I do, and then this is the summer that I meet the SDS people and I meet-- the "liberal study group," with quotes around it, happens at the congress that Al Haber and Tom Hayden and others are pulling people together to have discussions about US imperialism, and capitalism, and the war, the Cold War, and all of that context. So, this is [19]61 and, in fact, Port Huron is [19]62, summer, so it's the up--it's the run-up to Port Huron. So, SDS is obviously

using some of these forums as ways to identify students who have a similar thinking and can be recruited for the building of the SDS chapters around the country.

EC: Let me ask a couple questions.

BR: Sure.

EC: Were all of the NSA sort of leaders elected? Well, I guess, you just said that there was a woman who was the domestic vice chair the year before Tim.

BR: She wasn't the domestic--she was the international vice chair.

EC: Oh, she was the international--.

BR: They didn't trust her.

EC: They didn't trust her.

BR: Yeah.

EC: Were most of the NSA national officers men?

BR: Yes, yes. It was very rare to have a woman as the--there were three.

There was the president and then the NAVP, the national affairs vice president, and the IAVP, the international affairs vice president. So, there were three officers, basically, and they were mostly men.

EC: What about the position that you had, the sort of assistant to--is that generally a female job?

BR: I think it would have been either. It was just somebody who had the logistical, the administrative experience and could do that, yeah. Could do that kind of work. So, I think mostly it was women but, I don't--I don't know.

EC: It was perceived as a--sort of a secretarial thing or how was--?

BR: I think it was a semi-secretarial thing, yeah. I mean, I think, yeah, I think so.

EC: You mentioned that you were at the 1960 congress in Minnesota. Do you remember there was a panel that--there was a--?

BR: There was and Casey gave a fabulous speech. I remember she gave--and I think, maybe, I don't know if Tim was on the panel, too, but there was a--I remember something and that was the summer that Connie also had the Southern Student Human Relations Seminar, right?

EC: Yes.

BR: So, brought Southern students, black and white Southern students. I can remember Casey's speech. I mean, I can remember being in the audience and how electric it felt and, you know, she was taking a step way out there and it was pretty powerful, yeah.

EC: Yeah, so I think that there was--Tim, I'm sure, was part of it. But, there was a group that was leading a push for the NSA to pass a resolution in support of the sit-in movement and then some sort of Southern students were opposing it and I think Casey gets recruited to be on this panel of Southern--.

BR: Oh, okay.

EC: --students and so it's--.

BR: She gets recruited to be on the panel to oppose the push or they think she's going to?

EC: Well, I think that the NSA leadership who was trying to get the resolution passed--.

BR: I see.

EC: --was looking for supporters to put on that--.

BR: To put on the Southern panel, okay, okay, I understand, okay, okay.

That's some back story. Oh, I think John is--.

M1: Let us pause for a second.

[Camera turns off and on again] EC: Can you describe what Casey Hayden-- we're talking about Casey Hayden, what she was like at that conference, what your perception of her was?

BR: Well, she had a great personality. She was very warm and open and she was very smart. I mean, see, you have to understand about me. In that era, I was like a wallflower type. I wasn't the life of the party. I wasn't super-attractive. I was very competent and capable and so that's how come I got recruited for this assistant to the president job. And, in fact, at some point in the 1960s, I wrote this stuff about how I was bureaucratic or I could function in--I'll have to back up a little bit--how I could function in a bureaucratic setting and bureaucracy was one thing that we were fighting against. This is kind of in my semi-Socialist days, which we will talk about. But, anyway, so I'm saying, bureaucracy is like a bad thing but I'm so capable and competent, I can do all this administrative stuff. But, then, I go on and I talk about how I'm not--my mind doesn't work, that I'm a political strategist, and so I'm struggling to be better at that but I can't engage in all these intellectual conversations that these guys are having. And so, it's one of those things that women, I'm sure many women went through at the time. Because of our socialization, we were expected--we were not expected to have this intellectual

curiosity or at least in certain realms. We weren't expected to be in the leadership of things. We were supposed to be getting [50:00]--finding a husband and raising a family and being the support behind the man, right? So--.

EC: When you were talking--when you were sort of doing this self-reflection, is this later 1960s?

BR: This is later 1960s. This is probably post-SNCC, yeah, yeah.

EC: So, with that job that you were doing as the assistant and you're organizing the congress for Madison, do you have any interaction with the civil rights movement? Do you have a sense of what's going on?

BR: I don't. I think--I'm sure that we know. We know what's happening. I mean, this is the--leading up to the Freedom Rides, right? In 1961, spring?

EC: It would have been--yes, so you would have been organizing that congress.

BR: Right, while the Freedom Rides are going on. Yes, so I'm sure that we were aware and saw what was going on. So, by the time I get to--okay, fast forward. I go to Berkeley. I go to Berkeley for graduate school in the fall of 1961. So, I'm a full-time student, political science student, and I get all these letters from Paul Potter, who has passed away. He was a fabulous organizer and Tom Hayden, who go to McComb, and this is the organizing in McComb where Brenda Travis is kicked out of school and where Hollis Watkins and all of the SNCC folks, Curtis Hayes, all of the SNCC folks that come out of the McComb movement are organizing as high school students. So, I'm getting these long missals from Paul and Tom, who are travelling, and basically at the end, it says, well, do something to support us. So, I go all--I go around to all of the lefties in

Berkeley that I'm now meeting and they're like, "Well, we're too busy. You do something."

EC: They're writing those under the auspices of SDS?

BR: Of SDS, yes.

EC: They're using sort of NSA contacts, among others.

BR: Yes.

EC: That's how they find you?

BR: Well, no. Tom and Paul I knew because of the liberal study group in Madison and the 1961--and the 1961 congress. So, we kind of have this--I go to California imagining that I'll start an SDS chapter on the Berkeley campus.

EC: All right.

BR: Exactly, exactly, so, and then, so Tom and Paul are sending these very thick kinds of, you know, mimeographed--which we used to use that out Gestetner mimeograph with the blue film and, of course, we used the mail. We didn't have computers. We didn't have faxes. We didn't have any of that kind of communication so--

EC: You weren't texting and twittering.

BR: No, none of that. So, they're sending this through the mail in these like thick packages, these daily reports of what's happening in McComb, and then some of that, I think, we're seeing on TV. But, I don't--as a graduate student, I don't even remember did we have--did we have televisions? We must--we must have had because I have pictures in my mind of the sit-ins and that kind of thing but I wonder if it's because

I've seen the photographs and I've seen the movies or it's because we really had access to TV at the time. I don't remember, you know, so--.

EC: So, you start raising money for SNCC and--.

BR: Exactly. So, I start something called the Provisional Committee, the Provisional Committee for Civil Rights, something like that. It's in my hands chapter. I'm not sure what its name was but I organized--I get some undergraduates, some graduate students. So, there are a bunch of things that are going on parallel at the same time. There's this organizing. I'm gathering people to support the civil rights movement. I'm also in a study group of graduate students who are looking at social movements through history in the US. So, we're looking at the very beginnings of any kind of social movement organizing. So, we're looking at the white working-class men who fight for the right to vote in Rhode Island. We're looking at the--I can't even remember half the names. But, anyway, we definitely looked at the abolitionists. We looked at the early women's movement. We looked at the farmer labor parties. We looked at the muckraking organizing in the 1920s. We looked at the labor movement and so on, and then we looked at all the iterations of organizing within the black community, like the Marcus Garvey movement and other things, and--.

EC: Do you see this as a--as part of your graduate work or is this part of your interest?

BR: No, this is part of--I mean, it certainly dovetails with some of the graduate work but this was all graduate students. Not all of us were political scientists but we were progressive. We were left and we said, "We want to do this study." So, we did. We read books and we reported [55:00] to each other. We had like a monthly potluck

where we talked about these issues and what I concluded, and I'm pretty sure some of the others did as well, that the African American struggle was the one struggle that wasn't consummated, wasn't fully consummated. Of course, I didn't understand why that was until much later; that it had to do with the US origins in slavery and the use of the criminalization of black people and, therefore, how far we had to go to really know what the black freedom movement needed to do to achieve liberation. So, that was kind of the beginnings of me deciding that I was going to go South. It's kind of like--but it dovetailed with Jim Forman saying to me--because I was raising money and I was taking on the phone with Forman and with Casey, because she was in Atlanta doing some of the Northern support work. So, I'm talking with them on the phone. I'm saying, "I'm sending you this amount of money," or whatever we were doing, and Jim saying to me, "We need you in the South. Come South." And me doing this reading, and studying, and discussing with other graduate students and thinking about it, and then, also, this was the era of the ivory tower conversations about how the universities were isolated from the rest of the country. And they were ivory tower places where--which had no connection, really, to the reality of people's lives. So, there was that ivory tower thing. So, if you were studying political science, how could you just study it in a vacuum and not be active in it? So, all those things kind of led to my decision to go South.

EC: So, I'm looking at the timing. So, it looks like you probably were in grad school for two years and part of another because it--.

BR: Yes.

EC: You come to SNCC in the fall of 1963. Is that right?

BR: No, I come to SNCC in March of 1964.

EC: Oh, but, you come to the SNCC conference in the fall of 1963.

BR: Fall, 1963, I go to the Howard conference, exactly, over Thanksgiving break in 1963, and that's really where I get recruited. It's where I make my decision to go South. Before that, Forman and Casey had been calling me and suggesting I should come. So, I go back to Berkeley after that Thanksgiving break and I wrap up my semester. I didn't finish one of my papers, which is why it took me until March to go because I had incompletes on my record. So, I finish up my papers and then I take a train across the country in March of 1964.

EC: So, when you leave graduate school, have you like completed a master's--.

BR: No.

EC: --or something like that?

BR: No.

EC: You just leave.

BR: I have the coursework and that's it.

EC: So, yeah, so you've got, what, two-and-a-half semesters of coursework?

BR: Yeah.

EC: Then, you leave?

BR: Yeah. No, I have four-and-a-half. Isn't it four? Wait--1961, 1962, 1962, 1963, and wait--yes, and fall of 1963. Yeah, I have five semesters of coursework, yeah, and probably had completed all my course requirements and just needed to write a dissertation of some sort but never did so--.

EC: How do you end up going to the Thanksgiving meeting at Howard for SNCC in the fall of 1963?

