This is an interview conducted with Mary King in Washington, D.C. on July 24, 1973, by Sara Boyte. Ms. King is the author of one of the first protests of women's roles within the Civil Rights Movement.

Sara Boyte: First of all, could you tell me how you got involved in civil rights?

Mary King: Well, I was at Ohio Wesleyan my senior year, in 1962, and went South on a trip to Atlanta that was sponsored by the Student Y. We met SNCC people and SCLC people, and we went to Tuskegee. At that time, SNCC had sixteen people, Jim Foreman and Dottie Miller and Julian Bond and Jane Stembridge, and, ten others maybe. And I was enormously impressed, I had been something of an activist campus leader myself and I had planned to go to graduate school in English, but I wasn't quite happy . . .

SB: What had you been active in?

KING: Oh, anti-HUAC stuff.

SB: Oh, you had?

KING: Yeah. And a little bit of Northern support for the sit-ins and a little bit of student peace kind of activity.

SB: Did you come from a sort of political background?

KING: No, my father is a Methodist minister . . .

SB: So is mine.

KING: . . . and my mother is an assistant principal of a high school. Yours is? Great, where from?

SB: He was in South Carolina, now he's in Texas.

KING: Well, fantastic. My father was from the South and my grandfather was a Methodist minister, and my great-grandfather, so it's very

much a southern ethos, although I was raised in New York City. My mother is a nurse-educator and neither of them is particularly . . . they're not boat-rockers and they're not even "doers", in the sense that they get most of their gratification from relating to parishioners or students, the kind of "year-in-year-out" thing. They aren't out to change the status quo in any way. But, there is a kind of value orientation, or a service orientation that I think is very hard for a minister's kids to get away from. No matter how hard they try, it's very hard.

SB: Right.

KING: It changes with generations, the form that it comes out in. I didn't really want to go to graduate school, I was ambivalent about it, I had applied to Emory and Tulane. I can't even remember where else, wanting to go South so that I could relate to the movement on the side. And one of the people that I met my senior year at Wesleyan on the Y trip was Ella Baker. It was Ella Baker and Rosetta Gardner, who was then head of the Southern Region for the Campus YWCA . . . and Casey Hayden. I met them on that Atlanta trip and was enormously impressed with them as I was with all the other people that I met and when I went back to Wesleyan to finish packing and getting ready to leave Ohio, I got a call asking me if I would come down for an interview and consider replacing Casey Hayden in a special human relations project. The Marshall Field Foundation had been funding it for a year and she had been working on it with Ella Baker. So, I flew to North Carolina for the interview and it was just what I wanted. It was not only a way for me to be related to the movement, but it was a very legitimate way, I wasn't sort of asking to . . .

SB: Tagging along or anything like that . . .

KING: Right.

SB: Exactly what was that for you to do? What was the job?

KING: Well, basically, what we were doing was to try to identify students in campuses in about ten southern states, who were probing kinds of students, who were asking questions. At that time, the atmosphere on southern campuses was so oppressive that people would close doors before they would talk about race. Students couldn't ask questions in class, even in the best universities. Professors would say things like, "I'm sorry, but I can't answer that question." I remember being told that by a student who had asked his professor if it didn't cost more for the state to run two separate school systems, "wasn't it a higher dollar figure for education?" The professor said that he couldn't deal with that question, he couldn't answer it. The implication being that his administration would come down on him.

SB: Right.

KING: So, were trying to find students and some way to help them bridge what was a very great isolation. We used the Y, the campus Y, as our entry point. The National Students Association was considered "communist" on most of those campuses, they only had a beachhead in Texas, Chapel Hill, maybe, you know. And nowhere else could they even get on campus. So, I made a couple of speeches and met with administrators and student government leaders and I worked with a black woman who had just graduated from Barnard, Bobbie Yancey. We went as a team wherever we could. That was very few places. We went to Queens College in Charlotte as a team. I can't remember if we went anywhere else as a team. In three cities, we organized secret groups of black and white students who continued to meet together without our support. That was Columbia, South Carolina between Benedict College and the University of South

Carolina; Tuscaloosa, Alabama between Stillman College and the University of Alabama; and in Jackson, Mississippi between Jackson State and Millsaps College. We tried to organize those groups because the black students had never met white students who would talk to them, and the white students had never met blacks who were educated.

SB: Right.

KING: We were also . . . the actual money from the Marshall Field Foundation had been given for a study on the extent of academic freedom, or the status of academic freedom in southern schools, but we used it to get on to campus and to organize workshops. We sponsored conferences at Duke University, for example. Or Ella Baker would come. These would be mind-boggling meetings for these students who had never met anybody who had dared to think the same things that they thought. And on weekends, I was working for SNCC, on just a volunteer basis. When the year was over and the grant was up, I went over to work with SNCC full-time and Jim Foreman sent me to Danville, Virginia as my first assignment, if you will. Then that fall, which was the fall of 1963, I started working with Julian Bond, doing what we called "communications".

SB: What did that mean? Race relations, or . . .

