

An oral history from David Nolan of the VSCRC, 2015

Oral histories taken for the VSCRC 50th Reunion Oral History Project in Blackstone, VA. Professors Brian Daugherty and Ryan Smith interview former members of the VSCRC to obtain information about their work with the organization in the 1960s, in addition to their work with Civil Rights in general. Virginia Student Civil Rights Committee Oral History collection.
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[BS] Alright, this is Brian Smith. I'm a faculty member at Virginia Commonwealth University and I'm here with Brian Doherty, who's also a faculty member at VCU. And we're going to interview David Nolan, who is a former member of the Virginia Students Civil Rights Committee or the VSCRC. And today we are speaking on Saturday, June 20th, 2015, and it's the 50th anniversary of the VSCRC. So, David, do you agree to be interviewed and recorded?

[DN] Yes.

[BS] Can you tell us your full name?

[DN] David Joseph Nolan.

[BS] Okay. And that's the same name that people knew during the activities here. Where and what year were you born?

[DN] I was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts in June of 1946.

[BS] A lot of our initial questions here, just getting some of that early biographical stuff out of the way and then we get into the meat of the activities there through organization. So in Cambridge there, what did your parents do?

[DN] My father was a newspaper man, so we moved, you know, he worked with the United Press in Boston and then he was transferred to Washington during the Truman administration. So my earliest memories are of Arlington, Virginia where we lived. Then he went to work for the New York Times. So we moved to New York where I went to public schools.

[BS] Okay. Did your mother work?

[DN] No.

[BS] Did you have siblings?

[DN] Yes, I have a sister. Slightly older, better looking.

[BS] Were you involved, whether it sounds like Cambridge, you're fairly young, but DC or New York, were you ever involved with social action such as this kind of stuff before you got into the work?

[DN] Yeah. You know, I've always considered myself to be a person of 1963 because that was like the year I came of age, I was a senior in high school. And it was the year of incredible events. And the civil rights movement, the demonstrations in Birmingham with the fire hoses and police dogs, the assassination of Medgar Evers in Jackson, Mississippi, the organizing for the march on Washington. Then this was the year I had a teacher in a course called, Problems of American Democracy, named Henry Avis and his opening lines to our class where I am a democratic socialist and I'd never heard anything like that. You know, by that time my father was

vice-president of the Chase Manhattan Bank. And I came from a Catholic background, there were no socialists or anything like that. But he was a wonderfully stimulating teacher who eventually became a neo con and gave money to George Bush for president when he was in his nineties, he was in a nursing home and Pennsylvania. And I wrote to him and said, you ought to know how influential you were as a teacher, just in raising ideas. But he said, you know, I am a friend, Bayard Rustin. Who was then organizing the march on Washington. So he would come into class and I had just talked about Bayard Rustin last night and he says, and you really felt like you were present at the creation of history. And then I went off to the University of Virginia, which was of course the entire opposite of how I grew up. I grew up mostly in a Jewish neighborhood in New York, and I didn't understand the significance of that until 20 years later in Montgomery, Alabama with Tom Gardner, I went to see the Barbra Streisand movie, Yentl. And I said, My God, that's how I grew up, you know, questioned everything, dispute everything. That's what my classmates were like, that's what schools like. And then I got to UVA. I always thought the motto was, we don't say things like that around here. We don't do things like that around here. We don't think things like that around here. And my fellow students that first year were a whole bunch of kids from Southside Virginia, from Nat Turner country and everything. And I heard every racist argument in the book. You know, all the reasons why we couldn't have integration, why segregation was good, why it was not discriminatory. Remember a student who told me, You don't want civil rights, you want my rights, I said what right? He said, my right to discriminate. So that was that was probably the greatest part of my UVA education. I remember that much more vividly than any of the classes that I took, except with Paul Gaston, who was a mentor to many of us.

[BS] We'd like to talk a lot more about Charlottesville experience. But before you get there, when you mentioned this influential teacher, who was like quite a figure in your life, but had you done any organization work outside of class?

[DN] I joined the Young Democrats at that time. And in New York there was a split between the regular Democratic Party and the reformed Democrats, whose iconic figures were Eleanor Roosevelt and former Governor Herbert Lehman. Thomas K Finletter, former Secretary of the Air Force. And this was the time of the New Frontier and John Kennedy and let's get the country moving again and stuff. So change was in the air and it was good to be a part of that and change was not in the air and Virginia, not at UVA when I got down there. And I remember watching the march on Washington on television and then going to UVA and having all these arguments with my fellow students. And then the Birmingham church got bombed. And that was the first time I saw any of these segregationists crack. Before that they would have said anything in the world was fine to do but, even bad as they were. You know, killing little girls in church on Sunday, struck them as wrong and that made an impression on me. But when I went to UVA, I wanted to do something. I always tell people I majored in civil rights. So they had an activities night where the freshmen could go in and pick activities. And I looked around the room. There was only one black person there. I mean, the year I went to UVA, they doubled the number of black students in the entering class from one to two. And my white students friends said that that was because you couldn't have just one because you'd have to have a white roommate, so you'd have to have two. So only blacks would room together. There's only one black person in the room. It was Wes Harris, that genius from Richmond, Virginia, who now