BR: That's a good question. I never really explored that question before. Probably, because Forman and Casey are encouraging me to come. My parents live in New York. The meeting is in Washington so it's easy for--I'm getting--probably, my parents are paying for my trip home. So, I can just take another little plane to DC and go to the meeting, and I'm sure by then I'm like, very connected to SNCC. I mean, I'm living and breathing the movement by then. The Freedom Singers had come to Berkeley to do a concert so actually there's a nice story here. Chuck Neblett, who was one of the Freedom Singers, when he--when they came, they came in the fall of 1963, his brother, Chico, had been beaten in Selma. I believe it was Selma, and so we went to the FBI office on Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley and we had picket signs, and I have a picture of Chuck saying, "My brother was beaten in Selma while the FBI watched." So, we were like targeting the FBI office in Berkeley, and that was the kind of organizing that SNCC did. It did fundraising but it also did rallies at federal buildings. We did work with congressional representatives. We always did--we just did whatever the--whatever the targets were for the organizing, whatever the demands were. And if the demand wasn't the FB--in this case, the demand wasn't the FBI. Stop being part of the Southern establishment, [1:00:00] then we would do that.

EC: And you're coordinating with Casey Hayden because she's the Northern--.

BR: She's the Northern Coordinator for SNCC at the time.

EC: Outside of the South support.

BR: Yes. Exactly. She's based in Atlanta at that time. Forman of course was the Executive Secretary and he's kind of the glue that holds the Atlanta office together and the visionary for all of us.

EC: And so, you're--you said you're sort of living, breathing SNCC by this time.

BR: Exactly.

EC: Is that through these--you said the freedom singers had come out.

BR: Exactly.

EC: I assume they did that as part of a fundraising--.

BR: Absolutely.

EC: Awareness raising.

BR: Yes. Yes.

EC: Are you meeting other SNCC people or is--.

BR: I think Sam Block may have come out to do house parties. I know Mike Miller who still lives on the West Coast, he went down to the freedom vote in the Fall of 1963. I think. He comes back--is that right or did he go in the summer of 1963? Maybe he was there in the summer of 1963, so he has stories to tell. And then he plays a role, as do other people, in starting the friends of SNCC, the Bay Area friends of SNCC, which becomes quite a large organization as a newspaper and that kind of thing and raises quite a lot of money to send south.

EC: Sure. Are you active in that then too?

BR: No. Bay Area Friends of SNCC really starts, really mushrooms, after I leave. I think--I don't remember when we took that name aside from this provisional Committee for Student Rights or whatever, but one of the interesting things is Mario Savio was one of the students that we recruited into this Berkeley Student Organization.

And then he of course ends up going South in the summer of 1964 and coming back and leading the free speech movement at Berkeley.

EC: By then your goal--.

M1: I got busted in that one.

BR: Pardon?

M1: I got busted--.

BR: You got busted at that one? Okay. So, you were a Berkeley student?

M1: Yes. I was.

BR: Absolutely. What department were you in?

M1: I ended up in Philosophy, started in Math and ended up in Philosophy.

BR: See that? See that those were the times that we lived in.

M1: I worked at Pleasantville High School.

BR: Pardon?

M1: And I worked at Pleasantville High School.

BR: In New York?

M1: In New York.

BR: You are kidding me!

M1: No.

BR: Wow. That's where I went, Pleasantville High School.

M1: I keep trying to. I know. I kept placing one work what I was doing with what you were doing.

BR: Right. Wow. That's--.

M1: That's editorializing. We shouldn't ().

BR: Yes. I know shouldn't, but I'm sure Guha will cut that out, right? If he does the editing. Right. Well, John, we'll have to talk over lunch.

EC: So, can you tell us what the--do you have memories of that Thanksgiving meeting that SNCC held at Howard in 1963?

BR: The biggest memory I have is the singing. That's the most incredible thing, standing in a circle singing all the freedom songs and then people with tears streaming down their eyes, singing "We Shall Overcome" at the very end of the meeting. That's the--I think that's the emotional connection that I had to the movement was the singing and then understanding how song really pushed you forward, gave you some courage to do something that you maybe hadn't dreamed that you would do and the community--again the collectivity of those moments where people were singing and they were united in that power.

I mean it's kind of the same thing I described with the Algerian students and the power of that singing and that comradery. Those were things because--partly it was probably because of the way I was raised without a lot of that feeling and emotion happening. I don't know, just so those moments, those emotional moments where you could open up and be connected with people were kind of the thing.

EC: Yes. You know, I know some of these networks and some of these people are very interconnected with NSA and SDS.

BR: Oh, I left something out. The Southern Student Freedom Fund, but I'll come back to that.

EC: Okay. So, you end up sort of focusing--you're moving into SNCC. Do you have a sense of why you became more engaged with SNCC as opposed to continuing with SDS?

BR: Yes. Absolutely. That's a good question, because I was thinking I also didn't bring up the SDS stuff completely. So, I go to California thinking that I'm going to, with this other woman Becky Mills, that we're going to start an SDS chapter and we just [1:05:00] somehow never get it off the ground. Maybe because I get involved in the civil rights support work. But at the same time, I'm staying connected with SDS, because by the--I can't remember if it's by the--.

It's not the summer of 1962. Maybe it is the summer of 1962, after Port Huron. So, summer of 1962, I also go to the World Youth Festival in Helsinki which is another piece. Okay, so the World Youth Festival is run by the Soviet Block and it's under it's under--no, it's WFDY, the World Forum of Democratic Youth which is the Soviet Block's name for this.

There's WFDY and there's another one that the West uses, the Europeans and the US, but I can't remember its name off hand. So, I go to Helsinki, go to Helsinki Youth Festival under the auspices of the IRS which is the International Relations something, Seminar maybe. I don't know. It's the thing that Gloria Steinem is connected to. It's funded by the CIA. She knows it's funded by the CIA and this other guy Harold [Baucham?] who was an NSA President back in the late 1940s, early 1950s.

So, they recruit a whole bunch of us to go to Helsinki to be the alternative to the Soviet line, but we're like, no testing east or west people. We're like, anti-nuclear. We're supposed to be the radical students from the US who are maybe socialist but not

pro-communist if you want to--I mean, that's like a weird distinction, but, there was the Democratic Socialist movement in the US. So, there was the Michael Harrington folks who were anti-communist, viciously anti-communist.

Those were the people that--rambling now--but those were the people that were the fathers of SDS, meaning SLID and LID, the League for Industrial Democracy. These were viciously anti-communist socialists and Michael Harrington was one of that group, the Norman Thomas socialist so to speak. And then SLID was the Student League for Industrial Democracy which was the student arm which was kind of the auspices under which SDS initially collected and then there was a break.

So, I went to this meeting in New York. I was put on the SDS Executive Committee, and I don't remember when or why or how come. But maybe because I was a student at Berkeley, and they imagined that I would really be doing some organizing work at Berkeley. I hadn't really cut my teeth on organizing yet, but they put me there. So, in the summer of 1962, I believe after Port Huron--the reason I didn't go to Port Huron was because I went to the World Festival in--I went to the Congress, the World Youth Congress, whatever it was called.

What did I say it was called? The World--the Festival of Democratic Youth. Something like that. So, I went to that instead of Port Huron, but when I came back, we were at a meeting in New York with the LID, the League for Industrial Democracy people and this is when the split happened between LID and SDS. So, other people can give you much better detail if this is an area of interest, but I can remember a guy named Mickie Most banging his hand on the table and screaming, "Those bloody communists, they're this, they're that, they're this and they're that."

And of course, this is in the context of Ru--this is post the Stalin purges and all of that. What did I know about any of that stuff? I didn't know. Probably not too many people in the US new about that, because it was kept under wraps, but this guy is just foaming at the mouth and he's really angry and pissed. So, I can remember those kind of emotional moments as they form the hallmark of these experiences.

But anyway, at this World Festival of Democratic Youth, or the International--whatever it was called. I don't have the right name for it yet. The idea was we got free housing and in exchange for writing notes about what we were experiencing. So, any panels that we went to, we had to write who was on the panel, what they said, etc., etc., and we would turn the notes in and that was again, that was why we got the free housing.

So, that was the CIA M.O. in that day. We didn't realize that we were--we really thought that we were representing an alternate view of the US, that we were organizing for more freedom and democracy at home, and that because we were anti-war also, [1:10:00] we were not testing east or west. In fact, I went to a demonstration in the main square in Helsinki which was a no testing east or west demonstration, and people had signs. And the people with the signs had the shit beat out of them by the Helsinki police because that was a communist control country at the time.

So, those people were just demolished right in front of me and I'm like, oh my gosh, this is an international--this is an example of what happens internationally when you're taking a stand that's different from the establishment.

EC: So, you did some of that background on SDS and what you were doing in response to my question about why you pursued SNCC instead of SDS.

BR: Yes. Oh, but I didn't finish the answer. The answer was because in SDS I really was a wallflower and I was, as a woman, I don't think I was respected or encouraged or affirmed. I was in awe of the men and their intellect and their conversation and so on, but I wasn't affirmed in that space. So, in the SNCC space, because I could take initiative, because I could rise to the occasion, I could do something concrete and I got affirmed by Jim Forman and by Casey that I was doing a good thing, and that I was needed and necessary and important. And that was probably one of the reasons maybe they had in mind that they would recruit me to come South, and [that] I should come to the Howard meeting so they could check me out further.

But I knew Casey from SDS circles, and that may have been one of the reasons that Casey left SDS as well, although I know that she split from Tom, so that may have been part of it as well. But she was southern and so the SNCC experience fit more with her perspective about the world. But that's kind of it in a nutshell, is the affirmation and the kind of knowing that you could. And then also SNCC was much more dynamic at the time.

I mean SDS--we were in our heads all the time. We weren't doing any action. There were no real organizing campaigns unless you were on a campus like--some of the campus newspapers got censored because they were writing radical things, all of those kinds. So, if you were on a campus and you worked with SDS, and there were political parties, there was Toxin. There was--I forget the Mich--there was Slate in California and there was another one on Michigan's campus that were running radical students for student office and that kind of thing.

So, those would have been exciting campaigns to be involved in, but I think the fact that I was affirmed and the fact that I could really make a contribution with the fundraising and the organizing, the political organizing, so I went South.

EC: I haven't really made a study of SDS, but when I've looked at some of the documents here and there I have a sense that it was a little more male than SNCC was.