KING: We were, in a very real sense, using the news media to try and get attention that we should have had without trying. So, we called it "communications" because it entailed everything from trying to protect people who were in jail (by using the leverage of the news media) to collecting affidavits, to preparing policy statements. Later on, Jack Minnis set up a research shop, but we were, for awhile, we were the closest thing to a research shop as well . . . we were the ones who kept the logs of what was happening and then, in the summer of 1964, communications

actually became a life and death matter. One of the main reasons that 800 or so volunteers were invited from the North was very explicitly (I mean it was very conscious in the planning of the SNCC meetings), to get the leverage that we would have from being able to call on press in northern cities. We would be able to call Des Moines and say, "We hear that John Springer is incarcerated in the Natchez or Meridian jail--have you seen anything over the wire services about it." Then, the family and friends would immediately call in the UPI or AP and say, "We hear that John Springer was just arrested because he was trying to help people vote. What do you have on your wires?" They had nothing of course. So, they would immediately have to call the Atlanta Bureau. The Atlanta Bureau would have nothing and they would have to send a stringer out and get some coverage. And that was usually the only leverage that we had against the kind of treatment that people got in jails. But this didn't work on the three who were killed in Neshoba County and I was the one who had to call Andy Goodwin's parents. The night that they were killed, I was on the phone with his parents and had been calling the jails in that area all day, trying to find out where they were. The police denied it, they would not admit that the three youths were in their care . . . well, care is not the right word there--custody. Without some outside authority questioning if people were incarcerated, nobody could get the information. So, it was a really very critical part of the strategy.

SB: Right.

KING: I went to Mississippi in the summer of '64 and was based in Jackson. I ran a communications center there with Frances Mitchell. Then, I became involved with a film that was being made in Natchez, called "Black Natchez", being made by Ed Pincus. It was a cinema verite

documentary about the rise of black leadership in a small southern town. I was also involved in setting up a literary workshop and a darkroom in Tugaloo, along with Mary Varela for production of materials to use in adult literary programs.

SB: Who is she?

KING: Mary Varela is one of the people on this list.

SB: Did other people call her Mary Varela?

KING: Well, that's what she was then. When the "black power" thing started and she claimed to be a member of the Third World, she started pronouncing it in the Spanish way. (Her parents were Mexican.) (the "ll" sound is pronounced as "ya") She's in New Mexico now.

SB: Let me ask you about that year that you worked with Julian Bond, and I assume in the Atlanta office, on communications. What was your role in decision-making processes in SNCC?

KING: What was my role?

SB: Yeah, did you participate in making decisions like to do the summer thing, or . . .

KING: Uh-huh. Everybody who was on the staff participated. We used to have these meetings in the basement of a restaurant on Hunter Street and everybody got to put in their advice, whatever they wanted to put in. Some were more creative than others. People who had been in the field organizing had a much better vantage point, much more to contribute than those who had been in the office. So, Julian for example, was rarely an active verbal participant in those sessions, but somebody who had just come in, like Charles Cobb, or Bob Moses, or somebody who had been out organizing, would be much more able to influence the group on the basis of their field work. I could have said a lot more than I

said. It seemed to me that the whites that were involved were careful not to try to assume leadership positions unnecessarily. The whites that were involved (and were not on ego trips) weren't into becoming, you know, leaders of the black movement or anything like that. It has been extremely aggravating to read the sloppy accounts justifying the black power movement as attempts to prevent white takeovers. Because there wasn't any possibility of it. The only person who ever came close to being perceived in an active and visible leadership role--able to lead the singing, or lead a march, or anything like that--was Bob Zellner. But he never went after it, he was always was drafted for it. He never did any politicking or jockeying to be considered a leader as such. The accounts have been very sloppy, I mean, history has got to correct that.

SB: Several people have said something along that line.

KING: Now, in terms of numbers in Mississippi, sure, there were a lot of whites. But even there, whites realized for the most part that they could leave when it was over and didn't try to wrest control. It was a much deeper ambivalence about white participation.

SB: Yeah, the main thing that I've heard about that, in the sense of people taking control, was simply a coupling of a certain kind of insensitivity which still . . . well, the image of the Barnard girls who came in and took over the mimeograph machines and wrote the press releases and stuff.

KING: Yeah, well but at least most whites were smart enough to know that if they had skills, they should work in areas where they had skills, rather than trying to go out and do the things that blacks were better at. At least that's what seemed to be true until 1964. There was no point in

my going to jail, I figured direct action wasn't my best contribution. It made sense for me to do something where I had skills. So, I see that as a very positive thing. Those who could write, wrote. But a white guy trying to drive onto a plantation to organize voters is pretty conspicuous.

SB: And a white woman is even more conspicuous.

KING: Yes. And, now, this is an interesting thing. There were white women who did not realize that the start of violence in a community was often tied to the point at which white women appeared to be in the Civil Rights Movement. We documented this in several places, where there were no church burnings, there were no bombings, no flagrant violence until a white woman became visibly involved, and then it started. And I remember that some white women sort of insisted that they had a right to go in. And those were for the most part, as I recall, and I hope that I'm not being prejudiced, but those were volunteers rather than those who had been on the staff for a long time and understood a little more about the southern white psyche and how those who were pathologically inclined toward violence anyway, could be touched off by a white woman's presence.

SB: Right. When did you sense any tension, or did you, with black women?

KING: That's usually described in terms of the triangle, that white women were involved with black men and black women became upset. Well, I first sensed that about the winter at the end of 1964. When SNCC came out of the summer of 1964, it went into a massive identify crisis. It couldn't figure out which way it wanted to go. We had one pivotal meeting, which if I play historian for the moment, what I would say that I saw happen was a question as to whether SNCC should go in the direction of becoming a pyramidal, hierarchical organization, in which all of the

activities in the various communities added to the total operation and organization of SNCC, and in which SNCC would be the central entity. The other choice was that SNCC could become a catalytic effort, sending out organizers and facilitators--people who would try to unleash, or develop the latent leadership in a community and get that leadership to begin moving on its own, without any necessarily formal connection to SNCC. It was a very traumatic time, because the organization had grown from being very small (sixteen staff members when I first encountered it in 1962) to where there were a hundred and thirty-two people on the staff after the summer of 1964. And then there were hundreds and hundreds of volunteers, of course. And when I first got involved with it, I said that there were only sixteen on the staff. Any organization that suddenly goes that large . . . if my company was to go from the size that it is now to say, fifty, we'd have many of the same problems. You could chart them.

