

INTERVIEW WITH RUTH HOWARD CHAMBERS

November 15, 1994

Q What was your opinion about this whole discussion about structure within SNCC, or restructuring?

A Well, I guess I'll start with how I came and where I interned. And I was a student at Howard in 1964 and I had been in college, out of college, I was a child bride. I was divorced and I got involved in the movement group, a non-violent action group, which was on Howard's campus. And those students were, Mary O'Tillyhass was in that group and Jean Wheeler and Stokely Carmichael, Courtland and Stanley Wise. There was a whole core group of people who went south for the summer project and that's how I learned about the summer project. But, prior to working with that group, I had done demonstrations with CORE around jobs and Safeway in the city and then somehow I found this group and so they were doing food drive for Mississippi families who had been thrown off plantations, that was the spring and the winter before the summer project.

Q So, '63?

A '63, that is right. And then there was a conference in Atlanta at Grambling and that was in '63 and I went down to that conference with Jean Wheeler and Frank Smith and a few other students. We drove down. And that was my first time meeting, you know, coming in contact with the kind of people who were a part of this organization and hearing about the work they were doing. When I returned from that conference I would, you know, there were

articles that were done like in the New Republic and the Nation and I was really struck by the article about the three workers in Americus, Georgia who were in jail for insurrection. I was always interested in history and who is that insurrectionist person, who was that -- in jail for insurrection? Benedict Arnold? Was that insurrection? I said, well what could these three innocent-looking fellows have done -- insurrection -- what is this about? And I read the article and what it was about and there was Don Harris and Allen, Richard Allen and another person, John Perkins, so they stayed in jail a long time in Americus, Georgia and so that really -- I just got interested and then there was the posters that they had done. I think you've you seen those posters, the Danny Lyons photographs, and those were, you know, I had those posters all in my room. So, then it was the summer project time and they were recruiting and the Howard students, you know, had been very active in NAG and had been to Mississippi the summer before that was Stokely and Jean Wheeler and a few of the others, and so we needed, you know, to have some black students as a part of this effort too. And so that made a lot of sense to me. I was working part-time at the public library and going to Howard and I had always gone south for the summer, as a child, to my grandparents. Until I was 18, that's where we spent all summer.

Q Where did you live?

A I lived in, I grew up in Washington, DC. And, my family is from North Carolina. They are from Warren County. My father is from Littleton and my mother is from a place called Wise in the same county and that's the county where Ms. Baker's from. Ms.

Baker is from Littleton. So, my family knows her. My mother has memories of Ms. Baker's mother.

Q Really?

A Uh-huh, and the kind of person she was and I have a Great-aunt who used to correspond with Ms. Baker because they were in the same age group. She's now in her 90's. I guess Ms. Baker must have been a little older than my aunt. So, going south in the summer was like, you know, history right on the spot. And I had also, when I was in college, worked in a summer camp in upstate New York which was called (inaudible). And, that was in '61 and '62. And the minister who organized the camp was Presbyterian and he was active in supporting student sit-in efforts. And, at the time, I wasn't really so aware of what was happening. But, now as I look back on his work, there were students there from Georgia, there was one student in particular, his name was Cliff and he had participated in demonstrations and had been beaten very badly and had gotten, like his stomach was ulcerated. So all during camp season, he was bent over and couldn't work too hard and he would go on speaking tours and raise money, so he was like a star while we were doing the grunge work. But I know that was an impression. I was impressed by that, and that was in '61 and '62. And, of course, Cliff talked to us a lot about, you know, what he had done. So I went south in the summer of '64 as a part of the summer project and as a part of the Howard student group. And, I also went, before I went south, I went to Ohio to the training and I left from that training, on a bus and went south. So that is where I entered, the summer project in

1964. So it was really a learning experience a lot for me. I didn't -- I was, that whole summer I was learning about what the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee was really about and how it was organized and I was meeting these people that I read about and I was attending these meetings where, you know, people were discussing how they were going to do something, what we were going to do. So it was a very, I was like watching this, and I was absorbing it a lot, and being a part of the Howard group gave me access to certain kinds of -- and also being a person of color, gave me access to certain kinds of meetings and certain kinds of discussions, I would imagine. And also because I think of my orientation and my southern background, I grew up in a Baptist Church, so the whole spiritual peace of it was very familiar to me. And, you know, I just felt like, well, here is something that is just very different but very familiar. So the summer went very well, you know, we did what we did and certainly, I wasn't aware, I wasn't very political. I had not participated, I lived in Washington, DC where you did not vote, so I was not a part of any kind of political groups or organizations as a young person. So, I wasn't very highly political, in terms of party politics. And some of the other people who had been a part of, say, like the SDS groups in New York and who had been (inaudible) all of those, I was not aware of that. I had come from -- that's my dad over there. It's a great picture. It's a picture I took and I blew it up over at Kinko's.

Q Really, you did that?

A Uh-huh, blew it up from one of these kinds of photographs. This was on the same day. This is my father, who is a baker, who was really a farmer. This is my uncle, he's passed on. He was a farmer, a good farmer, this is my Uncle Delbert, he's a farmer, he's still alive. And, this is my aunt's husband, he's passed away. This is my nephew who is now 24. And this is my grandparent's house and this is like a place my dad and my mother put across the road. And so my family are from, you know, they are agrarian people, you know, like you do the work and you get a good crop, you don't do the work, you don't get a good crop. You put it in, you get it out. And, also they were, you know, very active in terms of the schools and that sort of thing. So, that's how I came into the organization and that was more or less my background and I have two sisters and we grew up in D.C., so I wasn't very political, so in the summer project, so when we went to Atlantic City to take those seats, I didn't, wasn't really prepared for what was going to happen as were a lot of other people like myself. I'm sure of Jane (inaudible), Ms. Baker, those people who had been very involved in politics for long periods of time, they knew what to expect. But some of us were very naive so that was like a big disappointment. So, then the summer was over and you go back to Mississippi, well, what do you do, you know, if you come for the summer and you're well organized and you have your money, you go back to school, you know what -- you like go back to school and you continue on. Or, if you, you know, feel like, well gee whiz, this work is not done and this is going to be my life, you're just, you know, all caught up in this

thing, you stay. So I stayed. I did not return to Howard next semester. I stayed in the south. And there were -- because activities slowed down, everything slowed down, you know. The summer was over.