BR: Very much more male. Way more male. I mean, I think. Now I don't know about the chapters on the campuses but I think very often--in fact, I see it being recreated now in the student movement--is when sometimes when there are organizations that are headed by males, the women involved are the partners of the men. So, in SDS, that was another thing is the women involved were partners with the men.

So, that was how they got involved. They didn't necessarily get involved because they had had some independent presence and independent organizing thrust. And again, that was because of the day, although even now I'm seeing it recreated in some of the organizations that I--.

EC: That must be kind of strange.

BR: It is. It is. And I think they're struggling more with it. I mean, I think people are aware enough that they're saying, "Hey, wait. Look at the way you're organized. You've got to deal with this."

EC: Of course, that's interesting, because Casey was an activist in her own right.

BR: In her own right. Exactly.

EC: () made her slightly different than the others.

BR: Some of the other women. Exactly. Exactly. Yes. Exactly.

EC: So, you come South to the Atlanta office in March and, if I understand the chronology right, Casey is sort of the first northern coordinator for SNCC.

BR: Exactly.

EC: And then Dinky Romilly picks it up and then she goes back to New York, I think.

BR: She goes back to New York.

EC: You replace her.

BR: No, I don't replace her right away. When I come to SNCC in March of 1964, Dinky is the northern coordinator. We work together. I go to Mississippi for the summer. So, I'm the lead northern coordinator in the Greenwood office during summer [of 19]64, and Dottie and Judy are there both also working. [1:15:00] They work on the press stuff primarily. Then, in the fall of [19]64--.

EC: So, Dottie's on there and Judy--.

BR: Judy Richardson's. I'm sorry.

EC: So, this is part of SNCC--kind of relocates the national office to Greenwood in Freedom Summer.

BR: Exactly. During Freedom Summer. It's SNCC making a statement about its commitment to the Freedom Summer organizing. So, it opens an office in Greenwood and it picks Greenwood as the delta because that's the place where there are the least number of people, black people, voting and where the heaviest oppression in the State of Mississippi, one of the places where the heaviest oppression happens in the Delta which is part of the black belt of the South.

EC: You started to jump to fall 1964. Were you going to go on to what you were doing then?

BR: No. Fall 1964 is when Dinky Romilly moves to New York, and I become the northern coordinator. I become the--I get the title of northern coordinator title.

EC: So, can you describe to us what the Atlanta office was like when you come and sort of what you remember about it and what kind of work you did?

BR: Okay. So, okay. So, I come in March of [19]64. I find a group of people that are working really hard, that are absolutely dedicated. All the things that I imagined, like people working in solidarity, in comradery, Forman sweeping, Forman having us pick up. Him kind of like organizing us to make a family out of this space.

A number of people that I got to be--I got to friends with the people who are the bottom, not the--I don't want to say the bottom layer, because that's not really true. But the people who were not the big names. The Jim Formans and the John Lewises. Of course, you get to know them and you sit with them and you break bread with them and that kind of thing. But the people that I remember are like Wilson Brown and McCrae and people like Wilson Brown and McCrae were running the printing press and they were doing--Willie McCrae--they were doing more--they were doing the support functions in the office as I was when I first came.

Of course, I was a support person. So, yes, you build these friendships and have these conversations about--I don't know, it's an interesting thing reflecting back. We didn't really have conversations too much about how we grew up or what we were doing before we got there. I guess we kind of talked about the work and what was happening in the field.

Every morning, someone would call all the projects, all the SNCC projects, because we had a WATS line, a wide area telephone line, and it was kind of like an eight hundred number of today. So, we would document every morning and every evening, we would call all the projects and find out what had been going on. And then we also-- another thing we had to do, because we had this WATS line we paid, I don't know, \$400 or something like that. Maybe it wasn't that much to have it.

Then, the projects would call us collect and we would say--so, say somebody from Greenwood would call and they would say, "This is Stokely Carmichael and I want to talk to Jim Forman," and we would say, "Well, Jim Forman's not here. So, can we take a--" We used to leave an operator number. So, operator fifty-four in Greenwood. So you'd call back and get the--.

So, we would just know that it was Stokely on the other end and then we would dial the--using the eight hundred number--we would dial the SNCC office number and talk to Stokely or whoever it was that called. So, that was the way we avoided the phone company charges, right?

[Camera turns off and on again]BR: I'm ready. I'm ready.

EC: Where did you live when you moved to Atlanta?

BR: Oh. Gosh. That's a really good question, but we do have to go back and do Southern Student Freedom Fund.

EC: Okay. Well, let's--alright, why don't you tell us about what the Southern Student Freedom Fund was.

BR: Okay. Okay, so the Southern Student Freedom Fund was organized by NSA, Young Christian Students, SDS and one other organization, Norther Student

Movement. So, it was four organizations of students and NSA was part of that too. I don't know if I said that.

EC: I think you did.

BR: Yes. Okay. So, those four organizations organized nationally on campuses to do support work for the Southern Freedom Movement. [1:20:00]

EC: And, if I remember correctly, I think their first impetus was to raise money for scholarships for students who are kicked out of school.

BR: Kicked out of school.

EC: Because of the sit-ins.

BR: Yes. And then there would have been money raised for bail, and there would've been money raised just to send to SNCC directly for organizing, for field secretaries and that kind of thing.

EC: Was there anything in particular you wanted to say about their role or your connection to it?

BR: Well, no, but I think Tim was very active in that. Tim Jenkins was active in the Southern Student Freedom Fund. There was a young man from New Orleans. I think his name was Walter Williams maybe who--.

EC: Was he the Jackson State student?

BR: He might have been the Jackson State student or two who was kicked out right who then became the coordinator of the Southern Student Freedom Fund. So, again, it was another constellation of student energy that was developed and where black students played a really critical role in moving the work forward, in traveling nationally, in calling people in to do the work.

EC: So, then I want to come back to your living situation in Atlanta.

BR: Yes.

EC: Before we do, is there a sense in these networks that you're participating in that black students are sort of the driving force?

BR: Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean this is definitely a movement that's led by black students and we are--all of us are, first of all, exhilarated by the leadership of black students, the vision, the clarity, the dedication and the understanding of the need to fight against racial oppression. And then, because these amazing black students are leading it and in the trenches and sacrificing their lives in a way that we aren't sacrificing our lives.

I mean, one of the privileges I had of course, was when I went South to SNCC. I could leave. I was a northerner. I had a college degree. I certainly had a privilege to go back to--not that I did--but to go back to kind of a professional or a middleclass existence. A lot of the black students had dropped out of college or had been expelled from college and they were first in their families to go to college.

So, their family's hopes were riding on their success. So, they had to fly in the face of their family's expectations of what they would do with their lives.

EC: Which reminds me, how was your family reacting to your--?

BR: Oh, my gosh. They were very--they were outraged. They did not want me in the South. They thought I was duped. They thought I was--I don't know. They thought I was crazy. They were always leaning on me to come home, get out of there. They really did think I was brainwashed and that I was under the grip of some ideological, sinister ideological thing.

I don't know, they thought something was planted in my brain and that was making me do these crazy things. They were not happy at all. Not happy.

EC: What about your brother?

BR: I don't remember him saying much in those days. I know that in retrospect he's very proud of the work that I did. He was very supportive later on and he's a good thinker, progressive thinker himself. So, yes. He was supportive. He was never, you know.

EC: I can't remember the details now, but I've seen the letter that Judy Richardson wrote to your mother from Greenwood.

BR: Yes. Yes. I know. Thanking her. What they did when I was in Mississippi, that was the intense part that they thought that was the duping, brainwashing. So, I think when I was active in raising money and that kind of thing, they didn't have two thoughts about that because I was in Berkeley. I was safe. I wasn't in the South.

So, March of 1964 I go South, but in the summer in June I go to Greenwood. That's when the heat was put on. So there the brainwashing, the duping, they have to have--they're going to deprogram me when I come home. All that stuff happens in the summer of [19]64. But, at the same time, they send us an air conditioner, because they find out that we're living in 90-degree, 100-degree heat. So, they send us an air conditioner for the office.

So, that's kind of the contradiction of the parent who's anxious about their child's existence and their political thinking, but the same time you want their kid to be comfortable, right? [1:25:00] It's so bizarre. It's so upper middle class. It's ridiculous.

Anyway. So, they send us an air conditioner and Judy writes them a letter, Judy Richardson writes them a letter thanking them for the air conditioner.

EC: Did they have--I mean, obviously, they think you're crazy to go to Mississippi. What were their political views on segregation and the movement in general at this point?

BR: Well I think, I think because of my mother's prejudices that she's probably--I don't really know, because I didn't have much connection with them. So, I don't really know, as the movement evolves and as more and more images are shown on TV, I'm sure because of her prejudices she's not thinking freedom movement, liberation. She's not thinking the things I'm thinking about why the movement's important.

EC: So, you started to describe your living situation in Atlanta from Berkeley.

BR: In Atlanta. So, I live out--I can't remember the name of the street, but it's way out and it's kind of a freedom house. There's five or ten people living in the apartment and every morning we come into the office on Raymond Street, then every evening we'd go out. You don't have transportation or cars, so you've got to worry. You have to leave when somebody who has a car is leaving or cop a ride with somebody who has a car type of thing.

Then, I think I lived there for--did I live there until--I may have lived there. I don't remember. But then maybe I moved somewhere else to an apartment, and then after the summer of 1964, I lived in a house on West Anthony Street with Joyce Brown, Carole Merritt--wait a minute, and one other woman. Joyce Brown, Carole Merritt, myself and one other women. All three were African American women and we had a nice little house with four bedrooms and--.

EC: I'm trying to think of what other African American women would have been in the Atlanta office then.

BR: Just trying to think.

EC: Jeanne Breaker

BR: I don't think it was Jeanne Breaker. Gosh. Oh, it was Shirley, Shirley Cooks. Yes. That's who it was.

EC: Before we talk about that situation. The Freedom House that you first moved into. Is that a multi-racial crew?

BR: It is and it's an apartment in an apartment complex and I can't remember the name of the street, but it's kind of far out, so yes.

EC: Because I know some of the white women who first moved to Atlanta-- one of the things that they're struggling with is that Atlanta is so segregated that some of them initially are living in a white world.

BR: In a white world. Yes.