SB: Right, the same thing happened to SDS.

KING: Right, yeah.

SB: Right after the anti-war march, when it grew.

KING: I'm reluctant to say that the reaction of the black women was exclusively that and I believe that it was connectied to certain other problems of SNCC sort of finding its way. I began to be aware of the fact that people whom I had actually been very close to, like Donna Richards and Ruth Howard, and Janet Jamott and a couple of other people, Cynthia Washington . . . were very, very distant and very inaccessible.

SB: It must have been painful.

KING: Oh yeah. Sure. Actually, it wasn't the winter of '64, it would have been earlier, it would have been right after the summer of 1964 or towards the end of the summer that I first noticed that. And it

was true, you know, the black guys found white women more interesting and the black guys were more aggressive than the white guys and a lot of it was true. It wasn't necessarily the fault of the white women, although there were some who invited it. There were others who were, I think, careful, who understood the issue and weren't interested in flaunting themselves.

SB: Well, it makes sense that this would come to a head that summer, when lots of women came in, who had not been around and did not have the kind of background that would make them sensitive to the problem. They were from the North . . .

KING: And they wore provocative clothing, they insisted on wearing pants whereas most of the women that we were working with in communities wore dresses; they would insist on smoking, when these ladies, these black women, didn't smoke. You know, it wasn't "God-fearing." They really didn't understand the South . . . you know, long earrings and low-cut dresses and . . .

SB: Yeah, I get this picture. I can see how it would happen. And coupled with that, is that they are out to get rid of the evil of racism and if anyone tells them that, there's a way to prove how unracist they are.

KING: Well, that's the thing. The guys who screamed the most about "back-sliding" were the ones who were "back-sliding" the most. It was a real reaction for most of them.

SB: I've heard several versions of something that may have happened in '64, well, then again it may never have happened. One person tells me that there was a sit-in in the office of women . . .

KING: Uh-huh.

SB: There was. When was that, and who was in it?

KING: I don't remember. It wasn't very clearly articulated, though. Ruby Doris Smith Robinson would have been involved, I think. I can't help you there, Sara, there was a point where Emmy Schrader and Casey Hayden and I became so clearly identified with raising the women's issue, even though we weren't very abrasive about it, you know. We would just bring it up occasionally . . . when almost anything we did was seen that way. I really don't remember who was at the sit-in, but there was one and I have a photograph of it somewhere. You know, there was a very strong tendency to relegate the women to so-called women's work. And a lot of women got tired of just being in the office . . .

SB: Black women and white women?

KING: I think so, I think that Judy Richardson may have been involved in it. Have you talked with her? She's here in Washington, she might remember.

SB: Yes.

KING: Cynthia Washington is here in Washington, too . . .

SB: Right.

KING: She might remember something, although Cynthia wasn't as close in to the office.

SB: Yeah, I gathered that this was an office thing. It didn't seem to have much repercussions outside of that, it was probably fairly short-lived.

KING: It's very interesting, because some of the guys who were most hostile at that time about it, now remember it with a great deal of compassion. Ivanhoe Donaldson, every time he sees me, he wants to talk about how great it was and all that and at the time, he was totally contemptuous.

SB: That's fascinating. Did the men get really angry? Were the actions and reactions really serious, or was it taken as a joke?

KING: As a joke, and then indifference. Some thought it was cute, like Julian Bond.

SB: What was the issue? Office work?

KING: You mean for the sit-in?

SB: Uh-huh.

KING: I think so, I can't really remember.

SB: I've also heard that Ruby Doris Smith Robinson read a paper at a SNCC meeting.

KING: That may have been after I left. I left in late 1965, about the time that "black power" became most vociferous.

SB: Well, what I've heard is that it happened in '64. I'm beginning to think that a myth is being created, but . . .

KING: I don't remember that.

SB: . . . and as the myth goes, Stokely replied, "The only position for women in SNCC is prone."

KING: Oh, Stokely said that on the wharf at the Waveland meeting as part of a long humorous monologue. He used that kind of humor all the time. Stokely has the most fantastic Trinidad sense of humor. He's full of quips, he could keep going . . . I have seen him go on for two hours like a professional comedian. A constant barrage of very, very witty things, in which he puts down, not women, not blacks, but in which he puts down everybody. Including himself. He used to say that kind of thing all the time. There was never any situation where Stokely stood up and made that decisive statement seriously, this was just one of his jokes.

SB: I also had a hard time believing, I talked to a few people who were close to Ruby Doris and it was just hard to imagine her being squelched.

KING: Oh no, nobody could ever squash Ruby Doris. I don't remember Ruby as ever being particularly interested or involved where women were concerned. (Interruption, while King brings coffee.)

SB: That's interesting, because she is in the mythology of the development of the women's movement. Somehow they've . . .

KING: To my recollection, she . . .

SB: Did she take part in the sit-in?

KING: Let me say this. As I remember Ruby, she was rather rigid in her interpretation of what was legitimate activity for SNCC people. She cut me off SNCC payroll because I was organizing against the war in McComb and Natchez where I was in the spring and summer of 1965, we were mixing in war issues with race issues. There were coffins coming home from Vietnam and they were all filled with black bodies. You know, it didn't even take any effort to see the connection between the war and racism. Ruby cut me off payroll, because she considered organizing against the war as inappropriate. And as I recall, Ruby was not very flexible, and her definition of "civil rights" was rather narrow. She was after a certain kind of freedom. So, for me, this doesn't ring true. Have you tried finding Casey Hayden?

SB: I've tried and I'm still trying. I have an address in California at an ashram.

KING: What's that?

SB: Well, it's an . . .

KING: A yoga institute, that sort of thing?