teaches at MIT and has been a trustee at Princeton. And he was behind a table for the Virginia council on human relations. I signed right up and I joined the Young Democrats also, well turned out the Young Democrats were mostly law students, wanted to have something to put on their resume when they went into politics that would be pleasing to the bird machine. That didn't include civil rights, so they did basically nothing all year long. And then at the end of the year, a couple members came to me and said, You know, we're distressed that the Young Democrats don't do anything would you come to a meeting? And I said, yeah, you know, and they're talking about the Civil Rights Act before Congress again, if I put in a resolution to endorse the Civil Rights Act would you go along with it? And they said, yes, we passed a resolution endorsing the Civil Rights Act, then I printed up copies of it at the local Jewish synagogue and mailed them out to every newspaper in Virginia and those law students went ballistic. Said, how's this going to look on our resume. So one of them had been a former associated press reporter and he called up every newspaper in Virginia and said that's not an official action. Don't report that. We kept on that way. And finally, we took over the Young Democrats. We organized hundreds of people to join a lot of graduate students and stuff. And we not only passed that resolution, but we passed one endorsing the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party, which was challenging the Regular Mississippi Democrats at the national convention that year. So those were kind of the things that were going on in school at that time. And the second year, which would have been 1964, it was the election year. And we had invited a whole lot of speakers to come. I'd been elected Vice President of human relations council. And so I got James Farmer and Bayard Rustin and Norman Thomas and Sarah Patton Boyle and others to come and speak. In my, my two Bibles at UVA in those days where Sarah Patton Boyle Boyle's book, The Desegregated Heart, which of course was about the desegregation of the University of Virginia. And Howard Carwile, Speaking From Bird Land, those were the good days of Howard Carwile. I just chuckled all the way through that book and loved it. But come that second season, we had something new on the scene. Howard Romain came and he had been in Mississippi Freedom Summer. And he was a wild man like he is today, but maybe slightly more ground and he said, we've gotta do something more than just pass resolutions here we have to have some action. And the Vietnam War was starting to heat up. And there was the question of could this Virginia council of human relations sponsor a demonstration against the Vietnam War. So eventually we decided to form a new organization called Students for social action. And that kind of fed right into the Virginia students Civil Rights Committee and all of that fed into the southern student organizing committee. And it was one of these great streams through the South, you know, and you find the same names of people through them. If you Greg Michel's book, you know. So all of this cut our teeth at UVA and students for social action. And in VSCRC and SOCC.

[BS] How did you end up at University of Virginia in the first place?

[DN] Well, by chain, my mother had gone to Mary Washington College back in the 1930's 40's, so I'd heard of it and my earliest memories were of Virginia. But basically it was the place I got in. I was not swept away with its quality. I must say I went there with a bad attitude.

[BS] Did you know which degree you were getting?

[DN] I was going to do political science. I think in retrospect, I have decided that political science is the boring part of history. So I'm in retrospect I would've done history, but in any rate, I didn't stay long enough to major. I stayed two years and I went to work with the Virginia students Civil

Rights Committee and I never went back to college after that.

[BS] So tell us about the origins of the student civil rights. Well, in December of 1964, SNCC held a conference on the upper South Hampton Institute. And we got word of that and a bunch of us went down, people from a number of Virginia colleges went down. And all of the SNCC people that we had been reading about were there. Jim Foreman, the Executive Secretary, Bob Moses from Mississippi, Jimmy Travis who'd gotten shot in Mississippi previous year. And some of the women who were challenging the Mississippi congressional delegates through the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. And it was an incredible and inspirational thing. One of the people who was teaching at Hampton then was Virginia's Thornton who had been a legendary graduate student at the University of Virginia, one of the first black graduate students and one of the founders of SNCC. And he had taken part in demonstrations in Charlottesville. As I have been told the story. He couldn't get his degree at Charlottesville because Thomas Perkins Abernathy told him something about the history of slavery in Virginia was not real history. So anyhow, he was teaching at Hampton Institute then and we had a party at his apartment during this SNCC conference there. And the thrust of the conference was, how did, this was right on the heels of Mississippi Freedom Summer. And it was how do you transfer the Mississippi experience to Virginia? You know, how do you expand that? And so at the end of it, we formed a continuations committee which held monthly or by-monthly meetings capped by a Conference in Charlottesville right after Selma and John Lewis was the speaker and his head was still bandaged up from the beating he'd received at Selma.

[BS] That would've been in, when in 1965?

[DN] Probably April 65. And

[BS] Going back to the Hampton conference, what was your experiences there, did it live up to your expectations?

[DN] That was really a new world for me and I, part of New York I grew up in. I didn't realize at the time, but I look back at my high school yearbook and it was, you know, 99% white or something. So it was very different thing to be in the black atmosphere of Hampton Institute. And just to be around all of these people, you know, many of them fresh up from Mississippi and, from the headlines we were reading in the day of some of the most dreadful conditions on America. Now remembering of Bob Moses, whom a lot of us worshiped in those days, you know, and who consciously tried to dissuade people from worshipping him. So everybody says Mr. Moses and he'd say Bob. Mr. Moses, Bob, Moses, Bob. That was interesting to see how people worked and how they interacted. And Jim Foreman at one point said, now Lawrenceville, It's 30 miles from here and Mr. Bloom runs that town. And those seemed like prophetic words to me, because I would spend the next couple years of my life and Lawrenceville. It wasn't anything like 30 miles from there and Mr. Bloom didn't run the town as far as I could tell, but Jim Foreman aimed me in that direction and so it had a kind of long-term effect on my life.

[BS] Who were students that were kind of in your orbit at that time who went back to Charlottesville with you?