EC: And then others make a move into a black world where they end up being I think more comfortable. But I certainly was wondering about that, because you've got, SNCC is trying to deal with an integrated--.

BR: Exactly.

EC: () SNCC has integrated in a world that's still segregated.

BR: Segregated. Exactly. So, the place that I lived out [on] this highway, and I'll think of it. I want to say--oh, I can't remember the name of the highway. Anyway, that was not only multiracial. It was multi-gender. So, I don't think it was just women and I don't remember--I think I didn't stay there that long and then I think I moved in

with Dinky maybe. I think I lived--It was on English Avenue, but I'm not positive about that either.

But I can remember walking from that apartment. First, when you lived out this far away highway, you had to get a ride or be driven or maybe we could take a bus in the morning, in the daytime, but that was definitely a black apartment complex. Then this other apartment that I lived in was close enough to the office that I could walk, because I remember walking down Raymond Street to the office every morning. So, I'm not quite sure what that situation was.

EC: Do you remember whether you paid the rent or whether SNCC paid the rent?

BR: I think SNCC paid the rent on those places, those early places up to summer of 1964 and then fall of 1964 when we moved to West Anthony Street. I think we paid the rent and it was reasonable. I mean, we were--the SNCC, this is an interesting piece. I'm sure other SNCC folks have talked about this. The pay that we received was ten dollars a week, [1:30:00] or nine dollars and sixty-four cents after taxes and basically when you were in the field you had a free place, quotes around free.

You had a free place to stay either with a freedom house or with a family. So, the nine sixty-four was kind of your subsistence. So, you used it to buy groceries or you used it to buy cigarettes, which most of us smoked in the day. Cigarettes were only twenty cents a pack or fifteen cents a pack in that day. So, you could buy your cigarettes on that.

EC: It's true.

BR: It is a lot of cigarettes, right? When I quit smoking in 1969 a carton was two dollars and ten cents. So, I can remember the sign on T Street in Washington DC "Cartons two ten." So, it was pretty accessible then, smoking. But anyway. So, I think in some cases, SNCC paid the rent. In some cases, we paid the rent.

Then, when you lived in Atlanta, your pay was \$40 a week, and that was to acknowledge the fact that you had to pay rent. You had to pay utilities and that kind of thing.

EC: Yes. There are interesting discussions in some of the SNCC minutes about pay and--.

BR: I'm sure. I'm sure.

EC: So, what was your work as Northern Coordinator?

BR: Okay. Well, it depended upon--okay. So, there were a number of pieces to it. One was writing thank you letters to the people that sent us money. Often, we'd receive money unsolicited. People would send a check for ten dollars or one hundred dollars or one thousand dollars or fifty cents. So, we would write a handwritten thank you note to everybody.

Another part of the work was coordinating the Friends of SNCC activities. So, not only did we call all of the projects every morning, we called all the friends of SNCC offices every day and we would give them a report on what had happened in McComb, what had happened in Greenwood, what had happened in Albany, what had happened in Selma. Then we would, if we had some kind of a request like call the newspapers or call your congressman or call the Whitehouse or call the Justice Department or call the FBI or

have a rally at such and such office, have a rally at a federal building to highlight these issues of, people would organize things and go with their picket signs and their message.

I mean, we did--it's so interesting of today there's all this science of how do you develop the message and organizing and how do you change the narrative and that kind of thing. We had no science behind any of that. We just were out there with our messages. Stop this from happening. Stop the brutality in Greenwood or release the people who are in Parchman Penitentiary. But we had no conversations about what was the way to play it with the media and how could we get favor for our cause, because we were just out there assuming that people were going to resonate with the issues and get involved.

EC: I was going to--before you added that last bit, I was going to ask, is that because you thought that the message itself (), it was self-evident?

BR: Absolutely. Absolutely. And the news coverage was different at the time, because you would have these fabulous reporters from TV and newspaper reporters who were writing and capturing the images. I mean, I guess the TV images were not that well developed until a little later, but certainly Claude Sitton from the New York Times and some of the other writers were just incredible at capturing the spirit and the energy and the issues. The legal and the constitutional and the political issues.

EC: So, I think one of the things that hasn't been written that much about is what SNCC does accomplish through its Atlanta office or through the bureaucracy--.

BR: Right. Right.

EC: () but--.

BR: Right. Well, that wasn't the tendency to think of us as that.

EC: Yes. Well, what are the kinds of work that's taking place in the Atlanta office when you get there March [19]64?

BR: So, part of the work is because we're raising the money. We're also giving the money. We're paying the payroll and we're giving the money to the proj--when I say project, I mean a particular office in a community. So, there was the Greenwood project, or the McComb project, or the Hattiesburg office. So, we would be giving money, distributing money to those offices. We would be collecting all the information and documenting all the information and then losing all that information either for lawsuits, [1:35:00] for sending to the justice department, for scholars, for newspaper writers or whoever.

In other words, we were documenting the daily atrocities, the daily insults, the daily brutality of each community in the South, and then we were also working with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund with SCLC with Congress of Racial Equality, with the National Lawyers Guild, with the Medical Committee for Human Rights. So, we were working with these national organizations, with a lot of the church organizations even. National Council of Churches or the Unitarians or the Episcopalians or the UCC, the United Church of Christ folks.

We would be working, coordinating with them to think about what their role might be, how they might make a contribution, that kind of thing. There were delegations that came South and that would do some learning. So, there were a lot of different moving pieces. There was supporting the field projects and the field organizing was the dominant one. Then, the information that we sent to the northern Friends of

SNCC offices documented what was going on and then if there was a theme to what we were trying to take care of at that particular point in time.

There might have been something like the agriculture, the ASCS. The Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service. So, the ASCS was a federal program that enabled farmers to get some subsidies for growing a certain thing or not growing a certain thing, but it was the white farmers who benefited from that program and not the black farmers. So, there was a struggle to have the black farmers included in the benefits of that program.

There were food stamp programs. There were all of these federal programs including the school desegregation ruling by the Congress that you had to fight to make the promise of the piece of legislation actually given some benefit to the African American community.

EC: And that's the Civil Rights Act of [19]64 which put the little teeth into school desegregation. Is that what they ().

BR: I think it's [19]63. Is it [19]63 maybe that does it? No. It's [19]64. Okay. You're the scholar. I'm just the person in the trenches.

EC: You're just doing the work.

BR: Yes. Right. So, actually, yes. [19]64. That makes sense. [19]65 is the key voting rights Civil Rights Act. Yes. So, 1964, each school district was required to have a plan for desegregating and of course many school districts in the South formed their own white only private school systems. But if you didn't do that, you were supposed to have a plan where you could have freedom of choice, which of course put the burden on the black family that was wanting better education for their kid.

So, they had to undergo the harassment and the attacks, because they made their choice to send their child to the black school. Or you would have--some districts, very few districts, had all the first graders got put together. All the second graders, maybe the first, second and third graders got put together across racial lines and then it would continue on up, but that was very seldom. It was mostly freedom of choice and that meant that it wasn't free choice basically.

EC: Yes. I want to come back to that, because I think you did a lot of work on the school stuff.

BR: I did.

EC: I want to do a few other things first if that's okay.

BR: Okay.

EC: So, when you come to the Atlanta office and you're working, is there already a print shop?

BR: I think there is. Yes. There's a print shop and we're doing publications. We're doing--clearly we're doing the mimeographing, but there is some kind of a printing press. So, there's Mark Suckle. There's Wilson Brown. Willie McCray. What's this other guy's name? Forgetting his name. There were some hard-working folks who were doing the printing. Walter Tillow. I don't know if he was in the printing press. Anyway.

EC: One of the things I've seen is that SNCC takes these newspaper articles and then sort of lays them out with pictures that add the fundraising appeal.

BR: Yes. Exactly.

EC: And then The Student Voice.

BR: The Student Voice was the publication and that was printed on the printing press. So, you could print an eleven by seventeen piece of paper and it looked pretty nice. I don't know what that printing method [1:40:00] was at the time, but it was better than the mimeograph thing, because you could have the pictures exactly.

EC: Are you doing--when those things are printed, these things are printed up, do you have to like fold them and stuff?

BR: Absolutely. Yes. I'm so glad you rem--we had so many envelope stuffing parties and folding parties because we didn't folding machine or automatic, automated fundraising. No. So, yes we're up late at night folding and stuffing and you know talking and having pizza and playing music and cutting up type of thing. So, that was part of--.

EC: I mean, your sort of college student party, college age party.

BR: Exactly. With the envelope stuffing and so on. And of course, everybody knew that the fundraising was critical to the success of the organization. So, this was something that we had to do. So, there would be a fundraising appeal. That was something that we did in my department was write the letter. One of the things that we stayed away from was the "Oh, you have to help the poor Mississippi person who has no rights." We were more, "This is a democratic country. We need to be committed and dedicated to our ideals. This is an egregious violation of democratic principles and we need to--."

I mean we didn't use egregious and those words in the fundraising appeal, but you know, that was the idea was that we're not being true to our better side and therefore we have to--and here are these courageous young people who are risking their lives and

taking a step way beyond their comfort zone or anybody's comfort zone to bring the promise of democracy to the South. Of course, it was all about the South. We had no real lens on what the inequities in the North were and what the structural--certainly not understanding what the structural inequities were that were going on at the same time in terms of jobs and housing and education in the north.

EC: So, I know that some of the SNCC women had a sit-in in January of 1964.

BR: Yes.

EC: You get slightly different stories depending on who you ask, but, when you came in and started working, did you have any awareness of that?

BR: Not really. I don't--I think I only knew that in retrospect when we were working on the *Hands on the Freedom Plow* book and of course Judy Richardson has it in her story. Other people refer to it.

EC: Can you pull up *Hands on the Freedom Plow* and tell us briefly what that is? We'll come back to it.

BR: Of course. Oh, briefly.

EC: Well, we're going to come back to it.

BR: Okay. So, briefly, this is fifty-two stories of women who were part of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. It came out in 2010.

EC: And who edited it?

BR: So, there were six of us who edited. Judy Richardson, Dottie Zellner, Faith Holsaert, Martha Norman, and Jean Smith Young, and myself.

EC: And you're all SNCC women?

BR: We were all SNCC women. Yes. Took us fifteen years to get this out into the public.

EC: And we all thank you for doing it.

BR: You're very welcome. It was a labor of love.