SB: Well, kind of. But I've heard that she may . . .

KING: I've heard that she may be in Vermont now.

SB: I think they've left now, because I called her mother at Christmas time, trying to reach her, from Victoria, Texas, and talked to her mother on the phone for some time. And she was expecting Casey for Christmas, they had packed up and left California and were on their way east. I've not been able to get any response from Casey . . .

KING: I doubt that you will right now.

SB: . . . and I talked to Lenny.

KING: Oh, did you? Is she married?

SB: She's married to Paul Potter, but she changed her name from Zeiger to Wildflower.

KING: Oh really?

SB: But she had seen Casey not too long ago. Casey wouldn't talk about those days. So, I don't know. Casey is obviously one person for me to talk to, but she won't talk.

KING: She probably won't then. Casey and I were extremely close and lived together in Atlanta and Mississippi and I can't get any reaction out of her. I haven't tried that hard, but I did call her mother in Texas. I did write her at Christmas time. I suppose that I could keep trying. I probably will.

SB: Why do you think that you and Casey started raising the women's issue. Had you read the Feminine Mystique? Had something planted the idea?

KING: No. I had been aware of things about that for a long time. When I was in college, I noticed that women professors were treated

differently than men professors. And I had a friend who was in the philosophy and religion department who had actually organized the trip--you know, that key trip that I was telling you about--she told me about some of the difficulties, the kind of derision that she met. Troubles with tenure and so forth. And Ohio Wesleyan would have had a much greater proportion of women professors then than many others. For example, they had a black chairman of sociology when I left. So, I feel . . . her name was Miriam Willey, and to a very large extent, she made me aware of the problems that I didn't even perceive for myself. She was able to point out places where I had been circumscribed. So, the awareness had been there. I'm the oldest child and I'm very independent and kind of a willful person anyway. And you know, if that's the way you are when you're a girl, you kind of get enough knocks coming along that you begin to think about something.

SB: Right.

KING: O.K., Casey and I--you know, she's very, very thoughtful and perceptive and we just found ourselves sharing a lot of stuff, not just this, but a lot of stuff. And decided finally to write this memo just to try to see if we could elicit some response. And probably to help overcome our own pain and feeling of isolation. You wanted to feel that there were others who understood what this was about and maybe they would feel better if they knew that somebody else felt the same.

SB: Well, I find in the memo that women have basically been talking about this for years, does that include you too?

KING: It's basically true, all of those women who were key women in a sense, Dottie Miller too, are very thoughtful.

SB: They're all white.

KING: Well, the black women were not into discussing it, except for Dona Richards. Dona Richards was very much ostracized by a lot of people. She was too abrasive. They didn't understand why she wanted to retain her own name after she got married. The black women didn't understand that. There are some other people like Cynthia Washington . . .

SB: Did Dona Richards marry Bob Moses?

KING: Yeah. As I remember it, this memo was an attempt to reach out to the black women and try to get some kind of discussion going. Because they are sensitive, thoughtful women, I believe that they understood and I think there were discussions with no snickering. I remember an incident in Waveland, Mississippi. It was in the spring of 1964. We had a SNCC meeting there and some local marauder set fire to the dock house, it was right down at the edge of the water. And Cynthia Washington was the first one to go into the truck and drive down to the waterfront and try to find out who had done it and stop them and I think that probably there were guns in the truck, I'm not sure. And the guys sort of lagged behind. As I recall, there were male SNCC staff who were awake while the fire was raging, and did nothing. There had been another incident in Atlanta, where--this was just Casey and me--and there was a certain amount of awareness of the fact that when push came to shove, women were likely to be more "together". In a sense, there were some very strong people in SNCC and the women were no exception. They were going to be very strong people.

SB: Right.

KING: There was another incident that happened in Atlanta and I've only talked to a couple of people about this. This would have been in the

winter of 1964. I think that we were probably strategizing about the following summer, I have all this stuff in my minutes and notes, but there was a meeting with Charles Sherrod. It was in Casey's and my apartment. It was in our apartment, Bob Moses was asleep in the bedroom, but Courtland Cox and John Lewis were there. Three guys broke open a door to the apartment (which they were always breaking into because they didn't understand why two white women lived in this black neighborhood). And one of them had a sawed-off shotgun and one of them had a knife. And the guys all split out of the back door, leaving Casey and me there. So, there were a similar number of things like this that would happen and the black women were never as open in talking about it, but they knew.

SB: One thing that black women have expressed to me is that black women have never been able to expect very much. They see some of white women's discontent as from being from positions of privilege that they've never been able to have, and one of those has to do with protection.

KING: White women's discontent . . .

SB: In other words, that you and Casey might have reacted to that situation stronger than black women, who aren't used to assuming that men will . . .

KING: Very possibly, but I think that anybody who would have run out the back door would have gotten the same reaction from me.

SB: Right.

KING: Absolutely. You know, I tried to understand it, but it did happen.

SB: Right, I can see that. Do you think that black women were more concerned about the divisiveness in the movement. Did they see raising that question as divisive?

KING: I don't know. None of them were in positions of power, it seems to me, to think that they're really keeping quiet would help keep bonds together. The black woman with the greatest power in the movement was probably Ella Baker, and hers was indirect and infrequent. Ruby Doris, I guess, was the second and to my recollection, Ruby didn't discuss issues. Now, Ruth Howard and Janet Jamott and Cynthia Washington, they were all introspective, but they weren't in positions of influence or persuasion where they could kid themselves that if they shut-up, you know, that the adhesive would hold the organization together any longer, or anything like that. I don't think. And it's probably because Casey and I were in positions of relative powerlessness that we felt free to do that, too.

