

An oral history from Lucious Edwards of the VSCRC, 2016

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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(Unedited)

[RB] Students Civil Rights Committee or the VSCRC. We're speaking on Saturday, April 23rd, 2016, in the Mapp Room of James Branch Cabell Library, Lucious, Do you agree to be interviewed and recorded?

[LE] Yes, I do.

[RB] Can you give me your full name?

[LE] Lucious LUCIOUS Edwards, Jr.

[RB] Alright. And was this the same name people in the VSCRC knew you by?

[LE] A lot of them knew me by my nickname, which was Duke.

[RB] And where do you get the nicknamed?

[LE] My mother gave it to me when I was born. They had been married ten years and I was finally born. And so she had to give me a royal name and so she named me Duke.

[RB] And who were your parents where they were the names? Lucious Edwards, Sr., and Grace Harris were my parents

[RB] What were their occupations,

[LE] My father retired from the Atlantic Coastline Railroad as a laborer and my mother was at home. She was at home. She never really worked outside the house that I remembered she had done some ironing or something for some people, but she really didn't like that and my father didn't not particularly care for her being outside the home

[RB] You have any brothers or sisters?

[LE] I have a sister, Barbara Edwards. I can't remember her fourth husband's last name. Okay. So let that go because they are divorced anyway. She's retired and she lives here in Richmond she was the only sibling, Only sibling I have

[RB] And were you involved in any social activism before the VSCRC before getting involved with that?

[LE] There was some when I was in high school when they when Wyatt Walker was at Gillfield Baptist Church and they were attempting to get full use, full privileges at the Petersburg Public Library. And most of the people who who picketed and sat-in with him were students at Virginia State because a lot of them belong to his church than later on when I was in high school. And we took on the lunch counters and that kind of thing. I did some picketing with that. But other than that, that's all I was involved in when I was in high school.

[RB] Did you attend Gillfield Baptist Church?

[LE] No, I didn't. My parents went to Shiloh Baptist Church in Chesterfield.

[RB] And what high school did you attend?

[LE] I went to Peabody because of segregation, they were very, very few African Americans in Ettrick And there were very few young people in Ettrick period, black on white. And so the County of Chesterfield paid our tuition to either Petersburg high or to Peabody So we wouldn't have to undergo a 70 mile bus ride to Thomas Dale or Caver High School. So we ended up going to the city school and not all the people I grew up with went to the city school, someone to Carver. But we always thought Peabody had a better Pre-college program than Carver. So a lot of us went there. And that's where I went Peabody High School.

[RB] What do you think led you to become involved with the civil rights movement?

[LE] Well, for the longest kind of time I had had some interesting thoughts about what was going on and why. I think maybe when I was in getting ready to go to school, whatever I was thinking of becoming basically a lawyer and for some reason I thought nobody knew what was going on. And I was going to go before the Supreme Court and tell them. And once they found out that there was going to be the end of it and there were just certain things that I just really didn't quite understand it and also why people put up with it. And some of the people I knew were no better off than we were. They were only a different skin color and that's all but many of them were worse off than we were. But here again, they had the privilege and I always liked to read. And I had read about some, some ideas that people had that would be what was needed in the United States and other places. It was more of a form of socialism to, to, to equalize out the wealth and all that. And so I read some of that and some of that was an influence. But primarily it was just the idea that the whole thing was kind of crazy. And that was it. Yeah.

[RB]What year did you graduate high school,?

[LE] 63,

[RB]1963. How did you get involved with the VSCRC? I know you were would you say what are the leaders or one of the ...

[LE] Well I became a leader, the VSCRC-- and I still don't have a real full understanding of how it evolved-- but apparently, Virginia had a commission on race relations going back into the thirties and forties and fifties. And it appears that what some people were doing in Virginia was trying to steer college students into a more peaceful type of protest. And that was the commission on civil rights. There was a meeting at Hampton Institute in 63 about December 63, and I did not go to that meeting. There were four or five people at State who knew about the meeting. They went and that's really where the Virginia Students Civil Rights Committee was formed. And then I think some people didn't quite know what was getting ready to hit them. But there were people from SSOC and there were people who had ties to SNCC And I didn't know this for some time afterwards, but SNCC actually paid our bills. But I never never knew that. And I don't think that people who were in the Commission on that Virginia Council on Human Relations. I don't think they knew it either. We got some money from them. And so then we had another meeting around April, at Virginia State of Sixty-five Yeah, sixty-four sixty-five. We're meeting April 65 at Virginia State. And that's where the summer project was outline and I really didn't pay that much attention to it either because they were about five people from Virginia State. I was one of one of the five. And then when it came time for people to show up, no one

showed up. And so I got drafted. And that's when I joined the group. But there were about five people and none of them showed up. Butch came, but Butch was from Hampton. Bettie didn't show up.

[RB] hold on Butch who?

[LE] Montgomery Butch.

[RB] And you mentioned a woman? Bettie Mitchell Yeah. She's she ended up marrying a guy from Tanzania, Betty Fuzi, Janice Mitchell, whose dead, She didn't show up or Henry Thomas and there was one other person. None of them showed up for various reasons. And so I ended up going down there in June and I was just going to go down and sort of at least look like they have some kind of representation. But other than that,

[RB] And who was was Ben Montgomery?

[LE] Butch was one of the original people. He was at the meeting at Hampton. Okay. And he may have had something to do with organizing it. And Butch was supposed to have been chair of the group. And I think I met him about a week or so after I went down to a place called Jennings Ordinary. They rented a house and we all stayed there until we decided what kind of structure we were going to use and that was at Jennings Ordinary so that's why Butch...

[RB] Was Jennings Ordinary hotel?

[LE] Yeah, that's what it was. Yeah. Stage station, mail, everything you can think of, but it was just one great big building and narrow area was called Jennings Ordinary.

[RB] I might have missed it and where was this?

[LE] Oh, I forget what road it's on but it's outside of Blackstone. Okay. But I remember I don't remember which road.