EC: You want to say?

[Camera turns off and on again]

EC: What was it like to go into Mississippi in summer of 1964? You come in--actually, let me--before I ask that, when you were recruited, you were obviously recruited to come work in the Atlanta office. On your own, did you have any desire to go in the field or--.

BR: Absolutely. Oh, yes. Of course, you wanted to go into the field. I mean, I was torn. I felt safe in the office. I felt this parent thing I was dealing with where they were putting all this pressure on me to not be there. So, I felt I could carve out a space in the office. I was competent. I knew the work. I could do it. I was pretty efficient. I was pretty effective. But I wanted to be in the field. I was thrilled to go to Mississippi in the summer of [19]64 to be in the Greenwood office, and even though I was in the office, then I remember asking people, "I want to go canvassing with you. I want to go out." And I did go canvassing with Peter Orris a couple times. He was one of the white summer volunteers who is now in Chicago.

He became a physician actually, in Chicago and has worked for many years in health access and health equity organizing efforts as a doctor. But anyway, I went out canvassing with him a couple times to ask people to register to vote. I wanted to get the essence of the work. I wanted to be part of that essence. So, in the fall of [19]65, after I

had been the northern coordinator for a year, I decided I didn't want to do the northern coordinating anymore, but I wanted to do what was called federal programs. So, federal programs had to do with what we talked about before. [1:45:00] We talked about the discriminatory application of all the federal benefits in the South and somebody had been doing this work.

I can't remember if somebody had been doing it or if it had just been done in Mississippi. So, I imagined that I could do this by traveling to the different projects and documenting the inequalities of the giving out of the federal benefits. Then I would also go to Washington and do some research of the actual working of the program. So, it was food stamps. It was the school desegregation stuff. It was the ASCS, the Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service and other kind of local things.

So, I did go to Arkansas. I went to both the projects in Little Rock and Pine Bluff. I interviewed people and documented. It took like aff--we used to take affidavits which would be sworn statements about the discriminatory practices or the impact of these practices on the community. So, that was one thing I did and then when I got to Washington, maybe the second time I got to Washington, there was this issue with the Civil Rights act of [19]64 summer. I think the Congress had to write some rules for how would the school districts go about desegregating.

So, the rules maybe had been written by then and then there were all of these questions about how was the Act being put into practice. So, Marion Barry who was the head of the Washington DC office at the time and I went to the office of education and we asked if we could see their files and they let us see their files and in their files, we found these incredible pieces of information about the dispensations that were being

given. Congressman would right to the office of education and he would say, “In my school district in Hattiesburg, we are not ready to desegregate and therefore we’re okay with the freedom of choice plan for the first grade” type of thing.

So, they were like the minimum step forward is what they were willing and then the office of education would write back and they would say, “Oh, that’s okay. You’re relieved of any burden or responsibility.” So, what we did is we documented all of that. We put it together in a report which we published. It was mimeographed, because I remember what it looked like, and we had a big press conference in November of [19]65, maybe where John Lewis came, and we presented this data to the press.

Now, what impact it had, I guess we never figured out. Whether the report itself. But it’s like a lot of different iterations today. Somebody will do a report about access to jobs being inequitable or they’ll do affordable housing or whatever. So, you’d make a big fan fair, you’d present it to the press. The press writes about it and then it’s available for other scholars and researches and congressman and lawmakers who will then go onto write a different piece of legislation that takes into account what the findings have been.

EC: I want to circle back to a couple of things that you talked about, but I think one thing that people might find useful--I think what the Civil Rights Act did is it gave the federal government the power to withdraw federal funding from schools if they didn’t have--.

BR: Exactly. That was the point. If they didn’t have the plan and then the office of education would say, “Okay. Your plans fine. You keep the federal money.” Right?

EC: And so, there's this period of negotiation on what they had to do to fulfill that and it kind of became a little stronger over time as the resistance that you described.

BR: And also, the organizing in the South. I mean we can't forget that, because there were people in communities who were enrolling their children in the white school and who were being thrown off the plantation, who were being kicked out of their jobs, who were being harassed, who were being--houses were being shot into. So, it was part of the organizing picture. It became part of the next generation of demands beyond voting rights. The demand to have access to the federal programs. It was the demand for equal education, etcetera.

EC: A lot of people see Freedom Summer and the MFDP challenge as kind of a high point in that there's--people feel like there's a real drop off after that MFDP challenge and my sense is, after reading your piece [1:50:00] in *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, that you don't--that wasn't your experience.

BR: Well, I think what it did--the fact that the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegation was not accepted wholeheartedly by the National Democratic Party, what that did for us kind of was a slap in the face. It was like, oh, no matter what the picture is that we've painted of the denial of voting rights to people in the South and especially within the party structure in this case, they are not going to pay attention to that because they're more interested in their own political--Johnson was certainly interested in getting elected as President. He wasn't going to compromise the support of the southern states. All of that.

EC: So, for us, it was a rethinking--for us and SNCC, it was a rethinking of what the heck are we doing or what's the next step? Do we, as Forman put forward, do

we have a black belt summer project the next summer and we go into Alabama and Arkansas and Georgia and so we've spread across the South? South Carolina was part of that too. And Jack Minnis in the research department had done all the research to show all the denial of voting rights across all those black counties, the black belt counties across the South.

Do we do that? With some people that's more of the same. Do we continue the local organizing? Does it become more about schools and about access to benefits and food stamps and that kind of thing? Do we continue the voting rights conversation? And so, we continue all of that, and in fact we never resolve the black belt summer project issue. More students do come South in the summer of [19]65 to Mississippi. Not that many, but some. We have all these soul-searching conversations in the SNCC meetings that year.

We have four SNCC meetings that year. Two in the fall, maybe and two in the spring. We debate and discuss the direction of the movement and we talk about the--I mean, all the themes were there. I won't go into it. I'm sure somebody's interview will be able to elucidate all these points, but we really do a lot of soul searching and we, as young people, we try to pay attention to all of the organizational development issues like the personnel issues. Are people working, are people absent? Are people like burned out and are they therefore not working and we're still sending them a paycheck?

Are people--how are the different projects working? So, we were paying attention to that and I--and then of course Selma happened which is in March of [19]65, and then we're pushing back a little bit about that, because we're like, not in favor of Dr. King plunking himself into a community and kind of pushing for something big but not

building the capacity in the local community. Not developing leadership. Not going at the pace that the local community wants to go at. Of course, the story is that Amelia Boynton who was the leader of the Dallas County Voters League, she wanted Dr. King to come in, because she thought things were not moving quickly enough.

The SNCC field secretaries were building that capacity and leadership within the community and I think they felt that Dr. King coming in was a diversion from that. Of course, the SNCC field secretaries supported the Selma to Montgomery March and then the rest is documented in history. I won't go into that. I was only in Atlanta when the attack on the Edmund Pettus Bridge happened and then we were able--this is amazing--we were able to charter a plane to send four people, Ivanhoe Donaldson, Courtland Cox and Prathia Hall, and I don't know who the fourth person was, to Selma from Atlanta so they can get there quickly to be kind of the back-up SNCC support for John Lewis and John Love who was the field secretary in the community. That was kind of amazing.

EC: It is sort of amazing. Some of the stories of planes too. You're walking out on the runway.

BR: Yes. Exactly. The other piece was the cars, the fact that we had a fleet of 40 cars called the Sojourner Motor Fleet. Yes, Sojourner Motor Fleet. Who knows where that money came from? I mean, I suspect it might have come from Harry Belafonte or who knows. But there was--actually, maybe it was twenty cars. Was it forty cars or twenty cars? But anyway, we got a chunk of money from some source. Belafonte [1:55:00] was one of SNCC's big benefactors. Also, SCLC got a lot of money from him. But we were able to buy a fleet of cars. Very low end Fords and put CB

radios in them so that people could communicate in dangerous, especially in dangerous areas. So, each project was assigned a car and that was amazing.

EC: And one of the pieces of that was that they were able to buy the cars.

SNCC was able to buy the cars at cost, at the price the--.

BR: The dealers price? Oh, because of the United Auto Workers. I didn't know that part, right.

EC: Yes. So, they didn't buy them at sticker price. They got them at--.

BR: One of the histories that has never been written is this history of money flows. Like, what were the resources that either SCLC, SNCC, NAACP or CORE had at their disposal, how did they get it, where did they get it from? That kind of thing. I know in SNCC there was a big debate about the voting, the focus on voting rights as opposed to direct action, because the big foundations were ready to give money through the voter education project and within SNCC everybody thought, oh my gosh, this is going to soften the movement and it's going to dampen the organizing. It's going to divert people's attention.

So, Miss Baker was the one who suggest that SNCC do both the direct action as well as the voting rights organizing and then of course the voting rights turned out to be direct action because the resistance from the southerners.

EC: Yes. The Kennedy's thought that if they could--.

BR: Yes. Yes. Exactly, they thought that they could. They definitely did. They had no idea.

EC: You mentioned a little bit ago moving from the position of northern coordinator to working with federal programs. It was something like that. So, you saw a

need for a different kind of work or you had--so, do you just propose and say, "Hey, I want to do this" and then you make that move. How did something like that happen?

BR: Well, I proposed it and then I got agreement. I mean, I guess I proposed it to the executive committee. I'm not quite sure whether that's what I did. And then I think what happens--so, I get the approval to do this federal programs work. I don't think I had much guidance and I don't think--It was part of the more loose structure of SNCC which enabled people to carve out a space for themselves if they thought, "Oh, here's a space I can do." And you would normally get approval to do it. It, on some level, had to do with white privilege, I think, because as a white staff person, as somebody who had the--it wasn't that it was a SNCC strategy to go after the documenting and the federal programs.

There was a strategy to do the congressional challenge at the time. Post-[19]64 convention. There was also some other efforts where Mississippians went to Washington to protest and met with the federal agencies. I think that's kind of where I got the idea from. That was in summer of--I mean, that was in January of [19]65. I think people went to DC and met with all of these federal agencies about the way the programs were being delivered in the South. Anyway, there was--I had a certain level of privilege. I had that education privilege and the white privilege.

I had a car at that point. It was also partly my parents able to fund a car. It wasn't a new car, but it got me from place to place. So, there was a level of privilege there and there was also a level of the freedom within SNCC to kind of figure out what you could do within your, what you were interested in that would also dovetail with the fight for freedom.