[DN] Well, I had driven down to Hampton with Kerry Stronack, who was a graduate student in physics and wound up teaching at Virginia State for 30 some years. And he had a little red Renault that was later killed in a crash with a deer. So Kerry and I drove down together. And then Howard Romaine was there, there were several students from UVA some were in my

clutter I have a list like ten pages long. People who were there.

[BS] So April 1965, John Lewis was there you've got this kind of galvanizing meeting, or series of meetings?

[DN] Well, it was another conference at UVA where Kerry Stronack was gone now, but we had a party during the conference at my apartment on 15th Street, which has now been torn down. But it was a little the whole apartment was about the size of this room and it only had one door. There was no second entrance or anything. And it had a big glass window there, which was open and the local racists could look in and see black and white together in there, which wasn't very good. And so they came up to harass us and Kerry Stronack had a drink in his hand and he walked up to the screen door and he tossed it through the door in the face of this guy. I thought, Kerry, not good strategy. We're a little outnumbered here and there is no escape route. And Tom Gardner always claims that we stayed there in the next 24 hours or something until they finally got tired and left. But many memorable experiences, some of them having to do with being 16, 17, 18 years old. Some you wouldn't repeat at age 68 or 69,

[BS] You mentioned the idea of trying to replicate or export some of what they are doing in the deep south to Virginia. What else can we say about the goals of the early goals of the organization?

[DN] Oh, it's interesting, Howard Romain wrote a paper called The role of the community organizer. I guess most Americans heard the term community organizer and association with Barack Obama. But we were into a decades before that, you know. And it meant you don't go in with a particular Pro you don't say where here to register 427 voters. It's, We're here to see what the problems are and how can people be organized to do it. So that, when we've been having, the session's over there about what people did in various counties. It's different for each county depending on what the issue was, whether it was school desegregation and in some of the real heroes in my entire life. are the young black kids who were the first to go to the white schools. In those counties, I mean, that was just I talked with one of them a few years ago. He said, yeah, it was difficult, but I guess it was good experience for life. And voter registration. I worked in Brunswick County out of Lawrenceville in Brunswick County had a black majority of about 60% and I think 9% of the voters were black. So I'm glad to say that that changed during my time in there. So, you know, in every way there was a thing this was tobacco growing country. And you grew tobacco based on an allotment that you were permitted. Agricultural stabilization and Conservation Service and they had elections for the people who would sit on the ASCS board who would decide you can grow one acre and you can grow 20 acres. And naturally the boards were hallway and somehow the white farmers managed to get the better allotments. So we tried to organize people to take part in the ASCS elections. And the other thing that had just started was Lyndon Johnson's poverty program. And it had a line in there about maximum feasible participation of the poor in directing the community action program. And so we looked at the Community Action Program in Brunswick County, you know, maximum feasible participation to them was one person on the board. We said, um we should have a little bit more than this. They had the white social worker and a white minister and a token black farmer. So we spent some time working on that and they eventually decided 50-50 was a better balance so a variety of things. And then there's somethings, you know, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had already been passed, but it wasn't observed. I mean, I remember in Lynchburg going with a couple people, I

think two black people and I, and we went into a restaurant and sat down and the owner came up and said, "I'll serve you. And I'll serve you because the law says I have to, but I'm not going to serve ya, you damn nigger lover." And this was pretty common at that time, it didn't matter the law had been passed. They were still segregating lunch counters and everything. So, you know, these things would always come up. In 1966, it was a big election year. Harry Byrd was at the end of his rope and life and going to pass it on to his son, Harry Junior and Pat Robertson's father. Who was the same age as Byrd was coming to the end of his active political career. And so outside people were very anxious to see them defeated. And one way to defeat them was to register more black voters in Southside, Virginia. So we were able to get money from the voter education project to do voter registration work. And I was always a skeptic I mean, in those days, we had something called freedom high. You know, the answer to everything is more freedom. And Bayard Rustin wrote an influential paper called Coalition Politics or Nonviolent, or Staughton Lynd, wrote it. Called Coalition Politics or Nonviolent Revolution. And it was a response to Bayard Rustin's piece in Commentary Magazine called from, Protest to Politics. And Staughton's line, which I found very compelling at the time was, you know, if you don't like the Mississippi election, we have a freedom election. If you don't like the sheriff, we have a freedom sheriff. You don't like this. We have a freedom that's probably not realistic in the long run, but on the other hand, not without a certain merit and demonstrating other possibilities to people. So I always held back from voter registration until it was probably early 1966, a Boston University Chaplain named Bill England, whose brother I knew because he taught math at UVA and he was one of our big supporters a big supporters, somebody give us a \$100, you know, ordinary supporter gave us \$10. Medium will give us \$25. But Jim, who was a very junior faculty member, gave us a \$100 and that was really appreciated. That was the equivalent of what, six weeks, 16-week salary or something. But Bill England came down with a group of 30 or 40 college students from around the country. And they just stayed like a weekend to do voter registration project. And it just so happened that in Lawrenceville, Saturday was the Black day. Whites didn't go downtown on Saturday, blacks did their shopping. And the courthouse was right there. The registrar's office was right there, and it just happened to be open on Saturday. I mean, this was bad planning on the part of the Byrd machine that it opened on Tuesday, it would have been all white thing. But here crowds of black people all over and all these college students going out saying, are you registered? No? Well here, come across the street and they registered on a hundred, two hundred people in one day. And that made a believer out of me. So we organized a couple of others on our own of college students from around Virginia, these kind of guerrilla registration campaigns. And they were equally successful and it was kind of hilarious. My sister was a graduate student at the University of North Carolina then. And she came up, she'd never set foot in Virginia for decades before. The registrar would let her sit in the office and help with this, but he wouldn't let me do it because I was an outsider even though I lived across the street there. This was the attitude of the times. And then then I decided we should take this act on the road. And one thing that always bugged me was Charles City County, Virginia, which was 87% non-white and had a white voting majority. So Jim Tru and I went over there and knocked to see if anybody's interested in Civil Rights, who's active and stuff and they put us in touch with Charles Fletcher Bowman. And we arranged to send in a group of these kind of guerrilla workers. And in one day we switched the voting majority in Charles city