[RB] What kind of activities were you involved with the VSCRC?

[LE] Well, the very first thing we had to do was to try to come together. We had a really, I think one of the most diverse groups of people mentally I had ever been around. There were people there who were straight up. Theoretical communist. There were a bunch of different types of socialist, democratic socialists. Fabians, then there were people there who were basically in favor of absolutely no government at all and I am not kidding, none. And these were all white members of the VCRC and yeah, yeah, yeah. It was a, it was an interesting group. So we had to get a little bit of a structured to begin with. I mean, when you, when you have a group and you have no structure. What do you do? And so we did a little bit of that. We were able to to rent an office downtown in Blackstone, which was like a building next to a barbershop. And we met some people there who were, who were leaders. We actually were asked to come there, but I never met the people who asked us to come there. But Bruce knows who they were. And we were asked to come down there And then finally one day, Stokely Carmichael, Ralph Featherstone and Charlie Cobbs, three people whose names are fairly high in SNCC showed up in Blackstone

[RB] April, May? This is 65.

[LE] This is sometime in June. June of 65. They showed up and they basically wanted to know what are you all doing. And that's when some people wanted to take the SNCC model where you would have a couple of people in a county and they would work and live with people in the county. And we basically settled on that. We settled on that. And because there were so few African Americans and only Butch and myself were in the group. We ended up being in

Blackstone. And I sort of visited everybody almost every day because I don't remember if Butch could drive. And so we did that. But we took the SNCC style of of a couple of people a day and a couple of people and accounting. And what she would do is you would you would basically live with that person and eat what they go to church where he went and do everything else. And I always had a few few questions about that because the Black people I knew did not want guests in their house until it was the weekend. And as far as being invited to eat or whatever, when when we got ready to be invited to some place, we knew what we were going to have. We're going to have the best they had and I always kind of looked at that as if it was putting them out, but they didn't want us to think that they didn't have. So we use the SNCC method and Butch and I basically went from county to county met with people, asked answered a lot of questions the one that was asked of me the most was, was I a beatnik Beatnik, you know, because the kids had never seen anyone with hair never seen that before. So I had to be a beatnik. And I answered those questions and everything. But it was an interesting experience.

[RB] And 65 your hair's a little long?

[LE] Yeah. Okay. Yeah.

[RB] How did you how did the organization get people, Black families, did you just approach them? Did you know of people who might be willing to do this? How did happen? Did it happen through a church?

[LE] Yeah, a lot of times it would come through church and the minister would say that sort of thing. In fact we went to a few churches and were introduced and all. and of course, we made it known, you know, that we did not have but a certain amount of MONEY People invited us. They would invite us for Sunday dinner. I remember we were, Butch and I shared the Freedom House. and that was available for people to stop by, rest if they wanted to. And it was a couple next to us. And I think we were really down. I don't think either of us had any money. We hadn't been paid. So Butch decided he was going to go next door and impose on the people next door. And I went with him and we ate. But, but they were a little apprehensive at first because they didn't want us to see them eating what we used to call fried, fried white meat, that kind of thing. But Butch and out both of us grew up eating that wasn't a surprise to us. So that was a little bit, little bit strange. But to Freedom House was there and people would stop occasionally on their way north or south. And we met a lot of people in the neighborhood, and they kinda adopted as they probably thought we were crazy too, but they adopted us.

[RB] This was on Fall Street?

[LE] Fall Street

[RB] So that was some of the first activities getting it organized. That meeting with those folks that those folks high up and SNCC. Where did that take place? Do you remember?

[LE] In our office, we had an office downtown and we also-- Dottie worked in the office-- Bill Towe--

[RB] Downtown Blacksburg?

[LE] Blackstone

[RB] Blackstone.

[LE] Bill Towe was there He and his wife were there. And Bill did a lot of our research, a lot of statistics on different counties and all that kind of stuff. His wife was working in the school --Head Start Okay. She was working in that. And Howard and his wife Ann they would there I'm

not quite sure exactly what they were doing, but Howard and Ann Romaine were there. But with the office was downtown in Blackstone,

[RB] And did those guys just show up in a car all together?

[LE] Yeah, they showed up. And it was just one day meeting. Yeah. We talked in an all day long. But Featherstone, his daddy has been dead for a long time. Charlie Cobb is still alive. He did a book on, ah, but is it a pictorial history of the civil rights movement or something? And he's working with project they have at Duke now. I think is a consultant for them or something. But Charlie Cobb and of course, Stokely's dead.

[RB]

[LE] Yeah. Yeah. They just showed up and we just talked about it. As far as I know, nobody had attempted to do that in Virginia. As far as I know.

[RB] And you guys get any press, that whole, and let's say that summer and all,

[LE] There was no press there. In fact, what they did was, and we discovered very quickly was that the, the, the powers that be had made it very important for us to be ignored. Just leave them alone. Will go a way. And that's what they did. We did get any press, not in that area. Ah, I don't know. But that was the name of the game. Just leave them alone and they would disappear, and never do anything else. And we learned that pretty quick.

[RB] Last time I talked to Bruce and he said you guys were involved with what was called a number counties referred to as the Black Belt. What counties were they and did you do different things in different counties?

[LE] Well, the idea in those counties, we had two people in each county Dinwiddie, Dinwiddie County, Lunenburg, Powhatan -- which is technically not in the Black Belt-- but we had Powhatan and I can't remember the rest of them. But people would, we're supposed to do a number of things. Answer questions, basic questions that people had. Because you could not, if you were Black, you could not get a straight answer to anything. If you went someplace to register to vote or whatever. Even in 65, you were still going to be looked at, asked questions in a very, very few registered black voters. We had wanted to set up a freedom school, but we didn't get around to that while I was there. But that was the idea. If you were in Din- Dinwiddie for instance, you would go from one person and this person might be a share cropper, or have a small farm, of tobacco farmer and you would talk to them about it or thought about this and then how would how would their kids in school and that kind of thing, that was generally it. And basically try to find out what their level of political sophistication was or interests were. And those were the Black Belt Counties. Which ranged anywhere in population from 50% Black to 70% Black. But none of the money or power was in the Black community, at all, whatsoever.

