

[Interviewed by Gretchen Howard]

INTERVIEW WITH DOROTHY DAWSON BURLAGE

October 16, 1994

Q Let's start with how you got involved.

A The first thing is that my maiden -- the story really starts with my maiden name. For me, it feels like the story starts (inaudible) I came from a (inaudible) but, anyway, no, it's not your fault. I came from a southern family who had come to this country two generations ago and migrated from the Virginia/Maryland area, eventually to Texas (inaudible).

So they were deep southern people and they had been slave owners at one point and they were kind of your typical southern family who believed in segregation.

(TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE IS TOTALLY INAUDIBLE)

Q All right. Why don't we talk about -- let's see, we're on SDS, so why don't we talk about SDS a little.

A Okay. Why don't you turn the page and let's jot down notes about what we might have missed because I was trying to do that. That the political issues which SDS did well sort of had it's own thing, where in local print, it's sort of overall political analysis of the country and the parties and social movements within the country. I mean, it's sort of analytic stuff they were really good at.

Q Right. Theorizing.

A Right. And they were outstanding on foreign policy issues, peace and Vietnam. That's where SDS people shone. Now, as you can see from those documents, SDS people were always coming from the south and writing stuff about what was going on in the south and sort of bringing it back to SDS and was kind of constantly infusing SDS with inspiration about political activity and --

Q Why do you think they did that?

A Because they didn't have any local movements of their own. And similarly, Bob Zellner, Bob Burlage, Casey (inaudible) and I were the southerners that I recall, southern whites, who would go back and forth at national SDS meetings all the time and would be sort of the local, the southern spokes people there. Rob being the best writer of us all and theoretician. But, all of us being somewhat involved in writing like the southern manifest of, or the southern position on such and such --

Q And, that's women (inaudible)

A In SDS, I felt like that northern SDS women did a lot of the really grunt work and were in secondary roles and kept the

organization going. They did the office work, they did the phone work, they did the typing, they did the mimeographing. And men did the public speaking and the writing. I was seeing out of probably how many documents do you think are here, several hundred? I'll bet you three things are written by women. So, both of us, north and in the south, women did not do much writing. Women did a lot of public speaking in the south but not that much I recall in the north.

Q Women from SDS?

A Right. Northern women didn't do that much writing, I mean Carol (inaudible) did some, maybe Heather Booth did, I don't really recall that. But women were seen as organizers and office runners more than theoreticians or speakers or writers. Women in SDS, in my opinion, black women, I mean at SNCC were -- the whole situation was more confusing because some of the most important leaders were black women, like Ella Baker, (inaudible) Clark, (inaudible), I mean they were, without whom there wouldn't have been the movement that there was and, yet, black men held a lot of power in SNCC and I'm not sure how and why that developed but my perception, one possible scenario is that in local movements black women were leaders but when it came to the (inaudible) organization itself, it seemed like the tradition was always to have black men in leadership roles.

Q So, you would say in both organizational structures --

A There's always men.

Q -- there's always men but black and white (inaudible) and the women were more --

A In the background.

Q -- the grass roots, organizing--

A Organizing people, yeah.

Q So, how about your, let's go over your role again in each organization.

A In SDS, I was one of the founding members. I was at the early meetings from 1961 on. And, Rob and I were involved in writing the southern part of the (inaudible) statement, which was like the original manifest of the document. SNCC was like my home base in Atlanta where I just kind of hung out all the time. It was my friendship base and we worked together on a lot of projects, like setting up conferences, setting up discussion groups on campuses, things like that. When I was running the Raleigh project, SNCC people came up and stayed and helped. When (inaudible) and (inaudible) and people might be going over to (inaudible) Mississippi or something, I'd go with them and just travel together and be at SNCC meetings. I was never on paid staff for SNCC. And, I hadn't talked about this before, but the NSA Office and the "Y" Office were both run by women and so had complete autonomy in what the women were doing.

Q So your role in both organizations was you would never doing the ground work, either one, you were always, you were more of a --

A Well, in the NSA Office I had to get all the paperwork done, like I did a lot of -- I wrote letters a lot to people to organize meetings, pulled lists together, you know, that was my responsibility there. But, in SOCK I cooked for people. I was



sort of the mother of SOCK. I cooked and people stayed there and people came to the house and stuff. I remember talking about (inaudible). But, again, I didn't -- I never did the mimeograph machine for SOCK. That's the difference. I was saying that in '63, around the time I got married, I read Betty (inaudible) and got very confused about my role, whether it was okay to be an organizer, which is how I perceived myself, or whether I was supposed to be a housewife and iron shirts and cook and clean and decorate the apartment and shop and all that stuff. It was very confusing for me. I couldn't figure out what I was supposed to do. And then I talked about how women's roles were confusing and relationships were confusing because we were so mobile, geographically, ideologically, in terms of organizational affiliations, etc. And there was always this shifting sand under us and, therefore, not appropriate for having families, for getting married and raising children.