EC: I know that happens in the context. As you've said, SNCC's doing all this soul searching and then there is, in one of the big debates going on, is what should the structure of SNCC look like.

BR: Exactly.

EC: Structure versus how to distribute it.

BR: Non-structured. Yes. And I was in the structure faction, interestingly enough, that we needed a strong central structure partly because I had heard from all the field staff that they needed some regularity to the way they were funded and that there was real anger that Mississippi was getting all this attention and money. And Georgia and Alabama and Arkansas, they were feeling like they were stepchildren of the organization and weren't being funded at the same level. And because all the volunteers flooded into Mississippi, [2:00:00] then those volunteers had access to money. And they went back home and they raised money for the project that they had been part of. So, they would send it to McComb or they would send it to Itta Bena or they would send it to Greenville or wherever they had been stationed--or Indianola or Ruleville or whatever. So, those--. I don't know which--. And again, this story has never been written, about how those funding inequities played out within the organization, how people coped with that, and/or how comfortable people felt with that. So.

EC: Did you--? One of the SNCC meetings that's infamous is the Waveland meeting. Were--?

BR: There were two Waveland meetings. So, are you talking about fall of [19]65 or spring of [19]66?

EC: It was actually, fall [19]64.

BR: Oh, yes, of course, fall [19]64. Yes. Yes. Well, that was the meeting where all the papers were written and presented. So, there were papers on every topic, on the people, on the--. There was a tension around the level of education that people had and whether people from the field--not the field secretaries but the sharecroppers that we were working with, how key was their voice and how important it was to have respect for them. So, there was that whole question, of education and wisdom. And clearly, a lot of SNCC staff felt there was incredible wisdom in the local people. I felt that. Clearly. They could just take an issue and crystalize it, in a very plain, simple language and move people to action. So, there were papers about structure. There were papers about culture and creativity. There were papers about--oh, my goodness--about things like the Freedom Democratic Party or some kind of electoral campaigns. There were papers on everything. And everybody was encouraged to write a paper, if they wanted to. And so, that was all put into the mix and the discussion. So.

EC: And one of the papers that's gotten a lot of attention over the years is the position paper--.

BR: On women.

EC: --on women in the organization--.

BR: Exactly. Ex--.

EC: --that was published anonymously--.

BR: Exactly.

EC: --but very quickly identified with Mary King and Casey Hayden. I know you know about that but were you aware of it at the time?

BR: I don't think so. I don't think--. I'm pretty sure that they may have given it to me or shown it to me. But I wasn't in that space, at that time, at all. I wasn't in the women's liberation space until the early [19]70s. And there's a whole history to that. But, yeah, I wasn't in that space. So, if they did show it to me and asked me what I thought or to be part of it, I was not interested. And I don't actually remember the debate happening, at the Waveland meeting. So, I don't know whether I wasn't there or whether--just something that I wasn't interested in. I don't really remember. I think it's partly the background is that I felt so respected and so free, in the moment, to be in the struggle, to make a contribution, that I didn't see this discriminatory--making women feel--felt less than. In fact, even though I come out of a tradition where women are not respected and honored and whatever--. But I felt that SNCC did give me that affirmation. And so, I didn't need to fight for women's liberation, per se. And because, I think, also I felt the freedom struggle was paramount.

And so, it's interesting. At some point, I want to go back and read all of the discussions about the women's movement, during the abolitionist time, and find out what the different women's positions were on why they did or didn't join the separate women's organizations, why they felt that their struggle should be subservient to the black freedom struggle. Because that's how I felt, I think. And again, looking back, I can see that the struggle of black women was clearly--should have been lifted up more than it was or could have been. Certainly, the position of black women was much more challenging than that of black men. And then the white women's movement left black women out of their equation, for many decades, in fact, probably still does, on some level. But somehow, I guess I thought that the black struggle was the dominant struggle

[2:05:00] and, therefore, I was not going to be diverted by this women's liberation thing. Right. And I don't know if it was because I thought somebody would call me a traitor or it was too self-centered or--. I don't remember what it was or why it was.

M1: Let me pause.

[Break in audio]

M1: We're back.

BR: Okay.

EC: I think you probably already answered this. But I know Mary King and Casey Hayden talk about sharing books about women's issues and having these discussions. And it sounds a little bit like what you were doing in graduate school--.

BR: Exactly.

EC: --around social movements.

BR: Yeah.

EC: Do you remember that, part of that network, at all?

BR: I wasn't. I wasn't. I don't remember--. The Simone de Beauvoir and the--who's the--? Doris Lessing books. I remember reading Doris Lessing later, once I was in DC. But I wasn't part of that. I was just in the trenches, [laughs] doing the work, whatever had to--stuffing the envelopes, writing the stuff to be sent out to raise the money. Right. I was just so focused on all of that.

EC: So, you mentioned that you and Marion Barry were looking at the education materials, when you wrote that report. I know SNCC opens a DC office--.

BR: Yes.

EC: --initially as a support office and in general. And then there was the DC MFDP office.

BR: Exactly.

EC: And part of that is connected to the strong Howard University Nonviolent Action Group or NAG.

BR: NAG. Yes.

EC: But at a certain point, SNCC starts moving towards working in DC, organizing DC in its own right.

BR: Yes.

EC: Can you talk about that? Or do you have--.

BR: A little bit.

EC: --a sense of that?

BR: Well, a little bit. I think it mostly happened after I left. But we did the--. So, at some point, I make this transition from the federal programs person to working full-time in the DC office. I'm not quite sure if that happens in November or December. I have an apartment in DC, by then. I guess I'm just full-time DC office. So--.

EC: When you--sorry to interrupt--.

BR: Okay.

EC: --when you first started working on federal programs, are you still based out of Atlanta?

BR: Yes. I'm based out of Atlanta. I'm traveling to Arkansas, to Alabama. I never went to southwest Georgia, in that process. And then I go to DC. And I stay in--. There was a Freedom House in Mount Pleasant, in DC, at the time. Or somebody lived

there. I just stayed there, temporarily. But by December, I think, I have an apartment in DC, on California Street. And so, on--.

EC: And this would be like December [19]65 or--?

BR: [19] 65. Yeah. So, I'm permanently a part of the Washington SNCC office. So, in January, February of [19]65, there are two initiatives that happen. One is a Free DC movement, which has to do with the fact that the District of Columbia doesn't have voting representation in Congress. And so, we have a logo that has a chain and there are hands pulling the chain apart. Free DC is the logo. And a guy named L.D. Pratt comes from Kansas or Iowa or somewhere, an older white guy, and Marion and he become very chummy--and just drives a wedge in the office too. Because he's much older than all the rest of us. Right. And Marion Barry, who's the head of the Washington SNCC office, he becomes very chummy with him. And so, the staff, we're feeling a little bit left out of the decision-making process. But one of the things that they concoct is an approach to big businesses, department stores, that kind of thing, in DC-- and ask them to put this logo in their window, that says "Free DC." And I forget if they were supposed to give some money or what they were supposed to do. But if you didn't put the logo in your window, then you were told, well, we were going to boycott you. Now, I don't think SNCC actually boycotted anybody. I don't remember. But I remember the big department stores, Woodward & Lothrop and Hecht Co. and so on, were some of the targets to get this Free DC decal in the window. And I don't know if anybody's written this history up either. This would be interesting history, right? So--. And Marion, of course, has passed away, so he can't share--. There's a couple of people, Tina Smith, who's still in DC, who might have some of this history--. Because she

worked kind of as the administrator in the Washington office. And Eric Jones is somebody else, who's a SNCC person who worked in the Washington office, who's still in DC. He comes to the SNCC meetings and reunions. So anyway, that was one thrust.

The other thrust was [2:10:00] we did a bus boycott. And that would have been in February or March of [19]66.

EC: And let me ask. So, while you're doing these thrusts in DC, there must still be an MFDP office, that's working on the Congressional Challenge. Because that was January in--.

BR: Of [19]65, though, wasn't it?

EC: Oh, that's right.

BR: So, this is a year later. I think the MFDP office--.

EC: This is--.

BR: --maybe is closed--I don't really know--at this point. I know there w--. Sharlene Kranz could give you the dates of that. But Marion--. So, we start this bus boycott. And I think it was around bus fares. I think the issue was bus fares. And we had this very clever plan where we would give people rides to work. And we used Benning Road as the big thoroughfare that we concentrated on. And we had, in the basement of the SNCC office, which was on Rhode Island Avenue, we had this array of telephones, that were supposed to take the incoming calls from people. And I think it only lasted a few days. I don't know if we even won the fare stabilization. It's very murky in my mind. But I do know that, right after that, I quit the--. I wrote a letter, talking about how the internal culture in the SNCC office was not an atmosphere where

people could be participatory, could participate in the decision-making process, which is what it had been, and that it was time for me to move on. So, I did.

EC: Can you talk about what the racial dynamics were in the organization?

You come to SNCC in fall of [19]64, in Atlanta.

BR: In March of [19]64.

EC: Sorry.

BR: That's okay. No problem.

EC: March [19]64, in Atlanta. And at that point, it's very much an interracial office.

BR: Exactly. It's mostly African American, though. It's never predominantly white.

EC: Even in the Atlanta office?

BR: Even in the Atlanta office. It's not predominantly white. If I ticked off the names and the people, it wouldn't be predominantly white. So, yes, but it is an interracial office. And there are some situations where there are interracial relationships. And there are some living situations which are inter-relation--inter-relat--interracial. [laughs] But there are also some situations where black staff live together. And in--. I don't remember if it's--. Maybe it's the fall of [19]65. No. I'm sorry. The fall of [19]64, there are some parties, which are black-only parties. And I'm only vaguely aware. I'm one of these people who is not like totally tuned into all the different social dynamics. So, I'm only vaguely aware. And I'm not feeling like I'm left out. I'm not feeling that this is some horrible thing. Black people want to have a party, have a party! It's--. So, I'm not paying too much attention. I do know there was a lot of controversy

around people who had interracial relationships, especially Forman, who was in an interracial relationship and who had an African American wife. So, there was a lot of tension around that.