Q Did your whole group from Howard stay?

A (inaudible) just about all stayed. There were some students, female students from Oregon, who were like a part of our group, they went back. But a lot of us did stay. And so then with that piece of work pulled from under you, like what do you continue to do. Well, we weren't rounded in that slow organizing process, where you can go into a community and you are going to be there and, you know, we came in with a big hurrah for the summer project and then the whole situation with James and Mickey and those boys getting killed, and what that threw onto you, it was not, you know, so it's like, you know the balloons come down and you got to go back to the steady work of organizing and, of course, there's disappointment. What do you do and how do you work. So, I guess there was a lot of --

Q Re-adjustment.

A Readjustment on a lot of people. Yeah. And, then the organization had grown because they had absorbed all of us into the organization.

Q Now, how did they handle that? Did they extend an open invitation to you to be permanent SNCC staff members, and was that because you were a group of students from college, I mean I know

-- A Did someone tell you that?

Q No. I'm just wondering.

A Well, because we came with the students from Howard and because we were African Americans, we did get to stay on. And, I'm sure that was a part of the peace effort. That was a peace effort.

Q Right. And, do you know who decided that, I know there was like a group of white students that stayed also?

A And, they did not get to be staff?

Q That did get to be staff and stayed there was about, I think, there was about 50 of them.

A And they came on staff.

Q Right.

A So, you had us and you had them. And, so the staff grew.

Q But, do you know who, I mean I'm just wondering who decided that.

A Who decided the staff?

Q Like do you remember who decided for you?

A Well, when I came, I didn't have any money, period. So, when I came that summer, I began to get 964 out of need. And I think that was the situation for most, for quite a few of us who came, who came unfinanced.

Q So -- but you don't remember who?

A Well, I guess the people who decided that would have been the executive committee, whoever they were at the time. There was Jim and Ruby and Rob and whoever, you know, and people from other projects. I mean, I'm sure it was a decision that was made through a process.

Q It's just confusing to me why they would want a group of white students also to stay, like sort of wasn't their goal with the summer project, I don't think, to expand their organization.

A No. But, I guess if people were staying and wanted to stay and continue to work, they needed to be connected organizationally to some organization. Why not?

Q I mean, from what I understand the summer project was about bringing mostly white, northern students down to the south to get national attention, media attention. It happened. So, in some respect, they achieved their goal. Now, I don't --

A And, then some students wanted to stay. I don't remember who, Dennis stayed, there was a whole bunch of them who stayed. Didn't you talk to some of them?

Q I've sort of been --

A Sue (inaudible), did she stay?

Q She stayed.

A Yeah, she came on staff, yeah. So, I guess they expressed an interest in staying and no one said, well you can't stay, you've got to go now. So they were accepted, I guess.

Q So, where were you located after that summer?

A I was in Greenwood during the summer project.

Q Right.

A I stayed with a family there, stayed with Judy Johnson's family in Greenwood and that Fall I stayed in Greenwood, I stayed in Greenwood through that Fall. And then I went down to (inaudible) to those conferences, right? They were in November?

Q Right.

A And, when I left (inaudible) I don't know if I came back to Greenwood or not, I probably came back for a short period of time. And, then I went over to, I forget which, the order of things, probably to southwest Georgia, to (inaudible) and I stayed over there. Judy and I worked over there for a while. And, then from southwest Georgia I went over to (inaudible) in Wilcox County in Alabama and I was in Alabama during the time when they were at the church. So, I was in Wilcox County and I went into the church for sometime. I didn't do the march, but we were in the county at that time. We were in Alabama, then the whole thing started. King came to Alabama, took the wind out of our sails. And then from Alabama I went to Atlanta, to the Atlanta office and I worked in communications and I put out a few issues of the Student Voice. I did posters for different kinds of efforts that were going on in counties where people were running for offices and they needed posters. I worked at the print shop. So, then at one office I did those Student Voices, those last issues, we called it the Voice because by then none of us were students. So we did those last two issues the Voice. And I did like a pamphlet, there were these ASC elections, those were agriculture elections and they'd form a committee.

Q What year was this?

A This was in -- so much happened in such a short period of time, I believe that was in '65. I've been to all these places, I was called a floater, by the way.

Q You were?

A I was one of the floaters. Have you heard that term yet?
Q No.

A Okay. I was a floater. So, I stayed in Atlanta and I did (inaudible) in fact, I left, I was in G-Spin this is when I left. G-Spin was this community in Wilcox County that had one road in and one road out. We were not to stay in there because (inaudible). And, then we stayed in freedom houses. I always stayed with a family, that was my background, you know. I stayed at a freedom house. I never had any freedom house problems. So, then in G-Spin I walked around, I talked to people, we took people down to the courthouse, there were no fences, animals, farm animals walked from one person's property to the next. I went into homes where women were quilting. I do a little piecing now I learned from Mrs. Chaney, who's my friend, James' mother. And, it was just a beautiful place, just to walk back down, there was this little lake, like a little bayou area, you go back down there, there was a post office, there was a store run by a man named Roman (inaudible), nobody was having any problems except they couldn't go down to the corner of the road. When I was up there I was feeling like too tired of walking into people's lives, going down here, you know? So I lost my feeling for that, I felt disrupted. And then something happened. I haven't thought about this a lot. But, I left G-Spin and I went to Atlanta and that's when I worked in the Atlanta office and I worked in communications. I worked with Julian Bond there and Wilson was running the presses. But, people were still out in Alabama doing their organizing and they were organizing the Lyons County Freedom

Organization. And, so Courtland was out there still and he and I were, we were a couple for many years, when I went south and through the south.

Q I don't know him.

A You don't know Courtland? He's a wonderful person. I'm sure you've heard people talk about him.

Q I've heard the name (inaudible)

A We were getting to tensions like at the Waveland meeting. (inaudible). This is Courtland (inaudible) so he used to wear this jacket. So we were in a meeting in a church, now this was after Waveland, I don't know the exact year. I think Bobby Fletcher took this photograph. And we're trying to sort through something that has to do with structure and how we're going to work and what we're going to do and after this meeting, I went to -- this is before (inaudible) this is before I went to Atlanta. This is still in Mississippi. And, after this meeting, I went to Jackson and stayed in Jackson for about two weeks. I was supposed to go work in the Jackson office and help facilitate people in the field with getting their needs met. And, a group of us were sitting in this little house where they used to -- you've heard about that house at there in Toogaloo?

Q Uh-huh.

A This was the tail end of the house, right. And, (inaudible) was there and some other people. And, we were talking about Mississippi, Freedom Democratic Party and what had happened. And, at that time, they were preparing the congressional challenge. Someone said, we need to take people from Mississippi

to Washington to see what happens on the congressional floor when the challenge comes up. We'd already been kicked in the butt in Atlantic City. We need to go to Washington and make our presence known. All right? So, we talked about that and so we decided, this is how things got decided.

Q Right.

A We said, "Okay. We're going to take people to Washington." And, I guess it was talked about with somebody in Atlanta and approved or something and because I was from Washington, it was decided, well you go to Washington and you go organize the housing and the food for when we get the people there because you know the city and you know the churches. So, I went ahead to Washington. And, I got to D.C. and Mike (inaudible) he teaches up at Amherst. Look at him on the tapes. He used to run the D.C. office. So, Mike was in D.C. organizing for the congressional challenge. And, so (inaudible) showed up there he said, "What do you all think you're doing. We don't have time for this. We're up here trying to get votes." You know, they're lobbying, they're politicking and (inaudible) so he says, "Well, look, you go over here and you talk to this minister, he might let you use the church." So, and, "We don't have any money to give you to help with this. Maybe I'll give you \$300.00 to get you going or something, but go talk to Chairman Phillips and see what he'll do." So, I go over and speak to Chairman Phillips at the Lutheran Congregational Church. And, he says, "Of course, we'd be glad to house the people here. We'd be glad to have the meetings and you can use our basement for the food and da, de, da, de, da."

So, then we have to get the food and we have to get the buses and we have to get places and so the logistics of all that, so I worked on that and that was really a nice experience. So, the churches donated food, I went and spoke to churches, I went to my church that I grew up in and asked them to make food. My mother sat there and said, "Why don't you sit down. You're talking too long." And, they brought down their food on their day and then there were Christian Brothers and Catholic groups that had buses and schools and they arranged to take people from the church to where they were staying and Ms. Johnson, who I had stayed at her house, she stayed with my family and that was nice, you know. And, it was really nice and we ate in the church and people demonstrated and I did a brochure. I don't know where it is right now, I have it somewhere around here. But, going to Washington and what that meant, you know, to raise money. And then from Washington, that experience ended. And I don't know how I got to Atlanta. I can't get the order of things. I would have to figure it out. But, I went to Alabama I guess, and then I left Alabama and went into the SNCC Office. I don't know. But, anyway, so they called (inaudible) county to say that they needed a card for the voters. Are you following me?

Q A card, uh-huh.

A A voting card. When people, they needed a membership card for the Lyons County Freedom Organization for people who were joining the party and they also needed an emblem for when people would go to the polls to vote could not read and write, that they would know this is our party emblem, you had a donkey and

elephant, right? And, at that time, I had left Wilcox County and I was working in the Atlanta office in the communications. And, Courtland called to say we needed this card, can you get it made up? I said, "Oh, sure, we can get it made up." I was so politically naive. I didn't understand the power of the symbols. So I came back with a bird and Jack (inaudible) was like the research person who was much older than we were and very (inaudible) and very sophisticated and did all of the finding out who, where the money was and who supported what and all those kinds of things. He seemed to have so much information on how things in this country operated and where money was, who supported what, who supported (inaudible). He did all that kind of research. He said, "No, this won't do. You're not having a bird. You need to go do something better than that. Why don't you go to Clark College, they have a panther or something as their logo, the football team." So, I went over there and I got this panther and put it on the card and it went back out to the county. And, then the press picked up on the symbol and they started selling the Black Panther party. But, it was not in that intent that it was, you know. So, I really, from that experience that's when I really started disliking the press and understanding how powerful they were in reshaping directions. What kind of control they had over people through misinformation or whatever. So I stayed in the Atlanta office for a period of time doing that and I was becoming very dissatisfied with the movement and the SNCC people and stuff because we were all walking away. And so I worked with a group of people and Nancy Hooper, who is in New York, you might want to

talk to her. She and I and other people during this (inaudible) we talked about organizing a coffee shop. And, so, Nancy and I, we really said, we're going to do it. So, we organized this coffee shop called "The Loving Spoonful." It was a wonderful place. And so when I did that, I came off of SNCC staff, Nancy came off of SNCC staff, we put our money into it. We had music, (inaudible) charged \$.50. It was geared to bring the students from Morehouse and Spellman in.

We had poetry reading. (inaudible)

And, you know, we had discussions around capitol punishment and (inaudible)

Q And, so did the money go to SNCC (inaudible)?

A No, we supported our coffee shop. There wasn't a lot of money raised. We just had to pay our house rent, pay the rent for the coffee shop to keep it going. (inaudible)

(End of Side one of Tape)

(Side two of Tape)

A I was really confused by it and it was a painful time because by the time they had the Waveland meetings, people had become polarized into different kinds of groups and there were people who felt that we needed pay organization and we needed to know where you were and what you were doing and they had very little tolerance for people who had questions about things.

Q And who would you put in that group?

A I really, I don't want to name names because right now some of those people are in different places and different spaces. But if you read some of the things that were written and stuff,

and some of them have written books, you'll know who some of them are. And then there were others who -- and then the class distinctions came up. Things in terms of who made decisions and who were in decision-making groups. And there was the northern student, southern student kind of issues going on. And those who had more education as opposed to those who had not as much education and being articulate. Those kinds of things. There was so much going on.

Q Where there blacks and whites in both groups on either of those sides or was that the (inaudible)?

A I think those groups crossed color lines. It wasn't just that this was black or white. It wasn't like that.

Q Okay.

A Yeah. At Waveland, I didn't see race as an issue. The issue (inaudible) what are we supposed to be doing now and how are we supposed to be doing it. There was confusion in my mind that seemed to be around that.

Q Do you think that confusion was because of the summer projects?

A I don't know if it was because of the summer project but I think it was because of the end of a period of work and where do you go next. Now, when you say it was because of the summer project, then you kind of -- the summer project is defined, I think, by the entrance of a lot of white students. So, then you say the blame is because of --

Q (inaudible)

A Yeah. And, I don't know that, I would not want to say it like that.

Q (inaudible)

A Well, not just a project. An effort had ended. You had learned something. You had been rejected by the democratic party. You know, a lot happened with the Mississippi Freedom democratic party rejection of those seats and people had come to different points in their own political development. Because, there were people in the Mississippi freedom democratic party who wanted to accept the seats and there were people who said, no, we don't. This is not what we're about. And, those were people from the state. And, there were people from outside the state who had advised the party to take different positions. So, here you had those dynamics operating. So, the SNCC position was always the hard line position, whatever, you know, well very clear about what we're doing and we don't take (inaudible).

Q So what was your opinion about all this that was going on, just during this summer. I mean, were you -- which ways do you think the organization should go? What direction?

A Well, I didn't have an opinion about that, you know. I didn't, I mean, I recognized and I felt it in terms of myself, a loss of something, and I recognized that the direction was not clear and I saw these people who were, you know, I had been listening to for so long being torn apart by one another and these different positions and I guess I was sort of sympathetic to some positions more so than other positions. For example, I know that I went to the meeting and I went because I was with Courtland a

lot and he would go to these meetings where they had discussions about purchasing the building and there were some people who felt, yes, we should buy a building and there were other people who felt, no, we shouldn't buy a building. And I remember very clearly how Jim was, really he was the original Panther. This was my original drawing.

Q Oh, wow.

A My original drawing.

Q Wow, this is incredible.

A So, I recognized Jim wanting to buy a building and some people (inaudible) and we need a building, we need to become an organization. And then, there were those people who would say, no, that's not what we are. That's not what we're about. And I kind of identified with the group that did not want to gather together in concrete positions. The buildings, you know, the cars, the need for money. I kind of identified with that. And I think the purchase of the building and the whole look of it that way encouraged people to have to be very rigid in terms of what are you doing with your time. Why are you over there? You have (inaudible) with your life on the line when somebody wants to, you know, and you're undisciplined and the protectors of the resources, you know. So, I was, you know, not sympathetic toward that view.

Q What was it, do you remember (inaudible)?

A No. I don't. And, the women's issue was like, I was not sharply aware there was something happening yet. I knew there was something happening with Casey and Mary and some of the other

women because they were always standing up in the meeting and talking about something. And I kept trying to figure, what are they talking about. Because these things would be going on and they were very pained about it. It wasn't an issue with me at the time. And Donna Richards was a good friend of mine, so I used to run with Donna a lot. So the women's issue (inaudible) I think, probably, with that group of women, they -- something was nurtured from that experience. They became more sensitive about issues. In that experience, I'm sure they did because it was hard, hard experience on many levels. And it was more than one white (inaudible) there were two, weren't they?

Q Yeah.

A There were two. And, then there was this meeting down here in this church. This was (inaudible)
If you look at me you can see how stressed --

Q Yeah, that's an amazing thing.

A You see the stress? Here's Jesus back here. We were always at church. Who is this boy sitting back here (inaudible) push these ideas out.

Q That's absolutely an amazing picture.

A And this is Waveland. This is (inaudible) it's in this book he had put me in so he sent me a picture. He's so wonderful. Here's Courtland, he's all stressed out. He's thinking. This is Phyllis Cunningham, who lives here. I look like, what is going on, right? This is (inaudible) back here being very attentive. And, there are a lot of these pictures like this at Waveland.

Here's another one in this book where -- well, (inaudible) sitting in the middle of the reading, reading the magazine.

Q What book is this?

A This is Danny Lyons' book (inaudible) you got to get this book. He was the photographer in the early days. (inaudible)

We were so young. (inaudible)

Q (inaudible) Well, how would you characterize, even outside of Waveland, how personally or by observing, how would you characterize, like, how much interaction was there between -- A (inaudible)

Q Oh, wow. Well, how would you characterize the relationships between black and white women in (inaudible)?

A Well, during what period? I think when we talk about this, we also have to talk about different periods. Now, for me, I never had a conversation, well, actually, I went to segregated schools until Junior High School, and then I went to integrated schools in Washington. I didn't have any white girl friends. While we went to the school together, we were not friends. So, I had not come in contact with white people on this kind of level until I went south. A social level, you know. So, I didn't (inaudible)

So during -- when I did the summer project, I stayed in Greenwood with a family and with (inaudible) I stayed with (inaudible) who is a white student someplace else and another white student who's name I don't recall. We stayed with family. Now, during that time when I was in Greenwood, I didn't walk to the office with those girls.

Q Really?

A Really. Yeah. Because, I didn't want to get hurt (inaudible). So, they walked to the office one way and I never talked to them about it. I also got up very early. But, in my mind, I knew that I would get not only walk to the office before they walked to the office because I didn't want to be having all those kinds of problems. So, right then and there because of, you know, certain dynamics, you kind of stay here and you stayed there. I was not into hanging out with white people. And, one time, I did, no, I didn't, like things they told you, I paid attention to, you know, Mickey and James and those boys, and Andrew was with them and they didn't pay attention, you see. We were told, don't go out in the road and don't go out at night riding in cars too much. One night, I went home after a mass meeting, I went with one of the workers to take home some elderly people from the county. And, this was after we had a demonstration in Greenwood and I had spent about six days on the county farm. So, I get in the car with Jessie and these local people, Fred (inaudible) three of us and people in the back to take them home at night. And, a car gets behind us, following us --

Q (inaudible). Those other two people, were they all black?

A Everybody -- this is an example of back doing things people tell you not to do. So we were all in the car and as the car starts following us, Jessie says the car is staying behind us. So he knows his way around so he goes down this little path, there

was a church and people were having service. And, we go in the church. He goes up to the front and he tells them who we are and what's happening. They said, here, you can use the telephone. So, they take them out and we sit down in the church while people are having service and he goes to use the phone, and he called the Justice Department or the FBI or whatever, whoever you're supposed to call that summer, he makes that call. So, we go back and they tell us go back in the church and wait. We go back in the church and after a while the police come with a big spotlight and they shine it down. And, you know, that means to come out and see what's going on. So, Jessie goes to see what's going on. And they tell us to get in the car, drop the people off and the way to go back to Greenwood and so that's what we do. And when we get to this one bridge, we get stuck by another group of police who, you know, because they're watching our movement, and they come around and they say, "Oh, okay. There's Ruth Howard in the car." I'm sitting in the middle. And I want to go under the dashboard, and, this is the police, big, old, strapping policeman, who, in the county jail he used to look at me, I remembered his name was Taylor. You're afraid, you are afraid of a lot of things happening to you. And, I remembered how he used to look at me. And, he remembered me. And, he said, "Oh, there's Ruth Howard in the car." And, I was so afraid and they told us, "Okay. We know how you're going back." And, Jessie said, yes. And, we went back to Greenwood and it was all right. I didn't go out at night any more.

Q I don't blame you.

A I didn't go, you know, I didn't do those things. If you told me, no, this was not a good idea to do this, I kind of paid as much attention as I could because -- so I did not do a lot of moving around with the white volunteers, you know, hanging out, that kind of stuff. I wouldn't. And, of course, I was not socialized with white people as I grew up so it was not familiar relationships to me. You know, I didn't know a lot of people. But, then I did get to know certain people more than other people because of their position in the organization and I was a Howard student and I moved in certain circles. So, that's how I got to know Casey a little more and I got to know Emily. I didn't know Mary very well. She --, I saw Mary at a distance. She was always a neat lady, she always had on neat skirts, a neat blouse and her hair was always in place and she did her work. She was always writing and she always had something to say. And, then there were black women also who, you know, looked at you like there's a woman (inaudible) who is, you know, older than I am and (inaudible) used to have a lot to say about certain things and she would speak and I always listened. And, I always, you know, understood something but I paid attention to (inaudible). And, there were other people, you know, Mrs. Baker who's always been there. There were some black women whose voices stood out as well as white women's voices stood out. The issues were sometimes very different. So, I don't know. I didn't have any problems.

Q Just didn't really identify with it?

A I guess I was what -- I don't know it was as much of an issue at the time as it is an issue now. I think it has become an issue how women were treated and the whole thing in retrospect.

Q So apply today's standards to that situation.

A Of course, the dynamics may have been there because the dynamics were there throughout the culture. And you may have been more sensitive to them based on who you were and what you were trying to put forth in the organization. And when you were, particularly in a position that was not a popular position at the time, and you may have been a women or you may have been a white male, then you have to -- why or what is happening to you, of course, you attribute to certain things, you're not in a power structure. Those kind of rigid people became the people who were in the office, who were controlling the resources and, you know, who knew what needed to be done and for those of us who were dreamers and poets, maybe, and, you know, (inaudible), you were boxed off. There were white people in the camp and there were black people in the camp or who identified it that way. I didn't go to the (inaudible) because by then, I was just, like I'm going through something else, I was over there with Nancy. She was a white woman and I was a black woman and Julian, he was a black man and there was another couple, they were a white couple who were interested. They didn't put any money in, though. They thought twice about it but they helped us in talking about it and shaping the idea. And we had the coffee shop.

Q What did you feel about interracial relationships within the staff?

A I didn't pay a lot of attention to it, really, you know what I mean? I knew that black guys chased white girls, you know, here's your chance to have a white girl if that's what you want. (inaudible) and, I didn't have any, I don't remember having a whole lot of feelings about it. I did not like Nancy running off with that drummer.

Q I don't blame you, she left you all by yourself.

A Well, also, he was black and he had a black girlfriend, and, you know, I felt bad about that. But, you know, I didn't like that.

Q So Nancy's white.

A Yeah, Nancy's white. Yeah, I didn't like that that much, but that was long after, you know (inaudible). I can imagine that black women would have some problems, you know, with that. I didn't have a problem because, as I told you, because my personal relationship was formed and worked well.

Q I can't imagine having a normal relationship under that, in that situation. I mean, weren't you just always in different places?

A Sometimes we were. Sometimes we were together.

Q It just worked out? Were you two unusual in that respect, or, would you characterize people as having solid relationships or sort of, I mean I know (inaudible)

A There were some solid relationships, there were some marriages and there was some marriages that continue today. There are some that don't continue today. There were marriages that have occurred after, you know, later in the years. There were

solid relationships, yeah. I can imagine if I, and I think you could to, how black women might have felt when black men were, you know, very interested in pursuing the white women. And they were interested because it was something they never experienced. It was new for any number of reasons for the women and for the men. They were young. So it would have caused some tensions, of course. It would have caused some tensions if I had taken someones boyfriend who was black.

Q Anytime you steal anyones boyfriend it's going to cause tension.

A And, really, exactly, and, so, you know, those dynamics did exist between white women and black women and I think they existed between normal black women (inaudible)

Q So, you recognized the tensions at that point, but also, while you were there or is this in retrospect?

A I recognized the tensions between my sisters, between the black women and me.

Q What do you mean?

A I recognized the tensions between southern black women and myself that might have had to do with men.

Q Because? I don't understand why.

A Well, because, you know, people protect their interest in the opposite sex.

Q You mean, because you're a southerner?

A Because I was not a southerner. I wasn't considered a southerner. I am a southerner and I feel my orientation is southern and some of the issues I have often identified with the

southern positions. I often find that I (inaudible) I can see how you perceive the obstructions.

Q How?

A Well, you know, you have, if you have something that's developing and it takes time for things to develop, but you get into a -- you get to a point where you want things to happen quickly so you want to do them as efficiently as possible. So that I can see that even as black students coming south, we could have misplaced some of the southern students that were there and doing certain pieces of work. We may have misplaced them because we may have been faster at the typewriter, we may have misplaced them because we were more aggressive in our styles. Whatever.

Q Do you attribute that to the geographical differences or the educational differences? I mean, because from coming from out of your group must have (inaudible)

A Associated with geography or education?

Q Both, I mean --

A I think it's some of all of it with the kind of person you are, too. Because, there were these some people from the north who would not have brought that on. Where others who clearly did bring it on with the type of person you are, you know, your approach to work to the level of political sophistication you came with. If you felt like you had more to offer, that you should be the project director, that you, you know, you were the theorist, do you understand?

Q Yeah. It just sounds like a lot of, sort of just talking with (inaudible) and Dorothy (inaudible) it sounds like

that's what they were trying to escape when they had to stay away from the new white left, the SDS rhetoric. Did you --

A (inaudible) I don't know anything about those people.

Q So, you didn't like --

A I didn't know anything about that. No, I never heard about SDS until I was in the south probably some months, until, you know, I was there, you know, there was talk about NAG and they knew all about it. But, I didn't know anything about it. I didn't know anything about Bill Strickland. I didn't meet Bill Strickland until I came out of the south in the north. And, I mean, people like Martha (inaudible) might have known about him, but I didn't know anything about that. (inaudible) But, there were some people, like there was a guy at Howard, Tom Carne, and all of that was happening in Washington around a group of people who were part of SNCC but I was not aware of all of that. So, I didn't quite understand your question which you were saying during your interview with Casey and some other people that they were trying to get away from that.

Q Well, one thing they said that they, well, they were involved with SNCC and SDS at the same time, so they were going back and forth. And, they felt in SDS it was all (inaudible) theorizing (inaudible) being very domineering and saying and sort of assuming control, like we were saying that south, I mean there was a northern white elite student group. And, so it just sounded like the same type of attitudes are coming down from northern to --

A Right, but I don't want to be misunderstood with that, okay. I don't want to give the idea that there was a conscious

attempt of any particular group to move into leadership and to take control and to shake things. But the events of the time and given who we all are, that that may have occurred in a way that wasn't conscious and so, for example, when I went to Greenwood, I was not politically sophisticated. I was 22, I think, when I went south. As I said, I had been in school, out of school, married and divorced. I had also had a job one year in the D.C. Government, you know, typing, before, and then I went back to school. And, always when I was a student, I worked in the public library as a part-time job. So I go to Greenwood that summer and perhaps I have certain skills that are faster than the sister who's been working in the office, Mary Lane. And, the same thing with others of us, like with Judy or with any of us. So, the national office moves to Greenwood, so you have a staff of local people who may have been doing certain work and then here we all come, we're the same people, we are, but we, in our haste - CUT OFF

So, no I was not present at the Raleigh conference in 1960. Because I graduated from high school in 1960. I did, yeah, 1960. Yeah, you know, I was always impressed with the idea of the SNCC movement as opposed to a fixed organization that gave out membership cards and that whole idea (inaudible) I don't know if you've ever heard him talk about it, very well.

Q I've read stuff about him.

A Yeah, the early formation of how they intended to be and to work themselves out of a job and just sort of. I was not the director of voter registration in Greenwood.

Q You weren't?

A No.

Q I don't know where I got that from.

A I don't either, but, no, I was not. Stokely was. I think he was. No, he was the director of the district, I don't know, of the second congressional district.

Q So, what did you do there?

A That summer, I collected a lot of signatures for the MFDP party and did a lot of talking and I went down to work in the freedom schools, but I really never worked in a freedom school. I worked, did more voter registration work. And, yeah, that's pretty much what I did. So, the question about SDS and SNCC,

especially the women, so, you know. But, I would say this in terms of my background. I came from a background where women always had a role that was very clearly defined in terms of being able to make decisions. Like, my mother was, she made a lot of decisions in our house and my grandparents and my aunts, they all worked side by side with their husbands on the farm. There was equal equality in terms of that kind of stuff. And, then in our Baptist church, of course, the ministers had always been men and now, recent -- I grew up in a Baptist church because my parents were very active and my father was the deacon. But there were always women's organizations and those women's organizations were always very strong. So, I was taking a lot of that color (inaudible)

Doris is this very powerful woman, and, of course, Ms. Baker was (inaudible) and there were women who were in MFDP, they were all women except for (inaudible)

Q They had a lot of powerful (inaudible)

A And, then in terms of the slick resources, Cynthia Washington was a black woman, she came down with the Howard group. She got a truck, she got a car, they had all those new Plymouths, she got one. And, Mary (inaudible) was pretty much ahead of her own. So, I think that the black women may have not experienced some things that maybe white women were experiencing or felt sensitive about. And, they were the kind of things that may have gone on with the brothers because (inaudible) I am certainly more sensitive to, you know, male dominance and issues now than I used

to be. Now I am aware and I pick up on things fast but at that time, I was not (inaudible)

Q (inaudible)

A That SDS (inaudible)

Q (inaudible)

A (inaudible) so I don't have the sense of (inaudible) and just from where I came in and what I saw, I surely did change after '64 from what (inaudible) it was a very painful experience.

Q Waveland?

A Yeah, Waveland. It was hard.

Q Why was it so painful?

A Well, because people were struggling so much with who they were as a group and what kind of work needed to be done. And, direction, and there were such power dynamics going on.

Q You once (inaudible)

A No, that's the tape at Bates conference and I didn't go to that. I came to New York in 1967 in February. And, I left Atlanta in 1966 and I went to work at Lincoln University with Chuck Hamilton and Stokely, they were going to write this book. And, of course, you know, I was going to be a part of, you know, the process. They really needed me there to type the book. They would go upstairs and talk about how you could cut out -- they would go upstairs in Chuck's office in his attic office and talk when stuff came to them.

Q And, you would be downstairs typing?

A No. I wouldn't be downstairs typing, I would be downstairs with Donna and Valerie and (inaudible), you know, it

was a good period for me. And, I met a (inaudible) it was like a reconnecting of things (inaudible)

So, they finished the book and then Chuck went to the University of Chicago. I was really disappointed. And, then I came to New York.

Q Why were you disappointed?

A Well, because I was to be there for a whole year and it was just a semester. I didn't know, you know, when I left Atlanta I didn't know he was going to get ready to leave. So when he left that was my job because I was working for him.

Q So, did you go back to Howard?

A No, I never want back to Howard. I got, I came to New York -- I did go back for one semester to the Art Department but that didn't work out. So, I finished my undergraduate work at Pratt Institute here. I got involved in clay and that gave me an interest. And, so I made pots. I finished my undergraduate degree and then I went to work for an art institution teaching and I did a Masters at Teachers College and that's how I got into education. I miss working with clay, since I've been teaching I don't do anything with that so the energy is different. So, I do the patchwork stuff because (inaudible) who is (inaudible)'s mother and over the years I'd go visit her and she makes quilts so I got into quilting and she had just got back from New York City. She came here 19 -- right after the boys were killed. (inaudible) so she lived in the projects. They found a place in the projects.

Q Where?

A (inaudible) Avenue. And, she was here for 30 years and she just left, she got a house in New Jersey. I miss her. She's out of the City. (inaudible)

But, when I went south, I made dresses to wear to church because I knew the mass meetings were held at church. And, I made about four dresses and that whole summer -- I didn't wear pants when I went to church because I grew up in the church so I didn't feel comfortable going in the church. That later changed as time went on. So I had these, you know, ideas about how I was to carry myself that came from my background. Like, I never considered to live in the Freedom House. I stayed with the family.

Q And, what was all that trouble you were talking about with living in a Freedom House?

A Well, I can imagine that with living in the Freedom House, people coming and going all the time. And, sometimes people might not know boundaries, they might impose on certain boundaries, that kind of thing. For me, it was not a situation, I mean, you know, like my sisters, their husbands had to come ask my father to get married. You know, you just didn't, you know you didn't move out of your house and get an apartment. So, I brought all of that with me that summer. So, it seemed appropriate for me to stay with a family so I stayed with a family. And, I stayed with a family in most places I went (inaudible) Freedom House in Wilcox County (inaudible) I always stayed with a family. And, I must say, because it had gotten to a point where I didn't feel like I was being productive and I didn't feel comfortable, I felt alienated because I was not, I didn't see what was happening any

more and I felt like we had gotten to a point where we spent more time talking to each other than to people outside of our community.

Q Was your relationship with, what was his name?

A Courtland --

Q (inaudible)

A No, my relationship with him had changed. While I was still in the Atlanta office it had changed. He was in Alabama and I was in Atlanta. But, I would come out of the field and coming into the Atlanta office was a place I could work to provide some kind of service and relationship. But, I had clearly come away from working out in the communities and doing that kind of work. Because, I didn't understand how to do that any more and where that was going. So, then, you know, I did the coffee shop. But, I was still called to things, like when Sammy Young was killed in Alabama, I had the coffee shop and it hurt and I had to go there. You know, how we would all, when something like that happens, you people would gravitate, move to that, you know. And, so, I got a ride with someone, I remember that. And, I just went down there and I stood around and I looked and I didn't know what was going on because I was in the coffee shop. And, when I went over to open the coffee shop, I made it very clear that I didn't want a lot of people from SNCC coming over here. Because I didn't want it to be a hang-out where you come and talk about politics. We wanted it a place for students to come and for other people and to express some of the ideas through poetry, music, you know --

Q So, do you think one of the reasons -- I don't know, I mean SNCC used to be this organization run by students and all of a sudden, like, as you said, it changed from the Student Voice to "The Voice", you don't want SNCC people hanging out at the coffee shop because you want students with new ideas and fresh ideas. So, do you think that was --

A We became -- yeah, well, you know, like we were students but you get out of school and you --

Q All right. So, I don't know, how much do you think, how much do you think SNCC was, at that point, was developing new ideas and new leaders from the local communities or new students and how much do you think it was just focusing on the ideas of the staff?