Q Right, we were talking about the men going (inaudible)

A Well, there was always this traveling going on -- to meetings. There would be a national council meeting for SDS. And so people would come from all over the country for these meetings, or there would be a SOCK meeting in Nashville and people would come from all over the south or whatever. And people would meet at those meetings and form relationships and then they'd go back to wherever they were living and the relationship would be over. Or, maybe it would be maintained in some fashion, long distance but they weren't in one place it had no continuity and they would disintegrate initially.

Q So, how did this affect your work?

A Well, I think that women felt not secure because of tentativeness of those relationships and felt undermined, hurt by them. And I don't know that men got as devastated by the kind of temporary nature of relationships then. I think I talked some about some of the marriages and how it was hard on marriages and people felt like they needed to be more self-protective if they were married and had children. That was my guess about how (inaudible) felt and how the (inaudible) felt and the (inaudible) and whatever that they couldn't take the same kind of chances that other people did if they didn't have kids to protect.

Q What about -- just in all of these temporary relationships, what about black women, how did they feel about these?

A About the temporariness of relationships?

Q Yeah, I mean do you think they are going through the same sort of thing?

A I really don't know. I wouldn't know how to answer that. There were certainly marriages among SNCC people early on. But, most of them didn't last. Jim (inaudible) marriage didn't last, Bob (inaudible) marriage didn't last.

Q So, it was the same sort of pattern?

A Yeah, similar pattern.

Q What about --

A Julian Bond's didn't.

Q -- what about just interracial patterns?

A Relationships?

Q Yeah.

A I think that there were a lot of interracial relationships but they were different in, I think, in the following way: if a black man was in the north raising money for SNCC and had a relationship with a white woman, and then he went back to working in the south, it might not have a major impact on the movement. But if a black man and white woman had a relationship and they both were involved in SNCC, then it had more of an impact on the group or on the organization. And those people had to work together every day and it mattered more to everyone how the personal relationships were affecting the politics and the work of the organization. And I think I also made the point that there was an older generation of women for whom that was not such a big deal. Namely, the Ella Baker generation, who were more focused on the goal and the outcome and not so much on the sexual politics, if you will, of the relationships.

Q Did you ever see any signs of resentment among black women if there was a white woman/black male relationship? What sort of things -- how did they express it (inaudible)?

A Well, the truth is that in my experience, there was, you know, I really didn't personally encounter that until I got to Washington and even then it was a minor thing. It was not a big deal. So I missed some of that. But, I think that the more fundamental truth or the more fundamental shift was blacks increasingly wanted to take over their own movement but there was this kind of contradiction between wanting support from the whites

and wanting whites not to run things. And that was the message I began to get, that there was a change from wanting us there to not wanting us there.

Q When you talk about the relationship between SNCC and SDS, how do you think people in SDS use (inaudible) and vice versa?

A I think SDS people had a lot of respect for SNCC people, sort of wished that they could be there doing what they were doing. I think that white men found it much more uncomfortable to be on that turf because white men couldn't very easily be leaders in SNCC. It was harder for them. And so they had a harder time finding their place there. White women could move into more organizing roles and be more comfortable. So, I think that white men often felt left out of the more exciting activities of the 60's, but respectful of that work. And I don't even know that it's fair or accurate to say that they felt left out, but I really, I mean it was not discussed like that, but I think it was true. And I think that was part of why (inaudible) developed and I think that's part of why sort of the politics of rage, if you will, developed, was trying to create a certain level of drama and intensity and conflict in the north comparable to what was going on in the south.

Q (inaudible) what about the other way around, like what did SNCC people think about SDS people in the organization?

A I think that they felt they were too theoretical and irrelevant and hopefully could make a contribution in terms of supporting SNCC but were not that developed.

Q (inaudible)?

A The south and the north were almost like two different countries. And it was hard for northerners to understand the south at all and function in it very well. I mean, their accents didn't help them any and their lack of familiarity to the culture didn't help. So, I mean, there were not all that many contributions that the theory of northern white SDS men can make to southern work. I mean, that kind of theorizing is not very useful, it's not that important.

Q (inaudible) but, just the theory of participatory democracy (inaudible)

A My recollection is that the concept of participatory democracy came from Tom Hayden early on, it's probably in the manifest in the Port Huron statement. And, was his concept about how the country ought to be run, namely, that people ought to be involved in government and making decisions.

Q (inaudible)

A And, it was not for the organization of SDS that he was articulating that. It was a national political statement. There was probably always a kind of internal contradiction in both organizations about participation versus leadership. I don't think anyone ever figured out how to allow everybody an equal voice, an equal access, an equal participation and at the same time get decisions made, allocate funds, allocate resources and make decisions.