SB: You all are perceived in very different ways by I think some whites who were there briefly and worked at different times. You were seen as very powerful people. Probably because you had been around for a long time and you were accepted by the inner circle.

KING: Well, we were, but it's not the kind of power where you get up in a meeting and make a speech and you sway eighty votes. It's the kind of power where you, in a staff meeting say, "Well, look, what we really ought to do is start taking depositions and hold a hearing and such and such . . ." Betty Garman was in very much the same position. Hard workers, I mean, if you were a hard worker and you were good, at least before 1965, if you were working hard and you were willing to put up with all of the difficulties and weren't a prima donna and if you were smart, you could evidently have an influence on policy. But it wasn't the kind of thing where when all the kids came in from the field, you know, the young kids who were being mobilized, or were mobilized would come

into Gammon Seminary or wherever we were having the meetings, that wasn't the place to stand up and argue the positions. It wouldn't have worked, we knew that.

SB: Right. So, when you decided to write--were you really trying to deliberately reach out to SDS people, or did you just include some . . .

KING: Well, there was a great feeling of kinship, partly because of Casey and Tom Hayden. I became sort of distant friends with Tom and with Todd Gitlin. I don't know how distant, you know, it wasn't the same intimacy that Casey had with them. But I definitely was very much aware of what Rob Burlage and Todd Gitlin and Tom Hayden were doing and felt that they were our northern counterparts and that it was a collaborative thing that was happening, although it was in different places. We were aware of SDS. Now, there was a point at which I remember SDS women expressing consternation because they couldn't get anywhere. I think that must have been after the memo, actually. Or there any SDS women on here? (looks at list) Let's see, there's Carol, Connie Brown . . . no, well, yes, Sharon Jeffrey was in there . . .

SB: Yes.

KING: O.K., very definitely. But as I recall, none of those women had really expressed anything, we weren't responding to them so much as feeling that they would feel the same way we did.

SB: Support you. Casey worked with that summer, summer of '65. Briefly.

KING: In Cleveland.

SB: In Chicago.

KING: In Chicago, yes, she went there, that's right.

SB: And I was wondering if that had just reinforced her feeling that this was a problem.

KING: I think that's when she got close to Harriet.

SB: Yes. Harriet was a very important person in Chicago.

KING: Some of these people like Alma Bosely and Margaret Burnam were very strong southern--well, I don't know if Margaret was southern or not--they were very strong black women that we just figured would have some of the same feelings. Janet was a hell-raiser, we knew she, you know . . . Betty Garman was totally disinterested in stuff like that at that time. She was not actually too simpatico. Prathia Hall, a rare and interesting person. Why is she underlined?

SB: I don't know, I think I must have gotten her name from somewhere. Oh, as a woman who was very important in SNCC, I believe. Someone had listed her.

KING: Yes, she was in a symbolic way.

SB: Why?

KING: She was sent North to do speeches. She was terribly articulate, has an enormous amount of presence. I think she too was a minister's daughter, I'm not sure, but she had a command, mature beyond her years. Could handle any size audience. But within SNCC itself, she had relatively influence. Joyce married Art Thomas, you should be able to get ahold of her if you need to. In New York.

SB: Art Thomas was in Durham, wasn't he?

KING: He was in the National Council of Churches.

SB: He used to be at Duke.

KING: Perhaps.

SB: As a campus minister.

KING: Maybe. I don't remember.

SB: I think so.

KING: Dori Ladner is in Atlanta. I saw her last year. Jeanette King is still in Jackson, I think. I hear that Dona Richards is in drama in New York. Judy Richardson is here in Washington, I told you that. Muriel Tillinghast . . . oh, yes. She was somebody that I thought had an awful lot of potential. And Jean Wheeler Smith. Why isn't she on here? I almost surely would have sent her a copy of the memo. Muriel Tillinghast, very thoughtful, as I recall. I have a somewhat more vague recollection of her. Jean Wheeler--she married Frank Smith. She had been at Howard and the Dean threatened to oust her because she let her hair grow natural and later she worked with Congressman John Conyers on the Hill and I don't know what she is doing,* but Frank is here in Washington. She's probably here and they are still married and she's another very, very thoughtful person that you can find. But you see, I don't remember any response from any of those people particularly. So, the fact that it was sent out to them, is to me, sort of the end of . . .

SB: Well, a few black women that I've talked to only vaguely remember the memo. As opposed to women in SDS and SOCC, on whom it had an enormous impact.

KING: Yes. I'm sure of that.

SB: Why?

KING: I'm sure that black women have had to be a lot more adaptive through the decades and centuries and that their upbringing probably

*She is in medical school with a year and a half to do as of December 1978.

trains them to take a lot more in stride than a well educated, middle class white girl who has been trained just the way her brother was, or educated just the way her brother was. Who has been trained to think like any other guy and then suddenly finds herself in a position of . . .

SB: Relative desperation.

KING: . . . of a very much less esteem, you know, what she says is held in so much less esteem. It must be more of a shock.

SB: Did you feel that way about your position in SNCC? That you were not taken as seriously as a man was?

KING: Oh yeah, but then I feel that way about everything.

SB: Right.

KING: I don't think the awareness . . . well, I don't know, but I don't think the awareness necessarily has to be that, but I definitely felt that. As much as whiteness.

SB: Yeah, you think that was as important as whiteness?

KING: I never really figured that out. I remember thinking that it might be more important and then I remember thinking, "Well, no it's not so important." I don't really have an answer for that.

SB: What were you and Casey doing that fall? You said that you had left SNCC.

KING: Yes, I had left SNCC and was staying in Virginia at a country cabin that my family had and Casey came to visit in November and that's when we wrote the memo. I think that's the setting.

BEGIN TAPE I SIDE II

SB: Had you planned before she came?