A I don't know how to put that in how much, but you weren't supposed to stay very long and people tended sometimes to stay longer than they should have. And, I don't know. How do you stay fresh? How do I stay open and inclusive? So, I guess that was one way was just to say, well, we're going to throw out this group of people and we're going to --

Q Well, wasn't the whole idea behind SNCC going into the communities and developing leadership from within, not saying, okay we're here to save you?

A Yeah, that was the idea. But, I don't think anybody really consciously said we're not about that any more.

Q Right. But, it seemed sort of that it became really a talent focus.

A It became, yeah. And, I guess if that happened it caused some circumstances that occurred from outside of the organization in terms of the country and the politics and then circumstances within that occurred. And, I can clearly remember when the, coming back, going to meetings out at (inaudible) and the discussion was whether or not we would participate in some of the programs that were coming down the pike, the Great Society programs and I can remember Rob talking about, well, there's a lot of money coming into the state and it's going to affect what we're doing because it's going to mean jobs and it's going to do this and it's going to do that and I don't know if anybody said this but it's going to maybe clot some of our work efforts. And what is our relationship going to be to these projects. Headstart was coming and some of the other things.

Q Federally funded?

A Uh-huh, federally funded. And, this meeting was out of (inaudible) and one of the science halls, so you go down in the front where you have the big table with the sink, okay, so you had people down there that were sitting in these seats in a science hall and we were discussing that and some people were expressing an interest in working with some of the programs they saw this a way to make some changes and others were saying that we should not, and I particularly remember this student, Claude Weaver, who was from the north, and he talked about the idea that SNCC was unique to him because it was a place where you shaped ideas, you made your own decisions and it was like no other kind of work

effort he'd ever been involved in. You know, you're just so clear about it. And, I really felt, you know, that's it. And, I (inaudible) I never worked in a poverty program, never worked in any poverty program.

Q How did you feel about that?

A Because, at that meeting, I identified with the people who said, no, we don't work with that.

Q Why, because it was controlling? Because the money was coming from the federal government?

A Yes, that and because the work was not going to solve problems that we needed to solve. It was going to provide jobs for certain people. I just didn't, I saw this as, you know, as an effort (inaudible) I guess I didn't identify with that.

Q Because they were educationally oriented like Headstart?

A No, because it was just money coming from the government from outside to sit you down to stop all these efforts.

Q So, you didn't like the idea of being dependent on these moneys (inaudible)?

A Yes, I guess, something like that.

Q That outweighed whatever benefit was going to come out of it?

A I didn't know what the benefit was. I don't think any of us knew what the benefit was. We're hearing what the benefit was supposed to be and it was articulated by Lyndon Johnson, articulated by these people who had sent us home without two seats, here they come with this money to fund an anti-poverty program. I mean, you know, what is this? And a lot happened as a

result of that anti-poverty money coming into communities. Certain kinds of organizations that existed, doing certain kinds of work, stopped doing certain things.

Q Like what?

A Well, you know, things that were organized like maybe in churches and community centers, basketball teams, music groups, things that people did for their youngsters and for their communities. Now you have a group of people who were supposed to be paid to do this work. And you also have people who need things, you know, you bring money into impoverished places then people have to fight for that money, and who gets it? Do the people who pay the price get it or do to people who have the education get it?

Q So it's a big class issue.

A It becomes a class issue, doesn't it. I mean, some class issues develop out of all of these things.

Q Yes.

A It's complicated. So the influx of those programs and those moneys, I mean, good things, I'm sure came out of it, I know they did, but also some other issues came out of it. So some people did make (inaudible) some people did not. So that went on also. That was right at the end of '64. That was prior to the (inaudible)

Q Yeah, I interviewed someone who went (inaudible)

A And, then there were the positions that we took against, against the war. And, there was the positions that we took against the -- to support the Palestinian people.

Q All these issues that are coming up at this point, do you think they are distracting?

A Yeah, you start talking about that and you start talking about your support base. What's your support base --

Q Narrows.

A -- narrows.

Q Why do you think -- I mean, I guess you can't avoid talking about those issues at that time, but you just felt it was hard to stay focused?

A Well, no, it wasn't hard to stay focused. It's the world, all of these things are related. I told you about Jack (inaudible) and the research he did. We were not just country bumpkins either.

Q Oh, I know.

A We were not, you know, we were naive and stuff, but we were getting a lot of information on a lot of things.

Q I guess I just can't imagine all those things going on at once. I'm trying to sort them out.

A And it was so fast. When you think about all that happened in such a short period of time. It's mind boggling.

Q See, I think that's why people in my generation that are sort of -- I think they love studying and learning about that time period because they almost feel like nothing's going on now. Like they don't know what to do.

A See, when I came to New York in the war effort, I wasn't really deeply involved in the war effort here. I mean, I went to demonstrations and marches and stuff, but I know I was doing a lot

of potting at Teacher's College and I remember the women who used to be in the studio sometimes, they'd be taking off going to things, you know. I wouldn't be going. I would be going to a lot of things in the early 60's, the late 60's, but through the 70's, during that period, I didn't go to a lot of, I mean I stayed in touch, but I wasn't out there in the movement against the war effort. I needed to try to heal myself.

Q Yeah, that's, most women I talk to it seems like, all of them, definitely felt they needed a good deal of time to heal themselves just because of --

A And it didn't have to do with male issues and male dominance. It just had to do with, you know, (inaudible) intensity of what you had been involved in and, you know some disappointments that you may have experienced as a result of it. And, wondering if you had done enough and then there was also guilt.

Q Guilt about?

A Well, sometimes guilt about the fact that you, you know, that you walked away. Guilt that you could leave the situation and come back to where you are and pick up your life when other people could not because you were an outsider. And, you know, sadness because of people's whose lives were lost, you know, I felt that a long time. That was not as pronounced as much, you know, and then after you grow up and you see how things are and you begin to compare your grief to the grief of the world and what other people lose and you get a sense of balance on it.