Q Right, because wasn't that SNCC's basic theme was drawing leadership out of the community?

A Yeah.

Q So, that's why I get confused also is how can there be sort of, I mean there was sort of a hierarchical structure in the organization even though they said they didn't want one.

A Right, that's correct. How does that work?

Q How does that work?

A Well, that's exactly, I mean, I think this is a really key point that if you read (inaudible)Parsons, for example, he'll talk about the beginning of institutions being charismatic and then they become bureaucratized, so that what was happening in the early movement was charismatic, you know, four kids decide that they're not going to accept segregation at a lunch counter and they just walk in and sit down and the police come and they get beaten up and bingo, you have a movement start. And so there's not an institution, there's not a structure, there's not a president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, there's not a, you know, who was it (inaudible) or whoever it was. There's not a membership list, there isn't a credo that everybody has to agree to. It is completely spontaneous and, yet, it's very vital, it's very intense and it meets the need at the moment. So, somewhere between that and an NAACP with a mailing list of fund raising mechanism bylaws, etc., somewhere in there were these movements that were trying to function as organizations with some kind of guidelines and somehow leadership, but weren't really and where they actually believed in letting people make their own decisions, encouraging spontaneity and community participation. So, in some ways those things were probably the strength, the vice and the

virtue of the movements, they were their strengths and their weaknesses.

Q So --

A So, it was always fluid, always shifting, nobody quite knew, I mean, that's why if someone can get up and give a great speech about why you should do things one way rather than another or why we were going to focus on Vietnam and not Cambodia, which is the kind of thing that white men would debate or why we should go into New Jersey but not into Connecticut. Then if somebody could convince with words and analysis then they were the leader that day, or as Karl Oglesbee said one time, you know, he joined SDS one day and the next week he was the national chairman and he didn't even know anything about the organization. I can't remember really what the time frame was but leaders were created and destroyed overnight.

Q Just when they were useful to --

A Because some other position would become more compelling or some other activity would feel more compelling, like people would be doing desegregation of lunch counters and then someone else, I'm making this up as a parody almost, but someone else would say, "No, we shouldn't be doing lunch counters we should be doing political structure, that means we have to do voter registration." Well, voter registration is great but what are we going to do about the economy. So we have to address the economic issues here. And, so the vitality was people trying to sort this out as quickly as possible on a theoretical level and on a practical level, even if the theory said you had to deal with

economics and politics and voting in segregated facilities, strategically what was the most useful thing to do. And maybe while you were debating that, somebody would decide by starting a sit-in.

Q So, how was that sort of theory, like, how did SNCC, I mean, I understand how SDS was very theory oriented but SNCC must have had people generating theories.

A Right, they did.

Q I mean, to function.

A Right.

Q Now, how did, I don't understand --

A It was a similar thing, I mean, they would have -- that's why the whole movement was about meetings. Because there was no doctrine, there was no Bible to go by, and no job descriptions. And, so every meeting was like a new invention of defining goals, defining problem-solving strategies, defining roles, who was going to do what, it was almost like a football game, okay, you run out for a pass, do you know what I'm saying?

Q How did anyone ever come to an agreement?

A Consensus. That was it.

Q You mean, ultimately, you or I?

A Yeah, absolutely.

Q You would just stand there until you reached --

A Consensus. And if you were so marginal that you couldn't go with the majority, like I never liked the idea of the days of rage at the Chicago convention. I thought for these people to create all this havoc for SDS. So, what do you do, you



just don't participate. It's not like everybody votes. Voting became a bigger deal as time went on because as the organizations got larger, it became imperative to have some kind of central mechanism, you know, central organization and mechanism for decision making. And that's when the big important debates would happen and these incredible events would happen like SOCK got voted out of existence with no SOCK members there practically. Or, there were big debates between SDS and progressive labor at SDS meetings. And, then voting began to take on this incredible kind of power because -- but, again, there were no guidelines for keeping these organizations going. And they were almost due to self destruct before it was over with. I mean, between external pressure from the society to not survive, because they were a major threat to this country. They were the most powerful social movements probably in a hundred years and so there was a lot of pressure to get rid of us. And between that external pressure and internal confusion, I'll never forget when I came to Harvard Graduate School years later in 1970, there were some all socialist party people around who said that their problem was they were too doctrine (inaudible) and too allied to positions. And, you know, really wasted their time and energy in those kinds of debates and, you know, ways of defining themselves. But that the undermining of the (inaudible) was its having so little structure, that there was no cohesive structure to hold the (inaudible) together in the 60's and so it finally dissipated.

Q But, it almost seems to me that if there was such a set structure within something like SNCC at least, then it would sort of defeat it's own purpose.