KING: No, no. We just had a long discussion and just finally decided to write the memo.

SB: To do something.

KING: To circulate it inside.

SB: Do you think that maybe you and Casey had slightly different audiences? That you would have been wanting more response from women in SNCC?

KING: Yes, she was probably more interested in the SDS, although I was very much aware that I didn't know who the figures were. I knew Sharon Jeffrey and Harriet Stallman and a few other people, but I think that she was probably more aware of who the women with awareness were.

SB: Right. Were you disappointed at the reaction?

KING: Oh yeah, I think so. I didn't even know for awhile that it had had any impact. I guess that it was Lennie Zeiger who told me. My attitude about things like that has changed now. I begin to realize how long it takes for people to change and really how spectacularly successful we were in SNCC in a very short time in making what I think was a fundamental change in a nation's citizens. A small group had a most profound impact on American thought. When you think of the size and the shortness of time, and you think of the changes that are still taking place as a result of it, it's pretty phenomenal. I have a much different view of those things, now. I see it all so differently. Now, I would think of writing a memo and beginning to see the ripples from it five years from now, perhaps.

SB: But at the time, you looked for results.

KING: Yes.

SB: I know that it was a time when people were beginning to feel kind of disillusioned . . .

KING: Yes, I think that my general feelings of disappointment and sadness at the way that the movement had ground itself out over relatively petty issues and had been unable to solve what I now think is a very reasonable dilemma, that any burgeoning organization has, which way it goes, or what its identity will be. It's a perfectly predictable kind of problem that I know any organization will be faced with. And we all were so naive and wrapped up in it emotionally that we didn't have the perspective.

SB: It must have been a very intense experience.

KING: Oh yeah, blindingly so. So that we didn't have the kind of view that would have let us see that it was a turn in the road and that in the long run, there would be other things to come. Many, many people were decimated for different reasons by the experience of what went on after, well, I'd say about 1965.

SB: What kinds of things?

KING: Not just whites, there were a lot of blacks left at the time, too. There was an incredible amount of internecine struggle. I remember a sort of "troika" of Cleveland Sellers and Ivanhoe O'Donaldson and Ralph Featherstone, who were reported--they never told me this--but they were reported to be coming through Mississippi, checking on what everybody was doing. You began to see a much less flexible attitude. SNCC had been famous for the fact that it allowed a maximum of individuality, of styles of individuals, that it sort of invited people who were strong, had a lot of ego strength, had a lot of independent ideas and you were not a person who came to work for SNCC if you were a person who needed a lot of supervision. That's the long and short of it. Most people shared that one quality, they were capable of independent action.

SB: Right.

KING: And inevitably that was a very, very acetic kind of mixture that had to be put together.

SB: Yes, I can see how it would be sort of volatile.

KING: A lot of very strong personalities warring with each other over rather petty issues.

SB: And you would say that the same thing is true of women in SNCC? That they were strong, independent, self-initiating . . .

KING: Oh yes. Absolutely.

SB: See, I have a theory that one thing that happened in SNCC is that women were strong and did gain a sense of their own potential.

KING: And personal gratification.

SB: Right. And I would think, and perhaps you can answer this better than most, since you did write the memo and were thinking about this issue--I would think that it would be more difficult to take being pushed into a traditional role within an organization in which you were getting a sense of your own potential. Of your own strength.

KING: Well, it's this way too, Sara. If you are spending your time thinking about how to expand the decision-making process by enlarging the vote, by community organization, by generally lifting or opening people's awareness to their own power in themselves, it inevitably strengthens your own conceptions, your own ability. And I think it was very much that. It was the kind of thing where all of our activities were feeding a growing sense of our, what should be an increasing power, and wasn't. I think that's very much the case. I think that if Casey had been teaching at the University of Texas, you know, and if I had been doing something else, the memo might not necessarily have been written. Because there

wasn't the feeling of chomping at the bit, you know. So much of what we were doing was a sense of feeding ourselves and not to be able to completely act that out. I think that you are right, that's probably it.

SB: That's why it seems to me that women who came into the anti-war movement, which was much more mass and didn't provide those kinds of opportunities, didn't rebel as much. At least not at first. Later they did. What did you do after '65?

KING: Then I went to California for I guess for about a year, year and a half. And I was doing mostly photography at the time, I apprenticed myself to Matt Herron of New Orleans for about six months and learned photography, in connection with the illiteracy materials that were being developed. And I built the darkroom in Tugaloo. And in California, I worked with the grape strike and some poverty corporations in the Bay Area, Urban Corporation for the Poor, and a lot of other things like that, but it wasn't with the same kind of purposefulness that I had in the South, because it took me a very long time to understand what had happened. It was very, very sad to see something that was so creative and so dynamic and so strong, completely really--I feel that change was inevitable, it was not that which I feel sad about and it's not that I wanted the change to take place along certain lines particularly, it's that it lost its dynamism. It lost its power. It was very, very hard for me to understand that, I was terribly disappointed for a long time.

SB: Right. How did you feel about Black Power? Was that sort of a part of it?

KING: That had been around for a long time, and it really wasn't very much of a surprise. I was most affected by the way that the black women turned against me. That hurt more than the guys. But it had been there you know, you could see it coming. You could understand it, so . . .

SB: You can understand things, but the pain doesn't go, right?

KING: Oh yeah.

SB: How did that hostility come out? Did they just stop speaking, or did they make accusations?

KING: Yes.

SB: All of the above?