[RB] What kind of other issues? Voting issues and registration registration drives? Did you try...

[LE] Well, we did we did have some drives, those those came later. But what we would do and I was there for that summer what we would talk to people about was the difficulties that they may be having to vote. And then of course, people were asking the question, what are you gonna get for it? Look whose running. And a lot of times we ended up showing the local Black community there exactly what the law was as we would go into a place and sit down and eat. And everybody would look, including the people cooking. They will come out and look. Because although the law said that they were allowed to go in this place and have lunch or breakfast or whatever, nobody did it. People still people came in and went to the counter and get something

to go. And we go and sit down and cause we got waited on, but here again, this was something that a lot of African Americans in that little city of Blackstone and other places where Butch and I would go something like we're on a road, we'd stop someplace and get a hamburger or something like that. We will just look because there's really nothing we were doing wrong, but it was it was socially not done. We did some of that kind of stuff.

[RB] Would you say by the end of the summer of the following year, you saw if from what you guys were doing or what has just happened in the culture, things change as far as even that goes. Were more African Americans daring to go or make it more of just an everyday occurrence to go sit in a sit down rather

[LE] That really didn't change. I know it didn't change in Petersburg after the five and dimes were integrated. Most of the five and dimes took the lunch counters out. They just took them out completely so nobody sat down. For those that did have seats and everything, the Black population still did not sit down. I got drafted...

[RB] What year?

[LE] in the fall, fall of 65. Oh, yeah, I get that draft that someone said that they had speeded my draft up, or something I had never had any idea of exactly what Orlando is. I get drafted. You weren't in school by then or I didn't go back default. I say I didn't go back that fall. And normally they would have been a year in there somewhere, I think. But anyway, I don't think it was an immediate thing, but I do know that there was some younger students there who did become involved later on in some of the counties and some of that was some of that would be credited to us. Yeah. Yeah. So I guess as a role model or yeah. Yep. And but that did happen. There were some people who did not join, anything like that, but they definitely knew we were around that type of thing. So and I think we made some impact there.

[RB] Let's talk about the draft and just for a bit so you get drafted, what happened next?

[LE] Well, i i showed up for the physical.

[RB] Where was that?

[LE] Bellwood, Bellwood...down here the supply center thing  
US Defense Supply Center on the Bellwood farm] They had it there. And I went down and did that. And then I waited for the results. And I finally got a letter back saying that I would I would need to report on X, Y, and Z day. And I thought about that because to be honest with you, being in high school, I remember being in high school. No one that I knew in high school had ever heard of Điện Biên Phủ -- nobody And this is high school! And I started to read quite a bit and had no idea what the Vietnamese war against France was about and all this kind of stuff And that was not that much better. People still didn't know where Vietnam was. Who the Viet Cong were never heard of Việt Minh or Hồ Chí Minh Or that this was a war in Southeast Asia and a war of national liberation. And people didn't know anything about wars of national liberation period in Nigeria or anywhere that Americans don't look at those kinds of things. And I had some some issues with that. And the only reason I did go was because when I talk to my father about it.

[RB] What did he say?

[LE] Well, because he would by that time I think he had retired. But we talked and he set out, excuse me. He was drafted during the Second World War and they went up to Indiana, and I forget where the place was. But they went up there. All black troops. Our white officers except

the chaplains, NCOs are black And he said he used to take German prisoners. These are German prisoners of war who had been captured in North Africa. Many of them came to the United States. And my father told me, he said that he would he was a truck driver, that he and the others would take the German prisoners of war out for work detail and pick up things like picking up paper off the street and stuff or road And he would say that they had to get the German prisoners of war to go into places to buy them a Coca-Cola and a bag of potato chips.

[RB] In Indiana?

[LE] In Indiana! And so he told me about that and I thought about it and Dottie and I talked about it. And we sort of schemed up on leaving. But when I got my, my orders, my destination orders, it was it was to Germany. And I went through two calls and both calls said to Germany And so I went on to Germany and the army. Yet most stationed in Hannah, outside of Hanau and I would tell people today that was stationed outside of Hanau They think I'm talking about Hanoi in Vietnam But it was a place called Hanau Hanna, Hanoi. Hanau, Hanau I even think how to pronounce it.

[RB] Hanau, Germany

[LE] Hanau Germany, West Germany. In fact, I think it's, if you look at, if you read the cover on this, on Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, it mentions Hanau It's about 20 miles from Frankfurt, south of Frankfurt, down the Main river, that's where it was. So after that, after I had about 13 months left to go in the Army, I knew I wasn't going to go to Vietnam. So...

[RB] How longer were you in the Army?

[LE] Total? Less than two years. 23 months or so.

[RB] You mentioned Dottie Who was Dottie and where did you meet her? Dottie? I met Dottie at Virginia State briefly, but Dottie ended up being one of the students who came to Jennings Ordinary. And we met there. And we actually, I think one of the strange things was that we kind of thought alike And it read some of the same kinds of books and theories and stuff like that. And then that lead from one thing to another. That's basically how Dottie and I met. Plus young ladies, some of the, some of the Black young ladies weren't quite sure if I was growing my hair out to get it processed, or that I had become gay. So they didn't quite know why would anybody walk around, would any guy walk around with that much hair? So they all felt sorry for me. But they weren't very much informed. That's how Dottie and I met.

[RB] You were going to Virginia State? When, did you graduate from the there?

[LE] I ended up graduating after I got out the Army, I knocked around for a little while and I went back.

[RB] But what did you attend when you when, let's say sixty four, sixty three, sixty four...

[LE] I was at State.

[RB] And what what classes did you take? What was your major if you had...

[LE] I was majoring in History. Okay. And I took the regular liberal arts courses. It's just that Virginia States curriculum encouraged freshman and sophomores to take at least one upper division course. And so I took some things like political science courses up upper division courses. Yeah. I was a history major and Dottie was in Poli Sci at Randolph Macon, where she went to school

[RB] What was Dottie's full name then?