I'm thinking that I'm becoming aware of the racism that I carry, the prejudice, the stereotypes that I carry with me. But nobody is really there schooling me, as I think, today, there are a lot of white people who are able to school other white people, on the nature of privilege, on the way we perpetrate microaggressions, the way that we are insensitive and don't understand. Somebody told me a story last night about a church Sunday school, where a woman was talking about planting flowers and taking a bulb and talking about how the bulb was brown and ugly. And this woman actually had two biracial daughters in the Sunday school class. And she was like, "Brown and ugly? Are my kids going to be feeling less than, since brown is associated with ugly." And so, she will speak to that person. But the person probably had no clue, wasn't doing it for any malicious reason. But nobody schooled us on that stuff. Nobody talked to us about hair or about the stereotypes or the ways in which we were not appreciative of what the black community was--.

And I worried, [2:15:00] for years, that I was not appreciative of both the resources that I was able to--. I stayed in somebody's house, during the summer of [19]64. And I was given the only bedroom. What's that about? It's like--. And I feel angry at myself for not being much more connected to that privilege and insisting that the couple move back into their own bedroom and I sleep on the couch. But that wasn't what they were imagining, because they were welcoming us. So, those kinds of things, I think, we weren't--. There was just nobody that was schooling us on how to be and what the

disconnect between our upbringing and the upbringing--or the poverty of the South and the mores of the South. Nobody was able to guide us--I don't think. I don't remember anybody guiding us.

So, I think the black-only parties or the tensions were part of that. And, of course, later on, I realized that part of that was that we were the closest--. As a black person, as your consciousness about racial oppression intensifies and you peel back the layers and you see what the incredible brutality is and the incredible denial of rights--. We're the white people. We're the closest white people to them. So no wonder their anger and their fury is somehow directed at us, even though we're not the culprits, we're not the perpetrators of the oppression. But we're there. We're right there. We're the symbol of white supremacy, within the SNCC organization. So--.

In fact, in DC, a kid--. This was in [19]68, I think, after Dr. King was killed. I'm walking down 18th Street and a black kid comes up and hits me in the face. And he says, "You dirty white lady," or something like that, right? And I'm like taken aback. But then I'm thinking, "Well, okay. This is part of what the color of racial oppression is like, in the country. It's not--." And I couldn't take it personally. I knew that I was playing a different role than the white oppressor. But it still stung, because the kid was pissed off at me, right? And so, it pushes you into a space where you recognize what that white power, control, supremacy is all about. So.

EC: Yeah. You mentioned there was some tension around Forman, because he had a black wife and he's in an interracial relationship.

BR: Yes.

EC: Do you have any sense of how much that's because--? Would the tension have been the same, if he hadn't been married to a black woman at the time?

BR: It could have been. One of the things at Waveland, at one of the Waveland meetings, and I'm forgetting whether it was fall of [19]64 or spring of [19]65, there was a whole thing about backsliding. And it was black men who had white partners or white relationships. Now, I was in a relationship with Marion Barry. So, he was part of that conversation. Stokely, I think, had had relationships with white women. So, the whole conversation about these black men who had white relationships or white--maybe not partners, in the traditional sense--. Because these [laughs] relationships didn't last very long, because we were young. So, we went from one person to another. But there was lots of conversation about--. And I think this is, again, as the nationalist movement was building and as the frustrations of the US not changing, the country not changing-- and of us being young and not understanding that the struggle was long and that it wasn't going to happen overnight--. Both black and white young people, we didn't get that. We thought we were going to really transform the country. And, boy, it didn't happen the way we imagined it. So.

EC: What's your memory of when SNCC starts talking about white's working in the white community. How did you respond to that and--?

BR: Well, I think that I probably was not--. Well, okay. Let me back up. I think that there was some talk about that, in--. Certainly, in Mississippi, there was some talk about going into the white community, during the election in fall of [19]64, with--. I don't know whether we had Lyndon B. Johnson signs or what the deal--. I didn't do it. But there were a number of white people who went into the white community but who

got pretty much harassed by the police, rejected by the local white population, told to “Get out of town. You’re a nigger lover,” type of thing. So, that initiative was not very—[2:20:00] didn’t last very long.

The other thing that was happening, there was a Southern Student Organizing Committee, or SSOC, which was Southern white students, who did go on white campuses to try to find sympathetic white students, who would support the civil rights organizing or the freedom movement. So, there was that. I think there were a bunch of reasons why we didn’t go into the white community. One is there--well--okay--one is because I don’t think we felt any connection to the white working-class folks that we might have been canvassing. And I guess we didn’t imagine that we were going to be talking to white businessmen or white legislators or people like that. We imagined we would go door knocking in a neighborhood, or canvassing in a neighborhood, and we’d be working class folks, and we just felt no--. You know, here we were, middle class northerners, educated, right? So, I think we just--. It was--. We didn’t feel the connection. That was one.

Another is that here we were in this incredible community of civil rights workers, and we felt very passionate about our community, very close to everybody, very--like we had died and gone to heaven, because we were in this incredible community of struggle, and of change, and of power, because it was a very powerful community in the sense that we were--. You know, our mission was to transform the country, to make it the country that we had been taught that it was, the kind of country we had been taught it was when we were kids, you know? And that was separate from anybody of color. That was like, these are the ideals of the country: democracy, freedom, etc. So, that was another reason we felt close to this community.

Another reason, I think, is we didn't think politically we were going to change these folks. I think we didn't understand how we could change. So, we imagined it was the Klan and us, you know, so white people were in the Klan, or they were Klan sympathizers, and us. And so, we didn't, again, go into the white community. There was never any conversation, also, of when we went back home, going into the white community at home, and getting people to be more committed, or--I mean, we did say yes, organize money when you went back home, and organize at federal buildings, and that kind of thing, but there was never any thinking about intentionally going into the white community, to winning people over who were not in that space of being supportive of the freedom movement.

Now, today one of the things I'm involved in is Showing Up For Racial Justice, which is a national organization of white people, calling white people in to the multiracial America, calling white people in to stand for racial justice, and it feels like I am fulfilling that SNCC promise of going to the white community and organize by being connected to this amazing national network of white people who are working in the white community, calling people in to work for racial justice, calling people in to understand the inequities, the inequitable structures in the country, to understand white privilege in a way that white people mostly don't think about it or talk about it, and it's very, very exciting, I think.

EC: What's the connection between that and the Black Lives Matter?

BR: Well, okay, so Showing Up for Racial Justice was formed in 2009, when the attacks began on Obama, and a number of people-of-color-led organizations said, "Well, where are the white people standing up against these attacks?" And I think for white progressives, maybe we weren't totally in love with Obama. We didn't really--.

You know, we didn't buy the "Yes We Can," the deeper aspects that we wanted out of "Yes We Can." So anyway, a lot of these white folks who had been doing anti-racist organizing and training and work said, "Oh yeah, good point. We've got to stand up against this." And so, the first organization was called No Room for Racism, the US for All of Us is what it was called. And there were-- I won't go into the whole history, but that's a whole other set of interviews for somebody to do at some point. But by the time that Trayvon Martin was killed by George Zimmerman, there was a lot of work had been done about how do we dismantle white supremacy structures, what does it mean. And so there was a toolkit that was done, put online, on Showing Up for Racial Justice's page, about how to organize around the murder of Trayvon Martin, and what were the themes, what were the things that people could be doing, what action [2:25:00] they could be taking. And then when Mike Brown was killed in Ferguson in August of 2014, the chapter structure just began to mushroom.

So, that was kind of the inception of it, but then because the Black Lives Matter movement propelled people's thinking and consciousness much further forward-- And I think the Michelle Alexander work around *The New Jim Crow* and the impact of the criminal justice system, the mass incarceration, and the over-policing in black communities, all that understanding, which was done by some amazing scholars, and then popularized around the country, and then the murders that were lifted up by cellphone video, etc., then the Showing Up for Racial Justice nationally works with the Black Lives Matter movement. They have accountability relationships. And so, one of the things about SURJ--that's the nickname for Showing Up for Racial Justice--is to work in conjunction with Black Lives Matter organizations, with local black-led and people-of-

color-led organizations that are putting forward the vision for how we move to a more equitable structure, structures, and how we change the country, so--.

EC: What is some of the work you've been doing with SURJ here in Baltimore?

BR: Well, in April, when the Baltimore uprising happened, I was asked by the national coordinator of SURJ, who actually is somebody I had known from my organizing days in the [19]90s and the 2000s, she called me and asked if I could find some people who would talk about the Baltimore background. So, I got two women of color who spoke on a conference call of seven hundred people, just after the uprising, right, about the Baltimore background, what led to it, what the circumstances were. And then, in that call was the time where the St. Louis people had been doing door knocking with Black Lives Matter signs, and then the people in Arizona had been doing door knocking with signs saying "No on SB 1070," which was the law that criminalized immigrants that Sheriff Arpaio had been doing in Arizona. So, I mean, he shackled immigrants and brought them to the public square in Phoenix like they were just common criminals, shackled them and had them walking around in, like, orange jumpsuits. I mean, the images are just incredible. This is pre-Trump, right? I mean, this is--.

[Laughter]

But anyway, so--. Oh, I lost my train of thought. Oh, so that we learned about the door knocking that had happened in St. Louis and that had happened in Arizona on that call, and then the charge was take a selfie of yourself saying "I support the Baltimore uprising," or with the hashtag #BaltimoreUprising, which is a Twitter handle, I guess. I'm not on Twitter. [Laughter] And then go out and door knock with Black Lives Matter

signs, talk to people. Go in to white neighborhoods and talk to people about structural inequity, and about racism and police brutality and that kind of thing. So, I began to--. I got an organization that I was in locally, called Baltimore Racial Justice Action, to agree to do the door knocking with the signs, and you see the sign in my yard. And I have a sign here, if you want to take a picture of it later.

So, we did that, we did the door knocking, and then I was asked by Showing Up for Racial Justice if I wanted to become a regional resource person, and I agreed. And so, I went to Highlander in August, which was very exciting, because I had never been in Highlander, Highlander Education Center. I never went there during the Civil Rights Movement because I wasn't important enough to go there, right? [Laughter] So--.

EC: For people who don't know Highlander, can you say something about their role in the movement?