KING: You know, an interesting thing happened in that fall of 1964. Which was that we had gotten a lot of people registered to vote in Mississippi and in that fall, blacks began running for a few elections. They were candidates and when the votes came in in those communities where there was a black majority, places in the black belt where 85% were blacks, we might not have 85% of the vote, but there were instances, and I'm sure I've got some of the records, where there were black majorities, and they elected white candidates. This was one of the issues that was causing that identity crisis after the summer, because we had all been operating on the assumption that--well, we knew that voter registration was a safe issue to organize on, because there was some federal leverage that we could potentially and possibly gain. I think there was also a very great feel of belief that things would begin to change if we could just get the vote. And it didn't happen that way, because blacks really didn't believe, I think, that blacks could represent them. I think that the situation is very much analogous to women in politics now. Women, by and large, don't believe that women can represent them. And when women believe that women can represent them, just as when blacks began believing that blacks could represent them, then, you start seeing the change.

SB: Right. In the memo, you sort of make an analogy with blacks. Did you see that as analogous all along?

KING: Oh yes. Very definitely. I get a little impatient with the way that it's glibly bashed about now. I feel that it's no longer a very utilitarian analogy, except in the vote, electoral politics, where you can point to specifics, and a few other areas. I want people to be a little bit more analytical. I get tired of these sloppy analyses that take the easy . . .

SB: Well, I think that it's easy to understand how at a certain point in the movement, for women to have their grievances be legitimate, they felt that that was the only analogy to make.

KING: Oh yes. I think that the term "disenfranchisement" is a very useful one. That blacks were disenfranchised and women are disenfranchised in another sense. If you look at franchise in a very broad sense, I think that it's true. Lack of formal participation, but I think that the issue is infinitely more complicated and I think that the reason that women for the first time in this country, and I believe that it's unparalleled in the history of the world, the reason that women are mobilizing--and I'd have to say that the reason that I was writing a memo at that time about something like this, is that violent subjugation of women is no longer a problem in advanced societies, and because women can control their productivity, a woman who was always pregnant was in no position to argue about anything, I think that it is the consolation of those two things more than any effect from the black movement, although that's helped. I think that there are more fundamental cultural changes that are taking place that are bearing on that. And that the black movement sort of presented a catalyst.

SB: Yes.

KING: It provided a way of opening our eyes and it provided a useful method for organizing and it also was based on a movement where young people, who had no money, no particular education, nor anything to commend themselves, except their own personalities, literally their own ego strength and their own personalities, the belief that you could do something to change something just by sheer dent of personality. And I think that is a great thing that Americans have that I've never found elsewhere in the world, anywhere. I haven't done much traveling, but I have yet to find that kind of feeling that is so widespread here.

SB: When did you first hear of the women's movement and how did you react?

KING: First hear of it?

SB: Yeah, that women actually were reacting . . .

KING: There was no point in time. I had read The Feminine Mystique when it first came out and thought it was good. And I just remember hearing of groups meeting around our memo, that at one SDS meeting, the women had tried to raise it similarly and had been laughed down and had formed the Women's Caucus. I just began hearing about it and feeling that it would eventually catch. It was inevitable.

SB: Maybe you could, in case I don't get to talk to Casey, catch me up a little bit on what--I have a sense that she sort of faded out after that point. Did she?

KING: Well, that's very complicated. I think that most of the people who were involved in SNCC had a process of adjustment, re-entry to go through and it's very complicated. Part of it has to do with what I was talking about, the notion that you can do something just by sheer

dint of will. That's not the way that things generally run. The timing was right for us to have great impact on social attitudes, and we did manipulate the news media well. But there were certain feelings of betrayal, particularly I suspect that this was true of the white kids involved, the feeling that you couldn't even count on your own government. A sort of suspension of values, almost, that the things that I had grown up believing were constants, were just of dust. Everything from the FBI, to the way the Justice Department ran, to theories of state government and local churches, all of it was racist. It was a very, I suppose, a very realistic but disillusioning experience and I think that many people involved in SNCC never have re-entered society and have never really taken what they learned and transformed it, or tried to use it in some other way. And you know, I think that it's a very great price that we paid. There's an awful lot that was lost, some very good people. And I don't mean the people who were expatriates to Africa, but people who have just never gotten themselves together and have never been able to make useful contributions.

SB: That's right, it was a great tragedy.

KING: You can count the number of people who are "in there" actively now, fighting and still trying to use their influence and still trying to get things changed, things done. Maybe some people took more private routes that I don't know of. And I can understand how somebody could just never be able to get together. I really do. I think that the process that I've gone through is rather interesting. I think that I'm a much better person for it, but even I was unprepared for how much politics plays a part.

SB: After all of that, right.

KING: Yes, after all of that. You know, I thought that I was tough and I thought I understood what made the world work and I thought I understood how important telephones were, and how one person called the other person and that makes it click. And it's really been an eye-opener for me to go into business. I understand community politics much better for having been in the South and I think was much more effective in developing the health programs for OEO, because of the experience. And was used for about four years, in fact, as their primary trouble-shooter, mainly in black communities who were irritated for one reason or another at the federal funding apparatus.

SB: That's amazing.

KING: Yeah. I was sent everywhere from California to Florida to deal with that. And the main thing that I had that other people didn't have was that I wasn't afraid of angry black communities. But nothing could be worse than those SNCC meetings at Gammon Seminary, you see? It was very easy. And nothing ever was any worse in terms of concentrated aggression. I've never met anything like it. And I spent four years, when you think about it, dealing with angry medical schools, angry communities, angry public health departments of public health, angry medical societies, all of them were furious at OEO's attempt to change health services in their communities. Nothing ever touched the SNCC experience, even meetings in response to OEO where there were guns brought in by some of the community people.

SB: Can you just help me to see that aggression that you experienced.

KING: Well, there was a lot of aggression period. I'm not saying that it was all directed at me.

SB: Right.