[LE] Dorothy Page. Dorothy Page Brockman. And because she's Dorothy Page Edwards

[RB] And she's a white woman. And when did you bring it home to meet the parents? How did that go back then say 60 to 65. I think it was 65 when they first met. Dottie. The strange thing about Black people and white people. All Black families have members in their family who look like they're white. Sometimes they are whiter than white people And it's a strange reaction when they meet a white person who was not white. So, they had, we had, I had cousins with blond hair and blue eyes. and stuff, and practically any Black family in the United States has one. I think they might have been a little fearful because of the reaction that a lot of people had about a white woman and a Black man. Yeah. I think that's kinda scared them a little bit. They never said anything about it. But I think that was a concern.

[RB] Sure. Yeah. What year did you guys get married?

[LE] 67

[RB] Did she go to Germany with you?

[LE] She came over, and let's see, and I left Oklahoma. They sent me to Oklahoma to go to artillery school so I could learn how to plot artillery rounds and kill people 18 miles away.

[RB] Were you successful?

[LE] Oh, I was good at it. But this is the crazy part about it. I was in the third armored division, which was a highly decorated World War II division. And they were about 5 thousand of us in the artillery brigade Each artillery brigade had what was called a fire direction center. And that was the group that, that plotted everything. So we got all the calls that came in from our forward observers. And that's what that was. And there were only two of us in the entire third armored division who were Black. And we used to get people to... and we had this it was a track, a track vehicle where we had all the radios and charts and maps and stuff. And we would have colonels and generals sticking their head looking in to see who... And the guy, other Black guy was in Alpha battery, I was in Bravo battery. And I knew him. I had met him years ago. His his uncle taught history at Virginia State University. And his, his uncle wrote a book called "The Confederate Negro," James Brewer. And I had met him and he was an alpha battery. And when I arrived in Bravo battery, one way I saw him and he saw me and I said, I know you. and he was in Alpha battery. We were the only two in fire direction. Yeah.

[RB] Small world.

[LE] It was because he went to North Carolina Central. He didn't go to Virginia State. His father was very high in Pittsburgh and school board, he was either superintendent, assistant superintendent of schools because they were twins. His daddy and his brother. They were twins. And they played football one played right end one played left end.

[RB] What were their names since we are talking about them.

[LE] Brewer James and John Brewer. The Brewer boys as they were called.

[RB] How do you spell that last name

[LE] B-R-E-W-E-R But he wrote, James Brewer wrote the Confederate Negro. And other things. He was, he went to get his doctorate, I think at Pitt that we Pitt, might have been Pitt because he was from Pittsburgh. Might've been Penn State where he got his bachelor's degree at Virginia State

[RB] Describe some of the people that you work with at the local level. What did you think of their participation in the towns and counties?

[LE] Well,

[RB] Can you give us some examples of things that went well? Like what that guy was doing well in that county? Or he could have done this, or that...

[LE] You mean the people in VSCRC?

[RB] yeah, yeah,

[LE] That was a hard thing to judge because you had so many people who were very, very independent, very independent and had different models and those kinds of things. Nan, I was I was tapping on the chair over here, probably shouldn't do that. But Nan, Nan Grogan. David Nolan, Betty Cummings, Bruce, and Bob Foley. They were some of the more active groups and some of the other people were there but not as active. But we did have a group of very independent, very independent people. So there was no set thing, like you going to do this, this, not that not like that, didn't work like that.

[RB]

[?] mentioned that some of the meetings, they more debate societies and there were hardly to get around any yes or no, took a while to get we're going to decide on this we are gonna decide on that.

[LE] They were debates.

[RB] There were debates

[LE] That is exactly what they were.

[RB] Is it because they're just the nature of them being young and in college and that's what people do or

[LE] Well, I think it was some of that, but some of, some of the people who were young and in college were basically young people in college who really knew what was going on. And we're very well-informed about what was going on. And I think that contributed to it. It just wasn't just a college thing, some guys sitting around smoking pipes. It was there were some serious some serious people. And but our meetings were like debating societies. That's what they were. Consequently you really couldn't nail down too many things. So that was probably a problem with that.

[RB] What are some of the memories when you've talked to say students at Virginia State over the year, Virginia...VSU... what would you bring up and talk about from your days is 65 that summer?

[LE] Well, Virginia State was not a civil rights campus. And I remember I first, I think got in trouble probably at Virginia State, we had a student protests in 64, which led to an organized demonstration and petition and everything in 65. And that was just not something that students at Virginia State did. And most people just thought that that was just people just trying to show off. We're going to get anything. But the last one we had when I was there in 65 involved abuse of students in the workplace. And also involved the curriculum. We have some serious issues about the curriculum. David Nolan used to asked me all the time, you know, he used to say "Duke, why don't you go to a white school?" And I said, "David, I'm already at a white school, I don't know what you're talking about." Because if you looked at the curriculum, there was nothing in the curriculum. There wasn't in the curriculum over here it was the same curriculum. But we had some course and curriculum issues. And part of that was a course that was called music and art appreciation, was semester-long where you were supposed to learn about the greatness of European music and art. And that was it. You will learn all Beethoven stuff over

here you get Gainsborough all the paintings and all this kind of stuff. And I remember when I first met some, some white students, they didn't have a clue as to who some of these people were. And I was of the opinion that these were some the things they're discussing at UVA in class in different places. Beethoven, so we had some curriculum issues And the other one was this thing called the junior senior comp. And that was a class in those days. You had to take six creative hours of grammar and six credit hours of literature that was required for practically everybody. And then before you graduated, you had to take a class, a three hour class, which was called the junior senior comp. And on a junior senior comp, you had to write at the end of the semester 500 word essay. But not only did you have to write it grammatically correct, it also had to have some content to it. And nobody's mentioned content anywhere the whole time we'd ever been in school. We all had to buy this little book. They used to carry around little yellow book about grammar. Everybody had that. Yes. I don't even know what happened to mine. But everyone had to have this book. What you would do is when you get your papers back from an instructor, you had to look up what the comment was. Because they wouldn't write the comment, they would just write down the page and yeah, it was, it was torture. And I'll tell you how bad it was. There were some teachers at Virginia State teaching math and English, who were teaching math and English. And there were some who were not teaching math and English. It got so bad they stopped putting those people's names in the catalog. So you couldn't pick somebody's class that you weren't going to learn anything in. I'm serious. You would not. There would be no names next to the math professors for those introductory courses and for the English professors. And there were certain math instructors and certain, certain English instructors who was just asked to death. And so that was one of the things we protested. And I remember when they cut it out, when they finally cut out that junior, senior comp. Hundreds of people returned to school to finish because there were people would just couldn't that I'm serious. It was a major...look, this was a major class, now, this was a major class. So I'm also the humanities majors didn't have any problems with it, cause a lot of us, we're more into content. But somebody other classes would never mentioned anything about content. And what are you gonna do with a math major? What kind of content? So so that was one of the big things that got into trouble over was that which which came to a blossom in spring of 65. Prior to that, I had been involved in some other issues, discussions and things. We had these little forums and stuff. And I had attracted some attention then. Not for having crazy ideas, some instructors even said that I had some good ideas. Some of them wanted to know where I got that idea from. So but in fact, I found when I found the petition petition is in the Robert Daniel papers because he was not papers, the records of Robert Daniel. And the petition is there, with all the names and everything and but but it did involve student abuse. Student could just be fired for no reason. You had no rights or anything. And there was a lot of abuse as far as the students were concerned. And that was the main part of it and some of those curriculum changes. And that was it. And I know I've got into trouble on it.

[RB] Did you live on campus?

[LE] No, no. I never lived on campus. I spent a lot of... I grew up maybe a mile from where I ended up working. So I spent a lot of time on the campus but I never lived on campus.

[RB] When you got involved in 65 with the VSCRC what did your parents think about that they fine with that?

[LE] No, but here again, they were worried but they didn't, didn't really say anything because by that time, I think my father particularly was beginning to see more of an independent person in me than he had thought of before. But no, they never said anything about it, but I'm sure it worried them.

[RB] How about when you talk to the other members of the VSCRC how were those students? Do they talk about how, was there pressure on them by their parents or their peers where they were? What are you doing getting involved with this organization...

[LE] Yeah,

[RB] getting involved with civil rights?

[LE] Every every now and then one of the people would say something about their parents wanting to know exactly what this was. In one sense, it was great to have a child interested in other people's rights and things until it becomes your child. And then people want to know, well, you know, you could do a lot more if you graduate from school and this thing, but there was some of that. There was some of that. But we really didn't talk a lot about that. We just we sort of accepted our fate that our parents would probably eventually own us again. Yeah. Probably. And I think everybody's parents did well, some some of the parents probably has some serious strokes, particularly when they realized that it was an integrated group. But most of them pulled out of it. Yeah.

[RB] Were there any issues dealing with the poor in those counties that you remember, the organization get involved with? The organization? No. I don't remember that. Although people in the different counties would go to meetings and things with people, and I wasn't at all of them. But a lot of what I saw in the counties as far as poor people were concerned, were just things like I'd seen all my life. So it wasn't, it wasn't it wasn't new to me. It was new to some of the people, where people lived, what their facilities, school. But people ate. I remember there was one guy with us who's Jewish. There were a couple of fellows who were Jewish. We went some place and we got invited to dinner. Well, first of all, this, this person, for some reason ate everything that they were given when they got it. So if they got greens, they ate the greens. And no one is saying anything, now, the people who had provided it, they'd never said anything, they'd never seen anyone do that before. We didn't say anything. And after we left, I asked the guy and I'm not gonna call his name, said "Do you know would you just ate?" He had eaten just about every part of the pig you could think of. He was just eating because...and then we have something called creasy salad, which was something that just don't eat.

[RB] What is it?

[LE] It's a green it's --I'll tell you what it is it is nothing but watercress. There's a watercress and an upland cress and creasy salad is an upland cress. It's kind of spicy, peppery, and people use it to flavor other greens like kale and all the, cook it completely as creasy salad. but it's cress. That's what it is. Upland cress. And they had that they had biscuits and they had some fried, some some fried pork, can't remember exactly what that was, but he ate everything clean is plate. And they were happy. And it didn't kill him. In fact, I think last I saw him, I did see him in Blackstone. I joked him about it, but he laughed but it, but, but we had just never seen anybody eat everything that somebody put on their plate. And then the next thing, it almost like they were gonna take it back. Anyway, that was kind of funny. But I think we made an impact but it wasn't that first summer. I think the impact came as the group continued on and I wasn't there at that

particular time. Neither, neither was Dot for that matter. Because she came... when I went to Germany in April of 1966 and she came over in May, April or something like that. But I went over and I left Oklahoma and I think I wrap in Germany about March 66.

[RB] In the summer of 66 when they were back in the counties, you keeping correspondence with those people?

[LE] I think Dottie might've corresponded with David, but I wasn't corresponding with with anybody. But I think she may have corresponded with David. You could get that from her.

[RB] You talked about getting paid or the organization was getting money from SNCC, right?

[LE] Well, I think that's where it came from although I remember today we got a \$500 check from Joan Baez.

[RB] Really?

[LE] Yes. That was...

[RB] How did she added to hear about your--

[LE] Well, people in different groups and stuff. And they will she was giving money and a check came to Virginia Student Civil Rights Committee from Joan Baez Yeah, but a lot of people were funding SNCC and SCLC.

[RB] How long, how much would \$500 go?

[LE] Quite far considering I was getting \$8 a week and the girls were getting \$10 a week because they had to buy shampoo. It was all of them had the Joan Baez look long hair

[RB] Did Dottie have long hair?