A Right. So, that was the tension that always existed because it had to be flexible and respond to changes in the environment, like, for example, as I recall the story, and I could be wrong, the (inaudible) movement was not started by SNCC, it was started by the kids in (inaudible) and, therefore, SNCC responded to (inaudible). It wasn't on it's agenda, let's do (inaudible), Mississippi this month. And so there were always the unpredictable events. There was the bombing of the church in Birmingham. There were the freedom rides and then the burning of the buses. I mean, you couldn't predict the sequence of events and so you couldn't plan. And so there was this kind of required open endedness about things that made it very hard to function. People did a great job just because they were so dedicated and they were so principled and they were so capable. But not with a lot of clarity and people talk about how the movement -- a generation and the movement was (inaudible) that generation was gone. That's how fast things would change.

Q Was there a big, you mean over turn of people?

A The people could change, the direction could change, the agenda could change. The analysis could change, the place of action could change from, say, Boston to Chicago, from Chicago to New Jersey, from Atlanta to Louisville. There was this constant shift in place and content and action. And, yet, somehow, the sense of it's all adding up to something you wanted to be part of

and that you believed in, as if it was coherent. Because I think the coherence was around the feeling that the country was not fair. It's really simple in some level, country was not fair to people of color and to people who were poor. And, there was unity around the opposition to that. At some level it was very simple, and yet, in terms of creating change, there was no Bible for how to do it.

Q Sure, just thinking about all the different kinds of people that were involved in the movement, everyone defines their own tactic and their own definition of what should, what's the best way to, what is the problem and what's the best way to solve it.

A Right. Like, one of the themes was whether to be involved in discussions or direct action and should the direct action be violent or nonviolent, should it be legal or break laws, those were the debates. And another way that the southern movement and SDS came in conflict, finally, was that the original southern movement was largely influenced by Gandhi and King's vision and the Beloved Community and nonviolence. And those were not the guiding principles of SDS.

Q From the beginning?

A From the beginning. They would never have articulated their politics that way at all.

Q So, how did they, I mean, did they have a violent -- from the beginning did they have a --

A No, but they weren't as against violence as southerners were. And they weren't as -- they didn't come out of Christian

backgrounds the same way the southern movement did. I mean, they really came from a political analysis, where in some sense, and this is stretching it, but at some level it's true that there was a kind of spiritual sense in the south of what it was that people were trying to get and that was a certain way of people relating to one another that was not codified in politics. I mean, because the Beloved Community is not a political concept in some ways, I think that's correct.

Q Why?

A Because it's got to do with relationships that don't sort of fit political structures, where, I don't know I've never thought of this before but I feel like it's in the direction of true. It's not to say that the political structure in the south didn't need to change or the economic structure didn't need to change, but --here's what it was, there was a concern about relationships in the south, and, among southern people in a way that you didn't here talked about in the north by SDS people. SDS people didn't talk about relationships. They talked about politics.

Q Do you think relationships were more talked about in the south because it was a race issue?

A Probably. Probably.

Q And, was there definitely, just -- within the organization would you say that just the whole sexual overtones but just friendship relationships or, I mean, was it a different kind of person to person relationships that you saw in SDS?

A Well, I think that in both, people really became family to one another.

Q I was just wondering if SDS was the same way?

A Yeah, definitely. People were still very close. I think that there was definitely that feeling of family. But, the difference is probably that in the north, people were not as cut off from their roots, that is they could keep their ties with their families and with social institutions like universities more easily and still be political. Certainly, southern whites couldn't do that easy. They were much more strained in their relationships with their social institutions, the white ones, and their own families and so they were more dependent on the movement for relationships, so they mattered more.

Q (inaudible)

A I think one of the struggles for black friends of mine actually had to do, well, for whites too, but, maybe in a slightly different way, and I don't want to speak for blacks except as I've heard this articulated by them, that they were really in a tough spot because their parents had worked so hard to help opportunities be available to them and then if they dropped out of school, say, to work in the movement, it was really distressing for their families. Not to say that it wasn't distressing for white families, but I think that probably they felt like a lot was at stake. And, it was very confusing to be on this track of, you know, trying to make it and then --

Q I'm sure they probably felt the burden of their whole race they were carrying, like they had to --

A Right, and then which was the right way to go to be involved in the movement or stay on the success track. That's a very difficult choice. And, I think northern whites often had ways out. They didn't feel as, like the choices were that limited, like they could sort of go in and out of universities, they could go in and out of research organizations. There were more sort of liberal do good groups in the north where they could make money, they could work for unions. There were a lot more choices for northern white students. Not particularly for southern whites.

Q Yeah, I mean, that's how I sort of see the whole, I know you weren't there (inaudible) do their duty and then go back and leave to their safe little house.