BR: Sure, yes. So, they actually began in the [19]30s, and they began with tobacco workers, and textile workers, and they brought black and white workers together from the South to talk about their common purpose and their common struggle. And then when--. Pre the sit-ins, I think they were already doing the Septima Clark, for example, and Rosa Parks went to Highlander to talk about citizen education, to talk about organizing across the South. So, they played a big role in bringing white and black activists together in the South. They--. Myles Horton, who was the director of Highlander, did a lot of popular education teaching. So, it was a way to go into areas where people were unorganized and use popular education techniques to have people discuss their situation, a.k.a. Paolo Freire, who was a Brazilian popular educator, to do this process of consciousness-raising.

So, Highlander was kind of a core place. They got bombed. They had to move [2:30:00] from where they were in Tennessee to another place, because they were bombed, and their lease was taken from them. This is all in the either late [19]50s or early [19]60s, so they moved to--. And now they're in a particular place where they own the land, and they're pretty stable.

EC: I know they were shut down by the State of Tennessee, and--.

BR: Yes.

EC: They were charged with, you know, illegal alcohol.

BR: Sedition, and--. Oh, yeah.

EC: But I didn't remember that they were bombed.

BR: I think they were bombed. I might be wrong. I mean, you're the historian, Emilye, so--. [Laughter]

EC: I mean, I'm not saying they weren't. I just don't remember it. I was trying to place it.

BR: Right, right, yeah. And maybe they weren't bombed. Maybe that's just my recollection of the way the Southern culture worked, that you bombed somebody if you [Laughter] weren't in favor of their work, so--.

M1: I seem to remember Myles Horton's house was burned.

BR: Maybe, yes, something like that, yeah, yeah.

[Camera turns off and on again]

EC: So, we jumped to your current work with SURJ, and here in Baltimore, on racial justice, but can you talk about sort of--?

BR: The intervening years, the thirty--?

EC: Yeah, you know, what you--.

BR: The forty years in between? [Laughter] Right, right.

EC: How being in SNCC affected you, and what you did leaving SNCC.

BR: Okay.

EC: You also mentioned being part of the women's movement at a certain point. Maybe you could touch on that.

BR: Yeah. Okay, so when I moved to SNCC I moved to Washington, and I stayed in Washington, and I worked in a black community arts program for a number of years. And then I got involved in the antiwar movement, which a big center was in DC, so I--. And I, you know, reconnected with some of the SDS people, and some of the people who'd been in Mississippi, who were white, who were in the antiwar movement. So, I did some antiwar organizing while I worked in this art center. We did some organizing as white people around the rebellion after Dr. King's death. We did some taking supplies into the black community, that kind of thing. We had an organization called the Emergency, which was white people talking about race and inequity.

Then I got--. The women's movement reached me in the early [19]70s, so I was in a couple of consciousness-raising groups. I didn't do a lot with the women's movement, but I, you know, I kind of came to my own understanding about women's oppression and how it affected me, by being in connection with these amazing women in the liberation movement. Then I--.

EC: Did it change your sense of what you'd experienced in--?

BR: In SNCC?

EC: In SNCC, or SDS, or any of the other work you'd done before?

BR: It probably helped me center it, I mean, helped me realize what I--. But I think it--. I think it didn't--. It didn't say to me, oh my God, you were really oppressed in SNCC, buddy. [Laughter] No, it didn't say to me that at all. It might've said, okay, I wonder why I didn't feel that oppression, because I was valued and affirmed and given opportunities that I never would've had otherwise, you know? I mean, as Judy Richardson says, if you were--. You could do anything you were big enough to do, you know? So, if you took a step way out there and crafted some idea for what you could do, or if you, you know, if you thought of a new--like in my case I was doing the Northern support work; if I thought of some new initiative that I could do in that context, I could do it and be affirmed to doing it, you know?

EC: Sorry, you were going to keep going, and--.

BR: No, so then I moved--. I mean, there were some other things that I did in there, but eventually I moved to Baltimore in 1972 to work in a factory, and that was part of young people across the country feeling that the country hadn't changed sufficiently enough. And so, we went to work in factories to get the working class involved in some kind of, you know, radical, transformative process for the US. So, I worked in this factory for eight years. I married a factoryworker, a black factoryworker. I left the factory when one of my daughters had a birth defect and I needed to not be fired from my job, but I got a fabulous job working for a doctor who was an occupational medicine doctor who got a grant from HRSA, which is the--. It's a government agency, HRSA. H-R-S-A. It's in Hyattsville.

Anyway, he got a grant to teach medical students about occupational medicine, and part of it was taking medical students to factories, on factory tours. And so, I did that

for three years. I took medical students to all of the factories in Baltimore, to Bethlehem Steel, to the Chevrolet plant, to the glass plant, one of the places I had worked, to the Arco Steel, to a bunch of different places. And then Reagan was elected in the meantime, and he pulled the plug [2:35:00] on these grants.

So, then I worked for the same doctor in an asbestos screening program, where we saw building trades workers who had been exposed to asbestos, and, of course, had asbestosis or cancer from their asbestos exposure. So, I kind of deepened all that understanding about the public health of factory work or industrial work or working class occupations. And then, because Reagan had pulled the plug on this grant, and then I lost the funding, so I went to work at Hopkins, Johns Hopkins, in the School of Public Health, and I worked for fourteen years in different-- I worked in injury prevention, and I worked in HIV and AIDS research.

And then the organizing bug just was growing in me, so in 1997 I had been asked to come to this conference at Evergreen College, in the summer of or the spring of [19]97. It must've been 1995, and it was the initial conference of a group called the National Organizers Alliance, which brought organizers together across the country to think about what kind of things were needed and necessary and what work was going on. So, I went, and I was on a fishbowl about SNCC with some other people, with Hardy Frye from Berkeley, with Mike Miller, with I think Jerome Scott was on that fishbowl, but he had been in the Black workers organizing in Detroit.

But anyway, so I did that, and it's in the-- Then I'm reading about organizing, and learning about what's going on around the country, and so the bug is really getting ahold of me. So, in '97, I'm calling Baltimore organizations to see if they want to send

somebody to this conference in Colorado, which was another gathering of the National Organizers Alliance. And this woman is telling me, who works for Citizens Planning and Housing Association, which is a local nonprofit doing housing work and anticrime work in Baltimore, working in all the neighborhoods where *The Wire* was actually filmed, interestingly enough--so she says to me, "Well, we don't have anybody to send to the conference, but do you know somebody who knows organizing who could be our lead organizer?" And I'm like, oh my gosh, I want to apply for this job. And I actually got the job. I mean, I think I got it partly because I knew how to supervise people from my time at Hopkins, and partly because of my history and what I had been through.

So, I worked there for eight years, and worked in--it was neighborhood organizing. And then I had an OSI fellowship to bring organizers across--Open Society Institute fellowship--to bring organizers together across issues and constituencies. I did that. Then by then I'm, like, almost sixty-five, not quite. And so, then I did a variety of different-- Well, when my fellowship ended I was sixty-five. So, I've done a number of different organizing jobs. I worked for a union. I worked for a parent organizing group. I did some consulting on writing curriculum for community colleges on organizing so we could grow the number of organizers of color in the country, because a lot of the organizers, the professional organizers--and I'm putting quotes around professional--were white, from the big faith-based networks. Those were mostly white organizers, and very often the nonprofits were hiring white people to go and organize, even if they were organizing in the black community. So, I worked on this curriculum for a couple of years, and yeah, that led me to Showing Up for Racial Justice. That's my current work.

EC: So, are there things from the Civil Rights Movement, the modern movement, the sort of [19]60s movement, that you think are important that we haven't talked about?

BR: I think we've pretty much covered it. I think we've pretty much covered it. I mean, if you gave me a prompt I might say, "Oh yeah, we left that out," but yeah, I can't think of anything off the top of my head.

EC: So, what are some things that you think are important for people to know about the Civil Rights Movement and organizing for social and racial justice?

BR: I think people need to know what a movement is, and what the window, what the energy level is during a movement, which we're certainly in a movement time now, and what the window is, however, because the window doesn't last that long. So, the work that we have to do, the strategic thinking that we have to apply, [2:40:00] we do need to go fast, but we also need to go slow to go fast, and we can't move so fast--. I mean, white culture says, "You move fast, you get it done," type of thing, but really that's--. If we're in a moment of accountability is the way I'm thinking about it--we're in a moment of accountability, and we're in accountability with the Black Lives Matter movement, we can't go so fast that we move out ahead of where people are developing. And I think the form of the Black Lives Matter movement is going to be very different from the Civil Rights Movement. The issues are similar but different, and the energy is definitely very similar, and the thinking, and the depth of commitment is very similar.

I think it's important for people to know that movements need resources, and that the white community has lots of resources, and we should be making a commitment to using some of our resources for sustaining Black Lives Matter organizations. For

example, I do a monthly sustainer for Showing Up for Racial Justice, and I also have a monthly sustainer to the Baltimore Algebra Project, which is young people creating space for young people to--. They tutor other young people in math, but they also do some organizing. And I also have a monthly sustainer with ONE DC, which is Organizing Neighborhood Equity in DC, which is a really strong organization in Washington that organizes in the black community, anti-gentrification organizing and that kind of thing.

So yeah, I think so resources are important. I think scholarship is important. I think it's fabulous that there's been so much scholarship done of the [19]60s movement, and that we have young scholars, like Emilye Crosby and Hasan Jeffries and others who have written these powerful books and lifted up the history. I think reading is important. I mean, you know, I despair at the fact that young people don't read anymore, right? And they kind of get these blips from the internet, but they don't read and study and process the real--the history. So, I think history, we have to lift up history and the importance of history, and I love it that the Library of Congress is doing these interviews. What else?

Yeah, I think we're in a different moment now because we have global capital, and we have this level of exploitation that's unseen, that's been unseen and that is obscene. So, I think we have to be really thinking about the whole antiwar--how do we connect the sense of the Black Lives Matter movement with the antiwar organizing, with all the other human rights organizing, certainly with the identity politics of the gender nonconforming movement? [Laughter] I don't know if that's a movement yet, but the whole conversation about gender nonconforming structures, and--. But how do we mesh all of that? And for me, the black movement is the center, I think because the country was birthed in such an exploitive relationship to the enslaved population, and to slavery

as the kind of the basis of the US wealth, that that has to be the straw that--. That has to be where we focus our energy in order to open up all the other transformative processes and potential in the country, so--.

EC: Thank you.

BR: Yeah, you're welcome. You're welcome. It was a pleasure to chat with the Library of Congress. [Laughter]

F1: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

END OF INTERVIEW

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