county. From black to white, and they elected a black sheriff, sad to say within a few months he committed suicide. But you know-

[BS] What year was that?

[DN] It was 1966, his name was James Brad B, can find that in the old papers.

[BS] Charles was the plaintiff in one of the big school desegregation lawsuits.

[DN] Was he? He was a great guy and a wonderful photographer too, and I think he's still alive. You know, somebody ought to collect those photographs and I think he used to work down in one of the military bases around Hampton. So he had some independence from Charles city county and I mean, that's plantation country and John Tyler, William Henry Harrison, all that. He was, was really quite a person.

[BS] He was head of the local NAACP, I believe.

[DN] That would make sense certainly, but he was certainly the spirit of activism in that community.

[BS] So once you throw yourself into all this, did you realize you are leaving your studies at UVA?

[DN] Well the time came to go back to UVA, right? And at the end of the summer of 1965, and I said, savior of history that I was, you know, I came here and made some promises and the haven't quite been kept yet. I think I won't go back, I'll continue to work. And of course, that created tremendous problems with my family and everybody. There's always a family story behind all of these things. And that was not something that my father had a PhD and two master's degrees and a mother and a master's degree. And my sister has a PhD. And I come from a long line of educators and the dropping out of school too work in Brunswick County, Virginia, this didn't figure into it at all. So we all had our dramas of the time. But so I stayed on that. Most of the students left at the end of the summer, a few of us stayed on Bill and Betsy, Gene and Nan Grogan. Now need Nancy Orrock.

[BS] Your parents didn't have a problem with the cause you were working for?

[DN] Well, you know, I had a much younger cousin who called me up to do a paper for school and said, were your parents supportive? I mean, there's a lot of, when push comes to shove, people have different reactions. I mean, my father was one of the people who worked to get corporate boards of directors integrated. He knew Jackie Robinson and stuff. And he was just at that historic moment there. And he played a role in that and that the way I prefer to remember him compared to some of the things he did in life. But that didn't translate to thinking that your son should drop out of the University of Virginia and he said, first thing I'm sure you'll be drafted right away. And so, you know, we all have our draft stories too how could you do what you wanted to do if Uncle Sam's idea of your best possible use would be as cannon fodder somewhere or going through basic training or something. So all of these things happened. And my parents did come down to see me one time. And there was a Volume, I think it was called the Mississippi Black book. It was like 8.5 by 11, the black cover. And it was all about every atrocity in Mississippi and this scared them to death. You know, they're coming down to Blackstone and our office was next to a tire store filled with rednecks. What's going? It was a living and learning experience for all of us.

[BS] Tell me a little bit more about that summer of 1965. I'm curious about, you had mentioned in Hampton hearing about Brunswick County and you mentioned the Charles City. But how did

the organization decide where to focus on oor which counties it was going to engage, which was how does, where its offices will be set up?

[DN] Well, we decided it would be in Southside. And there was an interesting column by Martin Luther King in the Prince Edward Museum there, which I was unaware of at the time. But it sounds like he's basically outlining where you should go, that none of us knew it at the time, but it was the area with the greatest black concentration and the area with the most visible segregation and everything. And then it depended on what kind of contacts we had. So we knew Reverend Craig who was in Amelia County and HD Washington who was Cambridge, Virginia and stuff. And so it sort of depended on that. And first when we started, we all came down and stayed in one little tiny house, in Jennings ordinary, which is outside of Burkeville. A little two-bedroom bungalow and there were 12 people crash there getting on each other's nerves. And Stokely Carmichael and Charlie Cobb and Chuck Neblick from SNCC came and took one look at this and said, you've got to get out of here, spread out a little. And Stokely gave us a lesson on community organizing. And so we started to move on out. So I wound up in Brunswick County. Duke Edward was our like we call them field director at the time. And he and I got in a car and we drove down to Brunswick County and we asked around, you know, who would be interested in civil rights. And we talk to Mrs. Carrie Walker, who was a member of a prominent black family and she said, oh yeah, put us in touch with Beverly Taylor, who was president of the NAACP. And Duke knew Mrs. Velma Mac who became my other mother in those days. In fact, my last visit up here was to go to her funeral in 2008. She lived to be 94. But, you know, so this was how we did it. And then I was always impressed in those days with the great network that the NAACP had. Because all throughout the Southside counties, if you wanted to meet the active people, go see who was in NAACP and they weren't particularly partisan on oh, you're from another organization. We don't want to. They were all good people who wanted to get something done. And if you can help us were for it. So that was what we did in Brunswick County. And I worked with a fellow named John Cooley Washington, who had come from Albany, Georgia. He'd worked with SNCC and he'd work there and then was up at Georgia. And SNCC kind of sent him down because we were deficient in black. Cooley and I worked in Brunswick County and then in the spring of 1966, we needed to repopulate the summer project for 1966. Jim Tru popped up. Jim Tru always pops up at appropriate moments, in wonderful 1956 Chevrolet that he had beautifully restored. And we drove around Virginia and stopped at all kinda college campuses to try and recruit students to come down first for one of these guerrilla voter registration things and then for to work and next summer.

[BS] Would you describe that as your primary role in keeping the organization together, going, moving or was it more the actual kind of door-to-door basic activism?

[DN] Well, you know, the the first summer door-to-door, second summer teaching others how to do. And I, for instance, I organized the orientation session for the second summer. We had it up at the University of Virginia. And we had Willie Lee Rose, historian who wrote a book about the Port Royal experiment. And Dean Gordon Moss from Longwood College and Stan Mechelski from UVA institute of government and John Gibson who'd worked for SCLC and from Federation of Southern cooperatives. And the difference the second summer was we had a lot of outside students. We had a group from City College of New York and we had a couple from Boston University. They weren't all Virginians this time. So we figured we had to give them a little bit of

Virginia history and Virginia government and stuff.

[BS] Did the so-called outsiders work well alongside divergent students?

[DN] I think so. I mean, we had incredible fights all the way through you know, the horrible staff meeting we had on the Fourth of July, 1966. It just makes us all ill to read the staff minutes from it. How will we told each other apart and everything. I just apologized in the end. But this is what you do when you're young and stupid. In addition to being young and well-intentioned.

[BS] And what would that sort of a fight been over?

[DN] If you imagine being 18 years old again, you know, like the levers of power within an organization like that where such strange things as cars, you know, if somebody had a car, well you could get around and if you didn't, you had to beg a car or get a ride or something, you know, or people who were married. Howard, Nan, Romaine were married and Bill and Betsy Gene were married and the rest of us were single. And there was some discussion of sex at a staff meeting and Bill and Betsy Jean said they didn't want to hear about that. And then according to the minutes everyone said "Boo! to the married people who don't want to talk about sex." So it's a lot. It's, you know, it's kind of miraculous that anything happened. But I don't think there was a particular problem between the northern students and the southern students there. There were a variety of problems as they go. One of our students habitually drove like a bat out of hell. And the fellow who worked in Brunswick County with had a beautifully restored 1954 Pontiac, which this bat out of hell guy totaled. Always these kinds of things happen. You know, it's life is kind of amazing all the way through that we survive at all.

[BS] Talk about the funding a little bit did you have trouble getting money? Did you do a lot of fundraising activities, or did you find people willing to donate without a lot of prompting?

[DN] No. The two largest donors to the Virginia Student Civil Rights Committee were Joan Baez and William Styrene. They each gave \$500. Jones 500 was from a concert she did at UVA just as the project was beginning and Styrene's came when he was working on Nat Turner book. And I remember taking that \$500 check and going up to Richmond than buying a Gerstner mimeograph machine from the Richmond Unitarian Church. Which we then used to crank out thousands of newsletters and leaflets on for the next couple of years. And we had hoped to make money from a concert, the men named Byron Puryear in Hampton, his brother was President of Florida Memorial College in St. Augustine. This Puryear was a contractor and a great civil rights supporter, unlike his brother. And so he and Bill and Betsy Gene were going to organize this big kind of concert that was going to make us a fortune and it made us nothing at the end Mr. Puryear said, next time you wanna do it, just tell me and I'll donate that amount of money. So that didn't work. And then there was this mythology that there was all this money in North just waiting to come down to us. So Howard Romain had a roommate named Mike Cottages who was a graduate student in philosophy. And the last time I laid eyes on him, he was dressed in leather and he was getting on a motorcycle. He was going to vroom up to New York City and he was going to bring back just bags full of money. And I never saw him again, you know, finally about a year ago, Howard told me how to get in touch with him and I wrote to him and said, you know, what ever happened to this? Well, there wasn't any money. So we were reduced to they said look, everybody's share of this is \$300. So everybody tried to raise \$300 and people would go to their churches. Bill Leary belonged to a church that George Washington used to attend and Pohick Virginia, and they gave \$300 for it. I wrote to Monsignor William Kelly

at Sacred Heart Church in Bayside, New York, and he never answered. My family donated the \$300 with instructions that this was a terminal \$300, you know, so we we lived very modestly. We made \$6 a week when there was money and I in Brunswick County, I would go around every Sunday and speak at a church and they would ask me to explain what we were doing and then they'd take a collection up for us and that might be in a \$5, \$10, \$15. Onetime I spoke to the state convention of the order of Eastern Star's meeting at St. Paul's College and I think it was a \$136. And we used that money to go to a SSOC conference workshop at Highlander Center in Tennessee with Bob Moses. But that was the largest by far. But you learned how to sing for your supper.

[BS] Now you did mention at one point getting funding from the voter education project.

[DN] Yeah. We did and this this didn't come at the beginning, but as we as time went on, this money was coming available. Now, when Jim Tru and I were around campus travelling, we're also trying to get some money for voter registration. And we went and talked to Julian Harper, who was then the Vice President of the AFL-CIO and Virginia, and they had money for voter registration. And we went and he took one look at us and he said, huh, we prefer to work with more mature people. Said, for instance, we have this group that's registered 7 voters this month. And I said, yeah, we registered 200 last weekend. Not a penny from those people This is how these things go. Jim and I, for years afterwards he, Julian Harper said, we'd say, labor is the voice of the little man. Jim and I would say, yeah labor is the voice of the little man. Don't ask for any of our money. So it was always minimally funded, you know, kind of the typical grants from the voter education project would be two thousand dollars or three thousand dollars or something.

[BS] You also mentioned something else that peaked my curiosity, St. Paul's of course is a HPCU in Brunswick County. How did the fact that that was located in your county impact your work as opposed to some of the other Southside counties where there wasn't that sort of an institution?

[DN] Interesting. Well, that's where I first lived. In fact, there was a project in Prince Edward County that summer. One of my fellow UVA students, Gene Pearson was there and it was kind of a tutorial project and we would go over and meet with them at Rev. Griffin's church there and get around talking. And I said you know, I'm about to go to Lawrenceville. And this woman, I can't remember if it was Pat or Barbra Samuel, she is now deceased. Said, Oh, my parents live down there. They'll probably put you up. So her parents, her father taught at St. Paul's College, was a former Methodist minister named Bill Samuel and his wife Dorothy Samuel who's written several books. And so we stayed with them at the very beginning. And Saint Paul's has this road you go down faculty rode in the back and then there are several wood shingle houses up there and they'd lived in one of them. And it was an interesting experience. They were at that point Quakers and vegetarians, and they were the first Quakers I ever knew, and the first vegetarians I ever knew. And they didn't have car insurance, they opted out of it. So they explain that's why we couldn't borrow their car, which was probably a good thing. And we stayed there for a while. And while we were there Anne Braiden and came down. I'd written to Anne at the beginning of the project, I wrote a lot of people to Norman Thomas and others, asking them if we could get their Virginia mailing list, to send that a fundraising pitch to people and Anne wrote back as she inevitably would, we don't give our mailing list to anybody. However, Carl and I

have several personal friends in Virginia and she gave us the addresses and stuff and said. It sounds like there might be an interesting story about your projects and Anne came down fairly early that first summer and traveled around Southside and took pictures and interviewed people and wrote a very nice story in the Southern Patriot that came out that fall that we reprinted and used for fundraising. And of course, Anne and Carl Brayton were the two most notorious people in the South at that time. You know, they'd talk about hatred, you know. So Anne came down to Lawrenceville to the house at St. Paul's and we sat out on the front porch talking. And then I went inside and then Mrs. Samuel said, who is that? And I said, oh, that's Anne Brayton. She said, I can't believe that Anne Brayton is sitting on my front porch. I don't know if she expected a bomb to fall out next or what. That was the first time that I met Anne we became great friends and later years. But So St. Paul's was a president, I guess it and gather it's a tragedy now it's closed. But certainly a lot of the people that I knew in Lawrenceville had gone to St. Paul and St. Paul had the buildings that were built by the students because it was an industrial school at the beginning. The President of Saint Paul, Dr. Earl McClenney, you know, and the chaplain father easily, were not-- Duke Edwards could explain this all better to you than I can, but they were not for going out and having a demonstration everyday. And Dr. McClenney really gave me the cold shoulder until he was in New York at a fundraiser for the United Negro College Fund. And my parents came up to him and all of a sudden I was the golden boy, briefly. And so but- [BS] They were undoubtedly getting some state funding at the time, I would imagine. And that may have may help explain his recalcitrance I think.

[DN] Well, in general as all those things go, you know, it's just a fascinating study of black colleges throughout the South. And the difference between state colleges and privately funded that was Episcopal church related. We know also I was a neighbor of the governor. I lived at 112A Church Street and he live two blocks up Church street, right across from the St. Paul campus, but he lived in the white part of it and I lived in the black part of it. And I remember one day just walking downtown Brunswick and it's got this courthouse square there. And there were these people who look like all the photographs you see a Byrd machine functionaries pointing over to the governer's house. There he is, there's a troublemaker. But other than that, I had no contact with them.

[BS] What other kind of harassment can you talk about threats of violence?

[DN] You know, when we were living in Blackstone here over on Fall Street.

[BS] Would that have been in 1966?

[DN] '65, Duke and Ben Montgomery and I shared a house, on 805 Fall street. And some of the young kids from the neighborhood came up, said you want to see something? We followed them and they took us under the grounds of what's now Fort Beckett at what was then camp Beckett. And there was a perfectly beautifully wrapped Ku Klux Klan cross ready to be burned. And then up came the military police because we were trespassing and they grabbed us, took us into the sergeant and he was going to string us up, or send us to prison. And there was a freedom song that was popular at that time. Demonstrating GI from Fort Bragg the way they treat my people, Lord it makes me mad. You know that I couldn't sit still because my homes in Danville and Danville had just been a civil rights case the year before. And then it goes to Secretary of Defense Macnamara said, come boy, what's the matter? And so this was just running through my mind as the MPs took us in and I got to this blustery sergeant. You know, who's going to do

all this and I was not going to have that. I said, I think the secretary of defense would love to know that you are letting the Ku Klux Klan build their crosses on military properties. He said, I ain't no pantywaist Get out of here. We left by the front door. So you know, there were things like there was a cross burned and Bill Tao who was lived just down the street from us there right at the intersection of the white and black community, one-on-one North Amelie Avenue had a cross and that one burned in his yard. And then when the Ku Klux Klan came, which is a very long story originating in part in Princeton, New Jersey. But I have to have many days to get into that. But when they came in I guess, September of 1965 and held their first rally at Lunenburg courthouse. Several of us decided we would just go. Nobody recognized us I mean, I hadn't been working in this county. That lasted about ten seconds and then they came up and hit, kicked and out we went. Nan was across the street yelling, You leave those boys alone! You stop hitting those boys. You know, there were all kinds of things like that. The worst was Alfonso Stokes got shot on the front steps of the VSCRC office in Victoria in the fall of 1965. And in all of these cases, there was no recourse. I mean, I could identify the people who beat me at the Klan rally so we went right down to the police station in Victoria. Said I can identify them. I want you to arrest them. They said, we can't go out there and have 700 Klansmen. There's always that they never, nobody was ever charged for shooting Alfonso Stokes. You know, this was just the way it was. You don't get help from those people that you are simultaneously protesting against. [BS] Did everybody, all the students that you're supervising, managing, working with, did they share kind of a cavalier attitude about that. Or would some people have moments of kind of crisis?

[DN] Well, certainly there were moments of crisis and some people started to carry guns and stuff. And some of the people in the community, you know, always had guns and you know Bill, Money was telling the story about the fella he stayed with. He said when these people come, I just raise up the window, and stick my shotgun out and then they go away. You know. So I mean, it's country, it's a hunting place, its military veterans and stuff. You have all of those things I remember one time. You'd always have trouble at gas stations and Tastee Freez because that was the place where the rednecks would gather. And so one day, Bill Money and I, and an elderly black woman, decided to stop a Tastee Freez freeze and get ice cream. And it was on the road between Cambridge in Victoria in Lunenburg county. And these young whites came up to me and they pointed at Bill Money and said, Do you know him? I said, yeah. Do you like him? I said, oh he's okay. Well I don't. And you know what that means? Trouble. And so then somehow this de-escalated and I got back in the car, the black one woman leaned over and patted me and said, you didn't need to worry honey, she had an Afghan over her. She pulled up the Afghan. She had a gun large enough to kill an elephant. I wasn't gonna let anything happen to you. So you know, everybody probably has stories like that one way or another. You don't want to lay down for things. On the other hand, you don't want to do stupid things and you hope that in the long run, hot tempers blow off.

[BS] Tell us a little bit more about the local members of the community that you all worked with. If you remember some other individuals or?

[DN] Again, it would depend on where you were and things. In Brunswick County where the NAACP kind of took us under their wing. They said, you know, we'll arrange for people to feed you every day so you have one guaranteed meal a day. And I've never eaten so well in my life.

You know, and a lot of these were farm families, farm fresh vegetables you couldn't for that stuff. And there were two black funeral homes in Lawrenceville. And one of them RSP Jones funeral home, Beverly Taylor who worked there was president of the NAACP. And the other one was the Brown funeral home. And they were one of the families that invited me over to dinner. And so we appeared for dinner. And they said, gee, before dinner, we'd like to show you the funeral home and they showed me where the blood came out. I had no appetite after that, you know. Just the smell of that funeral home. Today. If I smell it again, I kind of lose my appetite. But it all depends. Some people stayed, you know, a lot of people stayed in families and with families in our case, they got us places to stay. The first was the old Methodist parsonage, which had been abandoned, didn't have plumbing, but we all moved into one room there and that continued until one day the Methodists decided they would start up their church again. And they met over in this room and out came black and white, young and old male and female. And said, hm this won't do. So we got expelled from the Old Methodist Parsonage. And that's still standing and has been fixed up and it's a house now. And then they got us an apartment upstairs from a dry cleaners downtown, just down the block from Governor Harrison's house. And that had irregular plumbing. You couldn't take a bath or a shower because it just drained right into the dry cleaners below and would ruin all the clothes that were hanging there. We would have visitors like Willie Ricks or Mike Simmons who were traveling for SNCC then in Virginia, who had tried to take a bath. The screams would go up from below. Stop that, stop the water it's dropping off! So it was always interesting. Many tales that probably should not be repeated on tape.

[BS] Well of some of what should be repeated is your accomplishments in terms of voter registration. What do you remember feeling at the time, were you really excited by the progress made in terms of helping people get registered or were you frustrated with?

[DN] Well, it wasn't my goal in the first place. You know, I had to be one over to that. As far as I was concerned, we could just have a freedom election and have a Freedom Board of Supervisors and a freedom senator and stuff. But I did become a believer after watching the Bill England group do that. And so, yeah, I did take some pride and I remember I went back 20 years later and I asked about something and Mrs. Macklin said oh, my cousin has just completed his 16th year on County Board of Supervisors. And so I felt pretty good about that. But, you know, it's not- we weren't saviors of anybody, you know, we did some things that maybe made a difference for one thing, if you have a movement, it's important that it happen everywhere or at least as many places as possible. So it was important that it happened in Virginia. I remember reading an academic article a few years ago it said, basically there wasn't any civil rights movement in Virginia and I said here's somebody who doesn't know what you're talking about. So, you know, that's important. Just that we were there. And then to the example thing you knew you were mostly a bunch of white kids from universities going in to the black belt of Southside, Virginia. But it had enough. People would say, gosh, these white kids can come down here, we'd better do a little more ourselves. So it had that effect. And then, you know, in varying ways. And then it also has a long-term effect. I mean you know, Nan has been in the Georgia Legislature for quarter of a century now. And this was part of her training and this is true of everybody, everybody who went through that. It affected their life, it gave them skills. People that we considered real dunces at the time wound up heading statewide organizations to stop strip mining and things. You know, it's it's part of that, it's part of your, your apprenticeship

and life. And that was a good one, because they are- Oh, this is a joke now.