A That was the position of the whites or the blacks or both?

Q I don't know, I mean, I think, I'm not one that should be saying this at all, but it seems like that would be a normal reaction for anyone in the movement that had been struggling in it for years to have these people come down and just, I mean, smart intelligent people come down and try to --

A Run the show.

Q Run the show.

A I don't know how much they really were trying to run the show, but I think that it created a lot of tension for them to be there, that's for sure. Because there was always this thing about people should work in their own communities, whether it's white working in white communities in the north or the south, I think

that was a very confusing issue, was what roles people should play.

Q Now, your role, you worked in both white and black communities, about equal, would you say?

A Probably, probably about equal. And, I found it confusing but, see, as I tried to say in the early part of this, I grew up in a typical southern racist world. And, I really thought it was despicable when I finally figured it out, I thought this was terrible. And, it's terrible for everybody involved in it. Whether you're the one being taught to hate on one side or the other, it was a terrible, terrible world, obviously much worse for blacks. It's still that way. But, I didn't like it, I wanted it to go away. And, for me, it was a question of how to make a change. And, I was certainly working in a white community, I mean, definitely, in Texas, for example, that ease what I did. And, I did it more when I was working for NSA, traveling to southern white campuses. But, I guess my feeling was we wouldn't have a major shift in the south if it were not for the black movement. And, so the black movement was necessary to get social change at that level and that quickly and to make the south turn. And, I really did have a very local vision, I have to admit. I never quite understood economic issues, they were a little bit over my head, they were a lot over my head. I never understood northern communities that well. I didn't have a sense of how they changed, and I was pretty focused on what I could understand. But, why did I say that, oh, just because I felt like everyone should be involved. Everyone should be a part of it. I still do.

And, I must say in retrospect because I kept resisting kind of getting on the band wagon with SDS people about China and Vietnam and stuff and now when I hear about how many people died under (inaudible) I think, you know, what was all that about, you know, why was SDS so [pro|pro] (inaudible) if all these people were dying under his regime. And, it's just hard to argue the good guy bad guy relationships in foreign countries if I don't understand. So, I'm not sorry that I never got into all that. Okay, what else did we talk about that are not, white women and black men in the south and how that changed with time. And, white women were really hurt about it. Oh, about being accused of being a racist if you didn't sleep with black men. And, I was saying that I really, I had been told about that by friends of mine and it just didn't seem that relevant because I was so focused on the outcome of social change that I just, I didn't get too diverted by that.

Q What about, how do you think black men in the movement, either both the southern white woman and (inaudible) that was involved?

A I don't know, well --

Q From your point of view, I know you're not speaking for them.

A I think that southern white women are, well, I don't know that it broke down that way. I think that the white women who were around all the time, like Dottie Miller or Connie Curry, I mean, they were just, they were, as Casey said one time, there was a time when race and color faded away. They didn't exist for a while, at least that was her perception of things. And,



friendships grew up that were independent of color for a while. And, I don't know if those kinds of relationships existed between black men and northern white women if the northern white women were in the north.

Q So, it's more on the external, outside of the organization?

A Right, it was who was around for what period of time. And, in what relationships and roles and whether people really got a chance to know each other, work together, support each other, trust each other and if they did then they remained friends.

Q The white man, what about his, I think you talked about sort of his feeling of not fitting into the whole --

A Activist southern kind of, I don't think that many white men felt that comfortable in the southern movement. And, I'm not really sure why. I mean, Bob Zelner certainly was in the movement and, you know, he sort of, he had grown up in the southern Baptist Church, or maybe the Methodist, but certainly a church that was pretty similar to --

What's remarkable is that we knew each other, these people, for less than ten years of our lives. Literally, maybe five years for a lot of us. And, we are more connected to one another than to people we've known since, I mean, it's like it takes that long to connect again. It's phenomenal to me how that happens. I don't know if it has to do with youth and who you know when you're young or the intensity of the experience you have.

Q Yeah, the shared experience. I think the same sort of things about college friends, not at the same level but sort of

you go through the same thing with them for four years, you're young too so --

A Right. And, you're friends for life. And, I think probably people do in other things, like the creative start ups in anything whether it's theater or a new business, almost anything where people are, where the neurons are really firing. And, it's intense.

Q I wanted to ask you, one of my friends at school, his mother is not in (inaudible), but I wanted to see if you knew her, Sheila (inaudible)? I'm not really sure about (inaudible) she was friends with (inaudible) but I don't think she was actually involved in it, I'm going to talk to her.

A Where was she from?

Q She was southern. All I have is this thing that her son wrote about her, so, Alabama.

A Really? Wow, it's amazing.

Q And, do you know Ruth (inaudible)?

A I know that name, I can't remember.