[LE] Yes, she did Long hair, not with the bangs but she wore her hair the same way Joan Baez did. And we made eight. And I smoked \$8 worth of cigarettes a day. It's just a so we made 8 and the girls made 10 And then of course we had to pay for gas, we did have two or three cars running. We'd pay for gas and food and stuff like that, no rent though.

[RB] Are there many records? You were an archivist for a long time where there are many records for the VSCRC, I don't get the impression.

[LE] Well, a lot of this stuff is at UVA, a lot of it, was not incorporated So individuals have put stuff different places and it's the same with SNCC, you know, you get some over here because it doesn't belong to the groups though. There's quite a bit of it at UVA. Bill Towe has a lot of it up there and this is what will become a part of what you have here. And we're hoping to get copies, duplicates of what we have at Virginia State. Yeah.

[RB] You got a receipt or the copy at the check from Joan Baez?

[LE] No, I don't I don't I don't know, but I remembered, I remember when it came.

[RB] Music was very popular, or important in the civil rights movement. Do you remember, was music important socially that summer of 65 you all?

[LE] Yeah, particularly because most of the people in the group listened to black artists. Although there were some people who there was some people, not just in VSCRC, but there was some white kids in VSCRC who came out of the SSOC tradition

[RB] The what tradition?

[LE] SSOC The Southern Student Organizing Committee And they were interested in white culture being seen as not a racist culture. So they would, they would love to hear a country singer or bluegrass singer because they were so they wanted to celebrate southern history and culture, but not looking at it all the time as a violence and obstructionism and all this kind of stuff.

So music was all around. Appreciated by everybody, in fact Dottie and I and this woman named Sue Thresher, and Sue, I think Sue is retired. But Sue -- we went to Sue's house for dinner. She wanted to look at the Johnny Cash program. That was the night that -- we went up there because Lyndon Johnson-- she lived up the street from us, she was on the same block. Lyndon Johnson was making a speech that night and that was the speech he made where he said he wouldn't run. And that night she had cooked biscuits and navy beans and whole thing that you would've gotten in Kentucky.

[RB] You were living up in DC at the time?

[LE] we lived in DC.

[RB] This was probably March or April of 68, I guess.

[LE] Yeah, we were there and we were there for the riot. And it was after the riot that I told Dottie we are going home, I said I gotta go back to where people are civilized

laugh[NG] It was crazy. We lived on a hill and then at the bottom of the hill was Florida Avenue and the tear gas just hung down in there. It was really bad. So we left right after that and came back to Petersburg.

[RB] Was the right right after Martin Luther King's --

[LE] Yes, started that night

[RB] April, I guess.

LE} Yes. Started that night, right. Yeah. And went for it. There were there was another black guy in the group that joined about middle of the summer. His name was Cooley.

[RB] And what was his full name?

[LE] What was Cooley's first name? Cooley Washington. His first name was Cooley his last name was Washington.

[RB] Where was he from? Georgia. And he had been a member of SNCC and we we understood when we got him that he was hiding out in Virginia

[RB] so you're talking about when he joined VSCRC, right?

[LE] And he worked down in Brunswick County with David Nolan. Okay. But we kinda heard he was hiding out in Virginia.

laugh[NG]

[RB] Hiding out from what?

[LE] Klan, police, you name it, you could think of was supposed to be hiding out.

DE -off camera] Whatever he had been doing in Georgia.

[LE] Yeah, that's what he was trying to get away from.

[DE] It got too hot for him down there.

[LE] So they shipped him up to the Virginia Students. Civil Rights Committee.

[RB] Dottie says it got too hot for him in Georgia and

[LE] yeah, and in 68 I was not working. And I was between going back to school, whatever I was going to do. And we were living on Belmont Street, Northwest up in the Shaw area And we turned on the TV and the TV said, Dr. Martin Luther King has been shot. And I remember telling, yelling to Dottie who, she was getting ready to go into the kitchen I said Dottie, somebody shot Martin Luther King. And about a minute later I said Dottie Martin Luther King is dead. Well about ten o'clock at night. I got a phone call from Cooley Washington's girlfriend wanting to know if we could get 20-25 dollars or so so we could put some money together. to bail him out of jail

because he had thrown a bottle of -- a can of shaving cream through this store front, who wouldn't close the store after King, it had been announced that King had been killed. And so they didn't need our \$25 to bail him out. So the next day I went over, he was working at a Buster Brown shoe store. If you can believe that-- see I can't make this up-- a Buster Brown shoe store on the corner of Seventh and Florida avenue. Dottie went on to work. She was working for Maritime, she was working for Maritime Commission. And I walked on down the end of 18th and turn left. I looked up and I saw smoke But you always see smoke in DC, you hear sirens in DC. By the time I got up to seventh Street. I mean, you could see that they changed all the lights on 15th Street, and all the streets were running West, wide open and people in the car and turn the corner. And there was the riot

laugh[NG] coming right on up the street and Cooley and I stood right there and watched it. They just came right straight on up the street. And that was something that was amazing. I think that I didn't get home until midnight and she was worried and she should have been because there was a curfew and everything and I didn't have any problem getting home. But that was something.

[RB] When did you, when again, did you leave Germany?

[LE] I left Germany in October

[RB] October,

[LE] No, September.

[RB] September of 67?

[LE] hmhm , 67.

[RB] And why DC and what were you doing?

[LE] Dottie had gotten a job with the Maritime Administration,

[RB] I see.

[LE] And she she she came back before I did a couple of months before I did and went to work at the Maritime. And that's why we were there.

[RB] And were you employed up there?

[LE] I worked up there. I worked in a liquor store for a while. I had thought about going to school, back to school, I went over to Howard and I didn't like to atmosphere because when I got back, the Civil Rights Movement was beginning to become a style. People were dressing a certain way. They were talking in a certain way. But that was it, you know, people would do and all those kinds of things they were doing. Everything you can think of people who had some of this, some of the most beautiful bushes you've ever seen and everything else but there was nothing of the the reasons or anything like that was there. So I didn't go back to Howard that spring. And then when I went back to State later on and got involved in the protest between the students and everybody else. And President Tucker

[RB] What year is this?

[LE] 68 He became --the fall of 68-- he became president of Virginia State. Robert Daniel had died and they bought in this man named Tucker.

[RB] What was his first name?

[LE] I can't think of Tucker's first name.

[RB] We will look it up.

[LE] Yeah, his name was Tucker. And they had already made an agreement to give up the Ag

school And in return, they were going to get some buildings and things at Virginia State and they were also going to allow Richard Bland to become a four-year school. And I got involved in that David Baugh, and Truve

?) There was a bunch of us. And so I got right out of the frying pan into the fire. And so we got involved with that. Then later on --

[RB] You wanted to school to keep the agriculture department?

[LE] Right.

[RB] And they wanted to get rid of because Virginia State --

[LE] Tech

[RB] Tech was doing something like that.

[LE] Well, Tech is the main land-grant college in Virginia.

[RB] Did you -- were you successful?

[LE] No, no. No. Well, we kept we didn't have to get rid of the land. They did a few things. Now the farm, the school farm does fish and goats and hair sheep. What else? And also we took on the role of teaching and helping farmers in Southside Virginia move from tobacco to another crop that would give them the same amount of money. And so that's what we do now. But we've lost a lot of the Ag school and department and that went to Tech.

[RB] So you went back to school in 68.

[LE] Yeah, and stayed a year or so. Okay. And then left again.

[RB] And then what did you do?

[LE] Well, we had some groups in Petersburg and I worked with who basically existed to challenge the black power structure.

[RB] And what was the name of these groups did they have names?

[LE] Well, one was the Black United Front, which sounded very militant. We had SCLC and Milton Richardson, and they were like the youth leaders and we utilize youth to picket grocery stores...

[RB] What year is this 69 70?

[LE] Yeah. And we were around when they close the black high school. And we went to that and we ask questions and things. It's not that we weren't for change or anything, but when they close the black high school they threw everything that school had done away. But these was, and then we were there for the protest of the annexation. They began to try to counter white flight by -- And we went to that.

[RB] This is Petersburg doing that.

[LE] Hmm, the biggest thing we participated in though, was that was a, it was a white policeman who had gotten caught having sexual relations with a little girl who was about 13 years old, 14 years old. And apparently nothing. He wasn't charged or anything, and it was a big protests about that. We were involved in that. But we did a lot of stuff in Petersburg, including talking to people about hiring people and stuff like that. And then later in 72, I finally got tired of people asking me when I was going to go back to school, and that's why I went back to school.

[RB] And you also got your MA

[LE] Yes, later on.

[RB] under Dr. Toppin

[RB] I had him here for a course or two As an adjunct yeah.

[LE] Yeah, and then he became a full-time faculty member here VCU] in the late nineties. He was here a semester and at Virginia State a summer and a semester. Yeah. Toppin was my major advisor.

[RB] What was your thesis?

[LE] Well, there were 200. And so free black property owners. In Petersburg, property owners there were 3100 free blacks, but 200 or so property holders. So what I did was, and I can't think of a man's name, the model that I use. I looked at those people before the war. What happened to them after the war, based on how they became free. Where the born free, where the manumitted, or did they purchase themselves? Where they light complected or dark complected.

[RB]How could you tell that?

[LE] It's right there in the record. In the registries of free Negroes and Mulattos. It's right there, their complexion, everything.

[RB] I was going to say that they put that in census records that had that information too.

[LE] Yeah. But every county and city in Virginia had to have registries of free Negroes. And you had to register every three years and you had to carry identification and stuff. And so that's where I get that from. And then I compared them to see how many did the same thing at the end of the war like that. That's what I did for my thesis.

[RB] I'll have to peak at your results.

[LE] Yeah. Yeah. It kind of was not surprising that those people who had some things --what I was really looking at was to see if skin color or those people who purchase themselves were harder workers than those who were born free or were manumitted. Yeah, that's what I was really looking for. And I really could have used someone who was more into quantitative history than Dr. Toppin. That would've helped.

laughter]

[RB] He liked a lot of anecdotes and stories, And it was first this and first that.

[LE] Yeah. Well, he and I, we don't --but African American History and that's the old, that's the Woodson model. Heros and heroines But I've never heard anybody who could do that better than he can do it. But it wasn't very much analysis there. But he could definitely give you a bunch of stuff. It's kind of like Louis Gates, first, black woman with a patent and things like that. But you don't get into the reason why she was first black woman... But Toppin and I worked together and he was my major professor.

[RB] When did you get hired as an archivist?

[LE] Well, they, I, I went back to Virginia State -- I went to Richard Bland before I went to State. When I got ready, go back to State there were these two militant women in Petersburg, Nancy Johnson and this other woman named, I can't think of -- Baby Sis, her nickname was Baby Sis. And we had worked organizing students and things. And they decided to go back to school and they were going to go to Bland. And they had been on me about going and everything and and Nancy had a car. And so they they shamed me into going to Richard Bland with them. And so I stayed there for two years. And then I was getting ready to go to Old Dominion to finish. And I heard Toppin make a lecture and I found out who Toppin was so I went on to State. When was it? It was the winter of 76, when Virginia State was hoping to hire or to begin an archive. And I was one of the graduate students. And so two of us were chosen to take a look at doing that. So

I became the acting archivist in the fall of 76 and then I started as a non, non-tenure track and stuff and 77 so my hiring date officially is 77. And that's when I started as the archivist. Then. And that was the history department, pushed it but the library, had the material, so the library got the slot. And so that's when I started.

[RB] And you just left there about two years ago?

[LE] It'll be three years in June.

[RB] Okay. Your activism sounds like it continued in the late sixties and seventies. How about eighties and nineties? No, I switched from activism to the classroom. I did it that way.

[RB] In your classroom. Misses as asking this earlier, when you talked about your, that summer of 65, what kind of stories you to talk about to the class to make, to give examples.

[LE] But when I did teach that section of US history, I usually taught the earlier section. But I would talk about things that their grandparents did that they didn't realize. I mean, we would talk about all kinds of foodstuffs and stuff like that, what people were eating and wearing. And of course, it was not a car culture, or a cell phone culture and that kind of thing. And I would try to talk about some things like that. But I usually didn't teach the second part of US history. Yeah, I used to taught the first part It is a little bit safer to talk about dead people and stuff. Plus, I probably would have not been all that enthusiastic about the civil rights movement. And that would have made me a weird person.

[RB] Now tell me about that.

[LE] Well, I always thought that the Civil Rights Movement was a waste of time, our time because we shouldn't have had to do any of that stuff. We were born here and we had no need for me to beg a man to let me spend my money in his store, period. Just ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. And I always thought that that was a failure of government. That what is was failure of government. I mean, we were born here and there was no need for us to prove anything. Because I remember growing up, you may always hear Black kids being told they have to be twice as good and all that kind of stuff. And then later on when I did begin to meet whites and I realized we didn't have to be twice as good as this is ridiculous. All those kinds of things. So I wouldn't have been the best person to teach the second part. [laughter] [RB] Well, let me ask you about people like Martin Luther King. Did your opinion change in the sixties to say now, and you look backs like, okay, this is what I thought about him in the sixties. Now this is what I think.

[LE] Well, to be honest, most of the people that I knew didn't, didn't think that much of Martin Luther King. But nobody that I knew thought he should have had his head blown off. You know, that wasn't the issue.

[RB] Why didn't they think much of him?

[LE] Well, they thought what he was talking about was was too little, too late. And what you had to do was to be a little bit more up in your face. And that didn't come about. And even Stokely Carmichael, I knew he and Martin Luther King didn't really see eye to eye, but he didn't think the man should be shot or nothing. And we were really interested more in a black nationalist view for that. And when people would say, look at the progress we've made, We don't make no progress, what do we need to make progress about I mean, you know, we're here, you know, what kind of progress. I had a student once that she had been told coming from high school, that her teacher told her that if she was going on in school and she was going -- she had to do X, Y, and Z. Make the race proud or something. I'll make the race proud. You know, you, you will

be a citizen of this country because you were born here whether you like the place, hate the place, do well or don't do well, you know, that kind of thing. So people who had the idea that all African Americans had to be middle-class, bourgeois, suits, dresses, brief cases and that kind of thing. And that would be success. And of course with that, you would get acceptance. But if every African American in the United States was, was, was educated with the advanced degrees and everything else. Would they still be or would we still be in White churches on Sunday morning? Would we still, [laughter] would we still be getting the jobs? No. So that kind of stuff we used to talk about and we weren't on line with a lot of people's ideas of what was needed for African American improvement. I read an article in Negro History Bulletin, it was this whole thing about the Negro problem. That is what it was called after the Civil War. When blacks were free, we became a problem. So the Negro problem. And I read this one article and this guy wrote an article and he said, the Negro problem is white people.

[Laughter] That's what I know, it was exactly right. It was right. But the article is in The Negro History Bulletin one of the older bulletins. And that was one of the things that I really enjoyed being at Virginia State, Virginia State has everything you could think of. We had the Negro history journals, we had the bulletins, we had all the Ebonys and you name it. We had practically everything you could think of right there and nobody had done anything with it. And so I had a chance to look at some of that stuff because reading Jackson's letters, his correspondence with Woodson. All of that. The , the VIA materials Prince Edward and all that that it, it, it's an education in itself, it really is. And so...

[RB] So your job, which I do something similar, you constantly keep learning and that's what's great about working in archives.

[LE] Yeah. Yeah. It is. Had to teach myself certain things like we got a house put on the National Registry. I didn't know anything about architecture. I had to figure out a little bit about that before I made the initial move and Department of Historic resources wrote it up and houses on the National Registry

[RB] Which house was this?

[LE] Azurest, down in the-- it's not on the campus, it is completely surrounded by Virginia State it's called Azurest South. It's an International Style house. And I looked at the archives...

[RB] Who was the architect?

[LE] Amaza Meredith, Amaza Meredith. She was self taught.

[RB] I think I've read about her. Didn't she do some stuff in Richmond too?

[LE] Not in Richmond, but, yeah, Amaza Meredith, self-taught. She taught art. She was more of a designer. But she, the house that she and her partner owned is an International Style house in Ettrick, surrounded by Virginia State.

[RB] Where do you live now?

[LE] We live in Matoaca about eight miles from, 8-10 miles from Petersburg. We live up there in the woods. Hmhm.Yeah. We we moved up there back in the eighties when it, when it was only five TV stations and our children -- because we'd moved from Petersburg and they had access to A&E and some other things on TV and we didn't have anything like that where we lived. But we live in Matoaca

[RB] What do your children do? How many do you have?

[LE] We have two, we have a daughter who is currently teaching biology and general science in

Charles City county. And because the pay is so good, she also works two nights a week at Riptides.

laughter] Our youngest daughter who's a nurse She's a home nurse. Okay. That's what she does. We have two girls.

[RB] The last question here is what we've asked other people. What do your final thoughts about the VSCRC and your role in the organization?

[LE] I'm I'm not so sure of my role was that great. I did enjoy meeting the people that I did and listening to their arguments and discussions. And probably what I remember most was having met a woman who wasn't looking at me because my hair was long, didn't have on the right kind of shirt and that kind of thing. And that's Dottie over there.

[RB] And you unclear] because you guys related on other thing...

[LE] Other thing, hmhm.

[RB] that you both had been in to.

[LE] Yeah. I remember that if it wasn't for anything else and I'll deal with the VSCRC and I'll give her a break, going home. And I won't talk to her about me being doing this by myself. But she will be coming back and

[RB] that will be 51 years ago...

[LE] It will be 50...

[RB] This summer, This summer.

[LE] Right, Uh-huh. We will have been married 50 years next summer, next June.

[RB] That's great. We will ended on that note. Thank you.

[LE] Yeah, I enjoyed it. Alright, Dottie, it's your turn. Your turn. Your turn.