[BS] To individuals who are growing themselves.

[DN] Yeah. So individuals, we grow ourselves. The people I remember Otha Junior whose downstairs, as teenager and now he's director of economic development for Mecklenburg County or something not unaffected by the fact that he went around with the civil rights workers in the summer of 1966. You know better that you do that, than you do some other things in life. But again, it's not a question of, you know, I came in, I saved. It's nothing like I got much more out of it than I gave. But I got to be a part of a movement of a situation that did change America. You know, in all the, all the ways. I mean, I know the women who wrote the position paper in SNCC on the position of women in SNCC. That kind of re-launched the women's liberation movement and stuff. And, you know, it was an inspiration to everybody, you know, you had gay liberation, this liberation, that liberate all of that grew out of that, the well of civil rights in the early 1960's. And that's a good feeling to have. I remember seeing an interview with Stokely when he was dying of cancer. He said he was out in Denver, Colorado and he checked into the hotel. And this young man who was behind the desk didn't know who he was or asked him who he was or something. And he had long hair. So Stokely said he pointed to the long here. He said, without me, you wouldn't have had that same kind of a minimal thing to do, but, you know, that's true. You know, all of those things. I mean, when I think when we were at UVA, they would not send recruiters to black high schools in Virginia. They would only send them to white schools. And the Virginia council on human relations chapter there got permission. The university would magnanimous SLI give us this printed grant Biola that they send. And we could go to the black high schools and stuff, you know. And I hope all of that has changed now that so yeah, I like to think we're a little part of that in just making it a more decent place. How long did you stay connected with engaged with us till the end of 1966 and then I was really kind of burned out, went up to Charlottesville and slept on David loves his couch for many weeks. And Tom Gardner came along and wrote me up and said, OK, we're going to Florida or we're going to do peace tour of Florida. And that kind of gave me. Second wins. I'll always be grateful for that. First time I went to Florida and look, Cara. So what was your immediate career after that? I've always been a troublemaker. I am now happily retired, but I went to We did that tour of Florida and I went to work for the southern student organizing committee and edited their magazine. And then I eventually got conscientious objector status and it took years of appeals to get it. And then they turned around and drafted me instantly. So I spent two years working at Penn community services in South Carolina, which should be known as the Pioneer School for freed slaves in the South. And that was interesting. Then I went to Atlanta, I was a journalist for Anne Braitan's newspaper, Southern Patriot for awhile and wound up in St. Augustine in the 1970s and have been there ever since. Some people wishing I would get on a horse that brought that me here and get right back out of town.

[BS] And while you were with VSCRC, Were you in Mecklenburg the whole time through no. I'm sorry, Brunswick from all the way through the end of '66.

[DN] More or less, you know, I started here and not away and then to Brunswick. And then in, in most of the summer of 1966, Jim Tru and I were driving around all the counties trying to either give pointers to people or stir up dissension. There's some little of both, I'm afraid to say in retrospect, but and you know, it's influenced my whole life. I mean, I went to St. Augustine,

which was the site of the great demonstrations that led directly to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. And you never heard anything about it in St. Augustine history was fake buildings, funny costumes and all white history. And this was an article of faith. You know, we have worked for a long time there and we just last year on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Civil Rights Act, we opened the first Civil Rights Museum in the state of Florida, which mostly has a closed sign on it because we get no public support but it's a symbolic beachhead. And we started Freedom Trail of historic sites in the civil rights movement. And it's, St. Augustine is celebrating its 450th birthday this year, and it was celebrating its 400th birthday at the time of the Civil Rights Movement and disgraced itself to the world. For the 450th at the question was will they repeat it again? And to my surprise, they didn't. They had a large exhibit on black history in the visitor's center for several months. And all the publicity emphasizes not just constantly on, on Pedro Menendez, but also the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. It moves slowly, but if you annoy them long enough, they may have to something.

[BS] Is there anything else you wanted to say to reflect on this organization, your time with it, to get off your chest. Or thinking that posterity might want to know.

[DN] Hard to say about that. But it's of all the things that I have done in my life. And yes, there is one thing. You know, this is what I am proudest of. You know, that I can't imagine the rest of my life had I not gone through the crucible of the civil rights movement. And I will say this because this has been a longtime lesson and something I learned in South Side. I went to, I was always a very good student and all these things. And I went to UVA thinking that smartness was the thing to have in life. And I looked and the two top students in law school there were from Alabama and they were segregationists. And I said now something is wrong with this. And when I went to South Side, I met people who had no college degree, no high school degree, but they had goodness. And what I learned was that goodness is more important than smartness. And all through life, this is true. I mean, I have met people who ought to know better, but because it might reflect on their salary or their job, they're not going to bring this up. They're gonna sweep this under the rug and stuff. And that's all part of that lesson, you know, the goodness is the important thing. And I learned that in Southside.

[BS] Well, thank you, David, for what you did in Virginia in the 60s, and thank you for sharing your time with us today.

[DN] Thank you for having me has been great. And thanks to the conference. Looked me up next time. You're in. A great surprise to have to, to have to, to have to, to o.