Q I don't know anything about her. I don't know if she's black or white or --

A I can't remember. How did you come across her name?

Q Well, Jack (inaudible) he's (inaudible) he gave, he started, he gave me just a bunch of names that he thought would be great people to talk to and Julia (inaudible) gave me a bunch of people too, so, because he taught with (inaudible) years ago.

A Oh, he did? I didn't realize that. I lectured to his class.

Q Oh, really? At Williams?

A Harvard.

Q Really.

A He's very intimidating. I tried to talk about the history of racism from myself and all that. But, there was something else I was going to say. It seems to me that the whole thing about the issue about leadership in both movements really came down to who was able to speak publicly in a convincing manner and who was able to write. Those were the skills that made you or broke you as a leader. And, I guess there was to some extent the contact that you were espousing, but so many women were not comfortable with public speaking, me myself included. And, weren't comfortable with writing and so that was, you know, you didn't become a leader unless you did those two things.

Q Do you think that's why women sort of tended toward --

A Organizing instead?

Q Organizing the actual --

A I think probably because they were more people related. They were more into listening than espousing. Not all, obviously, Ella Baker was an eloquent speaker. (End of tape)

A Certainly, I always felt like southern women were brought up to be demur, passive, not be center stage, not demand attention publicly particularly and to always cater to men. That was southern training for women. And, my sense was women in the north were not quite so rigidified about those things, they were allowed to be more (inaudible) on their own and to expect more

respect than southern women and it was my impression that northern women were more comfortable in leadership roles. I'm telling you comparing white women in the south (inaudible). I don't know if that's a current analysis but it certainly was my impression.

Q When do you think you sort of grew out of that?

A By the way, another anomaly is Connie Curry because Connie's family's Irish, she wasn't really southern, not in the way that Casey and I were southern. When did I grow out of it? Never. I think once you've learned it at a young age it's really hard to change that, I mean it's all relevant.

Q Well, I pictured, I mean I only talked to Connie Curry on the phone, I pictured her as this, you know, definitely southern lady, like she has the long drawl and everything and --

A That's true, that's true, but in terms of her getting away, how much she was inundated with racist thinking, the fact that her family was Irish set her aside from the rest of us. In terms of sort of social behavior, she was quite southern. Penny was from, I think, New York State, Dottie was from New York. The only southerners really were Casey and myself in the beginning the first white southern women were Jane Stembridge, who's father is a Baptist minister from North Carolina or, no, from Georgia, or South Carolina, I can't remember. Jane, Casey, (inaudible).

Q Was Casey (inaudible)

A Um-hum.

Q I think we've covered everything that we talked about before at least.

A Actually, what I was thinking is what I noticed when we were doing this for SOCK was that it was great to do -- I'm the one who thought of the idea of doing the joint interview with Rob (inaudible) because, I mean, we would make each other think because otherwise we (inaudible). I remember another thing we talked about just in case it didn't get recorded before was the hardship on the married women. It was just horrendous, I mean, like Clark Kissinger and his wife had kids, it was really hard for that family.

Q Even without kids I think it would be just --

A But, with children it was (inaudible) what were they supposed to do for money. Clark Kissinger, (inaudible) Irene and Arthur (inaudible), I was telling you the story about the milk with the dog food in the refrigerator for the babies. Just crazy stuff.

Q How long -- you were married in '62?

A '63.

Q '63. So, how did --

A I wasn't married until December of '63.

Q Oh, so you were basically out of the south?

A I was still in the south then.

Q So, about the same?

A About December of '63, that's when I got married and we were living in Nashville and I started reading Betty (inaudible) and started getting interested in women's issues, that's the first time it really got to me about women's roles.

Q Do you think that's when you talked about you and Casey and Connie?

A Well, I think, actually, no, Connie -- I don't remember being part of that conversation, but Casey and I had both come from homes where there was no -- Casey's parents were divorced, and then her stepfather left. My father died when I was young so we both had come from mother-headed households, which made us different any way. And, I think that she and I talked about women's roles in terms of dependency on men early on because when she and Tom broke up, she was really devastated and there was a, the discussion that would go on was about how much time and energy to give to relationships versus how much to give to the movement. Where should you put your time and energy.

Q Did they give you just about, oh, second class status, how would you feel about that?

A I think I'm quoted about this in Sarah's book, I don't really know, but, I felt very grateful to be in the movement and to have the opportunity to part at all. And, being in a non-spokes person role a lot of the time, particularly around SDS men was bothersome and annoying and frustrating but it wasn't, it wasn't, it paled in significance for me compared to the oppression of black people. I just never could get as serious about it at the time, it just seemed to me that the suffering of women was not as great as the suffering of people who were poor and people who were black. But, later, I think I really began to understand but not, I mean --when I came to Boston I started a women's counseling center. I was that tuned in to women's issues and I've been

largely involved in women's movement activities but it took me years to understand how critical a women's role was to how well families and the country function. I didn't really get it. And, probably one reason I didn't get it is because I didn't see women's roles with children was much as I might have because there weren't kids around and it just didn't register. That's unfortunately true. What are you reading?

Q I was just thinking about something that -- in the Mary King book, she talks about that the reason she brought up the issue of women was to talk about the structure of SNCC, how the structure is changing and whether, they weren't really emphasizing on (inaudible) that she wasn't really, they weren't really emphasizing women's status in the movement more, it was more along the lines of is the structure of SNCC something that is still conclusive of women and, because I think they were in the group that didn't really like the hierarchical structure.

A They wanted more equal relationships.

Q Yeah, it was that same thing going back to the tension between the structure and the actual practicing of their --

A And the fluidity, the spontaneity, yeah. And, women always opted for the less hierarchical, less -- I don't know if less structure but certainly less hierarchical, yeah I think that's a good point. I think that's correct. They wanted a more fluid kind of organization. I don't think that was as much an issue for me. You know, I was such a typical female, I mean, I really had bought into the notion that men had strengths that I

didn't have and abilities I didn't have and I was supposed to cater to that. I really did buy it.

Q (inaudible)

A Right, yeah. And, it took years for me to begin to rethink that in any substantial way. I think that the economic burden for women was more of the thing that really got me was seeing women who were raising kids alone and had no money and couldn't get decent jobs and weren't being supported. I think that really had a major impact on me much more than women's roles in the movement. But, I spent a lot of time thinking that I just wasn't smart enough to understand all these debates that the men were having.

Q You have to start off with a Ph.D.

A I really felt that, they were just, you know, these brilliant men.

Q That liked to hear themselves talk.

A They certainly did. The truth is, you know, that probably the people in the movement in the 60's, if you think back about it were some of the finest minds of the 60's. I mean, they weren't duds, you know? So, they were brilliant. I made straight A's all through the University of Texas in an honor's program for a couple of hundred students, the creme de la creme. And, would be around these men who could talk like that and write like that and be totally intimidated like they were brilliant and I was stupid. And, really a lot of going to Harvard was the begin to think that maybe I wasn't so dumb after all. And, it tells you



how women get off track, how we need to work with young girls to help them not demean themselves. That is really clear.

Q What (inaudible)?

A Rob is doing teaching and research in New York and I am a child psychologist.

Q Oh, really?

A Yeah. I have a teaching appointment at Harvard, actually a clinical appointment at Harvard. And, I'm a clinical supervisor at a children's hospital.

Q That's great. So, you got your Ph.D. in Psychology? So, you went, all right let me get this straight, you went to Harvard to (inaudible) school but then --

A Dropped out.

Q So, then where did you end up?

A Well, I came back in 1970 and got my Ph.D. at Harvard in Psychology. And, I'll tell you this part (inaudible) my sense of things was that without naming names as generalities, the thought of southerners had a very hard time recovering, southern whites, had a very hard time recovering from the movement because they didn't know where to go. They had lost all connections to academic institutions. There were no jobs they really fit comfortably to. They were alienated from the white south, they didn't really fit there. They weren't northerners. There was no place where they fit. And, it's very hard to find a way, find a place to go. And, northerners tended, as I said earlier, to keep their ties to universities, to liberal organizations, to friends who had connections and it was easier, in my opinion, for them to

get back into better social situations than for southern whites. And, for a lot of people when the movement was fading, there was this tendency toward violence that to me was upsetting. But, there were also people who got into drinking a lot, became alcoholics, started doing drugs. They fell apart because the movement fell apart.

Q (inaudible)?

A Southern history would say, you know, southern historians would argue that black women have more privilege than black men because they were allowed to be in the house and not in the field, to get more education than black men, to have more power than black men, and, that the white society created a situation in which black men were undermined, and, certainly, black men were always much more vulnerable to white violence. If there was a lynching, it wasn't a black woman who got lynched, it was a black man who got lynched. And, so it was a much more dangerous situation for black men.

Q Except the black woman always got burned to death and the black male got hung.

A Got burned to death?

Q Well, yeah, during the reconstruction, I guess, the data is that they would burn black women, tie them to the stake and burn them, like, and mutilate them instead of just hanging them instead of men.

A That was common? Well, of all the lynchings, they were --

Q Right, the lynchings were strictly male.

A And, how do you -- do you have figures on women who were burned?

Q I don't have a number. I have, I just read it for a class I'm taking, actually.

A Who wrote that? Do you really trust those data?

Q I read it in several different, I think it was (inaudible) Angela Davis talks about it and (inaudible) it sounded pretty --

A Convincing.

Q It definitely, they said that they had, in their data, their research, they hadn't come across any men that were burned, it was just women, so. I think it was, I don't really understand why. I think it was because women represented sexuality and (inaudible).

A Well, men were certainly mutilated more.

Q Oh, definitely. I don't know I haven't figured out why they would do that.

A Well, I, the question here is whether black men (inaudible) the attack of whites and black women, and, if so, what affect that had on the social structure of the black community.

Q (inaudible)

A Well, all I said was that's what the history books that I used to read (inaudible).

Q I mean, because black women were subjected to sexual assaults, I mean, raped all the time plus all the racial applications. I mean, just, know, (inaudible) they sort of had a double duty of being oppressed.

A Well, I would have said that most people felt that black men were more the target of white rage than black women. I think I would still say that. Certainly, when I was growing up, the people who were to be attacked were black men, not black women.

Q Physically?

A Yeah. I mean, when the Klan went out for a victim, it didn't go out for a black women, it went out for black men.

Q Right. I agree (inaudible)

A That's all I mean, in terms of physical violence, and so, that plus that black women were allowed more education and more access to people with power in the white homes. Men, in some ways, they had a kind of -- they had access to power that black men didn't have. That's, I hope I'm saying that correctly.

Q (inaudible)

A No, I'm just thinking about in terms of who the white culture attacked and sort of set up as the people to hate was black men. Black men were to be feared. That was always the message.

Q Right, I think it was sort of a stereotype, I don't know, from what I've read, black men are to be feared and black women were either to be like the typical "Mammy" figure or the jezebel that was totally sexual, so.

A Yeah. Yeah, you had those kind of stereotypes in the white female community as well.

Q Oh, definitely, but, then, I don't know, there was the Victorian image of the white woman when you were growing up still very much --

A It was terrible. I grew up with (inaudible) were the things that made your skirt blouse up.

Q Really?

A Oh, yeah, and, so it took jillions of starchings and ironings to make these (inaudible) work so your skirts would be very bouffant.

Q Aren't you glad you can wear pants now?

A And, you had long white kid gloves and it was just straight out of (inaudible) But, anyway, I guess I just always felt like black men were more vulnerable to white violence, I mean, from what you're saying, that's not correct.

Q Well, physical violence, I mean, I just think a lot of history books don't count physical rape as violence.

A Their violence against women, that's true, yeah.

Q But, that's also hidden more, so.

A Right, I mean, that was definitely true. I guess I was thinking about murder. I think the men were (inaudible) and still are. And, the death rates in the black community I think are much worse for black men than black women.

Q That's why I think it's pretty interesting that women led the anti-lynching (inaudible) because it was men who were getting lynched.

A But, it was white women, is that what you're talking about or was it black women you're talking about. Because there was an organization of southern women against lynching, but I thought it was mostly white women.

Q Right, well, (inaudible)

A Really?

Q Um-hum.

A Was it that same organization? Was there an organization of black and white women together against lynching?

Q I think there were several (inaudible)

A By the way, in my early description of the various influences on me and stuff, populism was a major issue. Populism was a tradition. It was sort of anti-class, I mean, you know, that really took into account that poverty was a major problem. And, so that influenced my thinking about race.

Q We're trying to figure out this whole thing, not figure it out but just get a grasp on it. Race, gender and class, just those three things are so --

A Well, have you read Lillian Smith?

Q No.

A Oh, you've got to read her. She did the whole thing. Killers of the Dream by Lillian Smith. It's the most brilliant analysis of race class and gender you'll ever read. She basically said that the game in the south was that the southern gentry kept power by having two subservient groups. One was southern whites who were poor whites and the other were blacks. And, that the gentry, who were known as the "bourbons," kept those two groups fighting with each other all the time over the crumbs that would get thrown by the gentry. And, so, if there was working in the fields, it either can be done by tenant croppers and sharecroppers who were white or by black, right? And, so everybody stayed poor

because they would fight with each other, essentially, over the spoils, almost like labor movement with (inaudible).

Q Right.

A Then, the way that the antagonism was maintained between black and white was setting white women up as the foil, that is, if you let blacks and whites be together, black men would rape white women and so you had to keep the races separate. And, then white women had to be set into this special class that was both on a pedestal and also in a style of life that was to not live. To give them an excuse to keep racism going. And, the racism kept the economy fueled and the economy kept the men in power and it was a three way game using class, race and gender. You should read that book.

Q I will.

A It's brilliant. Because, I always felt like there was a lot of truth in that. And, that's why the whole issue, then, about the relationships between black men and white women in the movement were so politically important, because, in fact, that whole argument about how white women were getting used was in a way validating the worst fears of the white men. If you let (inaudible) black men are going to get the black women. That was the (inaudible). All right.