KING: There was a lot of concentrated anger and aggression. At that meeting in Waveland that I told you about, Jim Foreman thought that it was a good idea to bring in some people from Synanon, he thought that using the techniques of opening it up and letting it all come out would be useful. And of course, it was impossible, because blacks had so much more agility at expressing their anger and hostility than the whites had. They had grown up expressing anger directly. It's much more open in the black community. So, whites really got nothing therapeutic out of that, because there was no way that anybody white could have possibly held his own.

SB: That may not be just a racial thing, but a class thing.

KING: Well, I don't know . . .

SB: Except that the blacks tended to be from fairly middle-class backgrounds.

KING: Well, some of them were and some of them weren't. The southerners weren't. I don't know, it depends on how you define "class", too. If you define it as education, then many of the blacks were middle-class. If you define it as what your parents did, then many of them had maids as parents. Stokely, his mother was a maid, Bob Moses' mother was a maid. There were not many second generation professional people.

SB: I guess that's what I'm assuming more. More what I'm thinking about. The kinds of families that people grew up in and how much . . .

KING: Yeah, those kinds of emotions . . .

SB: . . . how those kinds of emotions were expressed, or in our case, more often, were turned into intellectual, rational, suppressed kind of thing . . .

KING: Well, I've always been taught that it's not nice to criticize people. And it's not nice to be hostile. And I don't think that happened to most middle-class black communities. At least my friends who are now middle-class, I notice that they still are better at it, you know. They're wittier, they're quicker, they're nimble, more than I will ever be. Julian would be no good at that, now. Julian would be a good example of what you're saying, because he comes from, I think, several generations of black leadership. And I never remember Julian raising his voice, ever, in the three years. And he's now on the board of directors for our company, so I see him from time to time. I've never heard him raise his voice.

SB: Does that come down sexually at all?

KING: Well, I think so, although black women know how to shout. I felt often, Sara, and this is just one little thing. I felt often that women in the movement saw certain issues more clearly than some of the men. And that that was a very positive thing about having women involved with it.

SB: Yeah, what issues?

KING: Well, Casey would always be more inclined, for example, to talk about what people were doing to each other. You know, "We're hurting each other . . ." I remember a meeting in Hattiesburg, Mississippi where she stood up and said, "I've been in the movement for"--however many years it was then--"and I still feel fear of blacks and I know that there are blacks in this room that still feel hate of whites." Now, it was only a woman who ever talked in those terms. Men were incapable of talking in those kinds of emotional terms, and I think that has been

true throughout the culture. And I feel that women in politics in the next few years, because women don't know anything about politics and are ingenuous when it comes to understanding how things get done politically, are more likely to stick to the issues. It isn't because they are better people, or better human beings, it's because they don't know the toughest roles of politics. They are more likely to talk the issues. And I think that whether or not the credit is given, women really made a significant contribution to the movement. Because they were a little bit closer to people and the issues.

SB: I have one other, well, two questions jotted down. One-is--you know, I'm asking you more about Casey because I'm afraid that I won't get to talk to her. She and Tom got married in '61, or something like that and spent the year--well, I've seen a letter from her to Ann Braden at about that time and it seems to me--she pops up in records here and there, but I don't have her chronology together--that they sort of went different ways pretty soon, but from what you say, it sounds like they maintained a friendship.

KING: Well, they maintain a relationship, I don't know . . . Tom came to visit Casey in the fall of 1963, and I think that it was the last attempt to see if anything would work. What is your question?

SB: Well, you had said that through your--through Tom--you were familiar with SDS people and so one could have assumed that if they broke up quickly, Casey would have had nothing more to do with those people, but it sounds like that wasn't true. That her friendship circle remained.

KING: Yes.

SB: Despite whatever happened to their personal relationships.

KING: Yeah, right. Well, I don't really want to go into that very much.

SB: Right, well, I'm not asking you to give me details, but I just wanted to understand that sort of connection.

KING: I don't believe in collusive, amicable divorces myself, and I don't know how to interpret it when I see it, because I don't think that it ever really happens. I don't know. I'm sure that it's possible to have a relationship afterwards, but it seems to me that it takes a long time for those feelings to change. Casey maintained her communication with Tom for some time. She wrote to him from Atlanta and eventually, I guess, it just ended. He always spoke extremely lovingly of her and I suspect there were some problems there that made it difficult for him to make a commitment to her. That's been my feeling, but I may have been too close to her.

SB: Well, see, in terms of just my research, I need to be able to make the links between what was happening in SNCC and what was happening in some of the SDS projects and Casey is a link.

KING: There was good communication. I remember when Kennedy was killed, calling Robb Burlage and asking him his reaction to Johnson. And I remember sending things in the mail to Todd Gitlin and Tom Hayden. I remember one time sending Tom a clipping from the Atlanta Constitution and I don't remember what it was about. He sent it back and on the reverse side of the slipping was an item that President Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy had gone to Georgia to stay at the plantation of somebody or the other down there in Georgia for a week. And Tom's comment was, "I found this much more interesting than the clipping"--which was probably something related to the movement. So, there was definitely communication and I think that it probably related most through Casey and

me, but I'm not very sure about that. But it's mostly through Casey, yeah, she was the link. She had been involved in all the SDS stuff.

SB: My last question, I think, is whether you can differentiate--well, let me go back and explain what impression I'm talking about. An impression that is related to the way in which black men came on aggressively to white women--whether or not you could characterize black men in the movement as having a more stereotypical male type stance or attitude toward women?

KING: Than what?

SB: Than white men.

KING: Yeah, but that's true throughout the black community. Yes. But I find it now. You know, I work with a black program in Chicago, in Lawndale. We've had a couple of contracts there. They just relate quite differently from the people in Kentucky that we have a contract from or the people in Charleston that we have a contract from. It's just different.

SB: Right, thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW