An Oral History with

Sandra Adickes

Biography

Dr. Sandra Adickes was born in New York City on July 14, 1933. She earned a B.A. in English from Douglass College in New Brunswick, New Jersey; an M.A. in English education from Hunter College of the City University of New York; and a doctorate in English and American literature at New York University. In 1960, Dr. Adickes began teaching public school in Harlem in New York City. In 1963, Dr. Adickes was an English teacher in an East Harlem high school. That summer, through a project sponsored by the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), Dr. Adickes got involved in freedom school efforts in Prince Edward County, Virginia, where she taught African-Americans whose public schools the county had closed when the Brown v. the Board of Education decision mandated integration in 1954.

During that summer of 1963, Ivanhoe Donaldson, an organizer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC], recruited Dr. Adickes to teach in freedom schools in Mississippi during the summer of 1964--a time that has come to be known as Freedom Summer. The Mississippi freedom schools were designed to challenge the inequities of Mississippi's segregated school system by providing an academic curriculum that included African-American literature and history. Dr. Adickes lobbied the UFT for sponsorship of the Mississippi Freedom Summer freedom schools; she raised funds; she persuaded publishers to contribute books; and she recruited teachers. During Mississippi's Freedom Summer, Dr. Adickes was a teacher at the freedom school in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, for a six-week session. On the last day of class, August 14, 1964, Dr. Adickes accompanied some of her students in an effort to integrate Hattiesburg's public library.

After leaving a Kress store where a waitress had refused to serve her because she was a white woman accompanying African-Americans, Dr. Adickes was arrested and charged with vagrancy. Dr. Adickes and her attorney, the Honorable Eleanor Piel, sued Kress for denying Dr. Adickes' civil rights and conspiring in her arrest. The case, Adickes v. Kress, went all the way to the United States Supreme Court, and, in 1970, resulted in a decision in Dr. Adickes favor, plus a cash settlement. Dr. Adickes contributed the cash settlement to the Southern Conference Education Fund, which was dispersed for education to people who had been active in the civil rights movement. Dr. Adickes has continued her activism through the anti-war movement, the women's liberation movement, and confronting racism, sexism, and homophobia in the classroom, advising her students: "The issues we addressed continue to divide our society; don't romanticize, organize."

Topics Discussed

Childhood
Early teaching career in Harlem
Working as a checker in early years of activism
Prince Edward County, Virginia, freedom school in 1963
SNCC organizer Ivanhoe Donaldson recruits for Freedom Summer
Al Shanker and the United Federation of Teachers
Raising funds
Books donated from publishing houses
Reverend Ponder offers church for freedom school
Methodism
Ivanhoe Donaldson remembered
Recruiting teachers for Freedom Summer
Orientation to Freedom Summer at LeMoyne College, Memphis
First day in Mississippi--Philadelphia, Mississippi
First day in Hattiesburg, Mississippi
Vernon Dahmer
Host Mrs. Addie Mae Jackson
Sexual subcontext of Freedom Summer
First freedom school day in Hattiesburg, July 6, 1964
The "black" library
The students
Adult education
Newsletter, "Freedom News"
Attempt to integrate the Hattiesburg Public Library
White Citizens' Council
Kress lunch counter
Arrest
National Lawyers' Guild
Tactical nonviolence
Eleanor Jackson Piel
The Women's Movement
Staughton Lynd
Significant participation of the clergy

Transcript

This interview is for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Dr. Sandra Adickes, civil rights activist and retired university professor. The interview is being recorded at The University of Southern Mississippi, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, on October 21, 1999. The interviewer is Stephanie Scull Millet.

Millet: This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. This interview is with Dr. Sandra Adickes, and it is taking place on October 21, 1999. The

interviewer is Stephanie Scull Millet. And, first, I'd like to thank you, Dr. Adickes, for taking time to talk with me today. And just get a little bit of background information, which is what we usually do, and ask you when and where you were born.

Adickes: I was born in the Bronx, New York, on July 14, 1933.

Millet: When and where have you attended school?

Adickes: Well, I attended school in the Bronx until the eighth grade, when my family moved to Asbury Park, New Jersey. I went to high school there, and after that I went to Douglass College. Then I--. Well, that completed my education up till that point.

Millet: And where is Douglass College?

Adickes: It's in New Brunswick, New Jersey, near where I live now.

Millet: What did you study?

Adickes: I was an English major.

Millet: So, your undergraduate degree was a B.A. in English?

Adickes: That's right.

Millet: And did you later acquire advanced degrees?

Adickes: Oh, yes. Later, I acquired an M.A. in English education from Hunter College of the City University of New York, and then still later, I earned a doctorate in English and American literature at New York University.

Millet: Let me just ask you a little bit about your parents. And, I guess, the reason that I find out about people's parents, especially in regard to the civil rights movement, is I'm always curious if people had to step outside the support of family in order to be involved in civil rights. Some people do. Some people get a lot of support from their families. And I think it's of historical importance, you know, to look back at great things people have done and see if they had to have enough courage to really be, you know, in, I guess, opposition to their family support. So, I'd like to know who were your parents, and what did your mother and father do as you were growing up?

Adickes: My father was August Adickes. And, my mother was Edythe Oberschlake Adickes, both of them children of German immigrants except my mother's mother had been born here. But they were from a much larger community of German-Americans, German-born people in New York City that has been completely dispersed except maybe for small sections in Brooklyn and part of the Bronx. And then, there used to be, I think that's also gone, too, a community in Yorkville, Manhattan, but I think all those communities have died out. And Germans have, you know, just dispersed. They are not a significant population in New York any longer. I was an adult. I wasn't a student when I participated, so that I had been on my own for quite some time, and the decision was not made in--. I didn't consult my parents when I made the decision. I think my mother was somewhat more in favor than my father. Neither of them expressed opposition, I think, knowing that it was probably pointless. But I think my mother, who was generally the more socially concerned parent, my mother understood and was sympathetic. Concerned for me, but understood why I was participating in it. My father didn't say much, but he certainly didn't express support, but he didn't express opposition.

Millet: So, he was, maybe, value neutral about it.

Adickes: Yes.

Millet: Do you have any siblings?

Adickes: Yes, I have a sister. It's her birthday today, in fact. She's two years and three months younger than I am.

Millet: Happy birthday to your sister. Would you mind just telling us--?

Adickes: Joanne Adickes Walker.

Millet: All right. And, how old were you when you participated in Freedom Summer 1964?

Adickes: I was thirty-one.

Millet: Thirty-one. You had been teaching a while, and I think I'm correct in remembering that you had taught in Harlem.

Adickes: That's right. I was teaching.

Millet: How did you reach that decision to--? See, that seems a little unusual to me that [you] would do that. It seems like, maybe, you were already thinking in terms of being of service in education.

Adickes: Well, teaching in Harlem was simply: that's where the job was; that's where I went. But I certainly became aware of the situation of my students in New York City. And the civil rights movement was not active. I would say to my students, for example, "Well, why don't you think about going to City College?" That was a branch of City University, and at the time, there was no tuition charge. They could have gone to college free, because for about 137 years that was a tradition. The first branch of City University was City College; later there was Hunter. And later there were others. And until nineteen sixty--I'm not sure when it stopped: 1968 or 1970--there was no tuition. You could go to college free. And that's why, I mean, Supreme Court justices, there are so many significant academics and achievers in this society who got their degrees at City College, for example. And City College is right in Harlem, but they had no models. There was nothing. I could not influence them. They would have to hear that from a black person who had gone to City College and said, "Hey, why don't you go?" Later, they did. Later, there was open enrollment, and students from the schools came in, but they came in underprepared. And not having come from homes where there was the leisure to support an intellectual life, they were not able to deal with the challenges in many cases, and of course, that provided a backlash. And now of course, there is no longer open enrollment. There are efforts to cut back on all the remedial programs that were established to bring these students up to speed in their skills. That struggle is still going on. Now, it's being headed by a Puerto Rican member of the Board of Regents of City University in New York which is somewhat ironic, certainly, in the eyes of many of the students involved. So, that struggle is still going on. Tuition is charged. It's still a bargain, but that was such a great beacon. You know, there was the torch of the Statue of Liberty, and then, there was City College and Hunter College and City University, where you could go and study and get a degree and lead a different life.

Millet: You might have to work part-time to support yourself, but you didn't have the burden--.

Adickes: Most of them did. Most of the students did work, but still, I mean, they had car fare; they had

living expenses; they had books to buy. But that you get your tuition, that you didn't have to pay tuition. I think that's a terrible loss, and a terrible social loss.

Millet: You refer to open enrollment. I don't know what that is.

Adickes: That is the situation that enabled any graduate of a New York City high school to go into college. Now, maybe not a senior college, a four-year college, but they could go into a two-year college.

Millet: So, it didn't depend on their grade-point average?

Adickes: On their grade-point average, yes.

Millet: Or their score on a standardized test like the ACT or the SAT?

Adickes: Yeah. Right.

Millet: That was a great opportunity. I wish that were true in every state in the United States today.

Adickes: Well, it used to be. I mean the land grant colleges, that was what they were designed for. Of course, originally, they were designed to educate farmers to be better farmers and women to be teachers, but that was a tradition. That's why state universities are still way below the costs of private institutions.

Millet: Right. So, what year did you begin teaching?

Adickes: Nineteen sixty.

Millet: Were you right out of college?

Adickes: No. No, I had been out a number of years doing other kinds of work.

Millet: What did you do in those intervening years?

Adickes: Oh, I was a secretary mostly, in those years. I graduated at a time when there were "help wanted, male" and "help wanted, female" jobs. There was clear--. I mean, discrimination was legal, and I remember in college, my senior year, I went into New York City with a close friend who is now an outstanding Shakespeare scholar, and we went looking for jobs, and we went into one employment agency and blithely, when they said--. We filled out these applications, you know: "Can you type?" Well, hardly, you know. What, thirty words per minute or something like that. And, can you take shorthand? And the owner or manager of this agency followed us into the hall, screaming at us, "You liberal arts majors are all alike! You think you can get a job without knowing how to type and take shorthand! Well, you're crazy!" And, I found, you know, when I did get out in the working world, well, there was very little I could do. And it was really depressing. And finally, teaching--. I didn't want to be a teacher. Teaching was the only thing that made sense because unless you had a mentor or someone who could get you--. Someone you were connected to, a family friend who could get you a decent job, there was very little you could do. It was really very tough.

Millet: That was nineteen six--?

Adickes: Well, this was in the late fifties. And 1960. Well, it was still the same in the sixties, you know, in the early sixties, when I went into teaching. And it certainly didn't seem like a waste of time. I realized what I was doing meant something to other people.

Millet: Right.

Adickes: And I liked it. I got to like it. I wasn't very good at first, but I got to like it and care about my students.

Millet: OK. So, you had worked as a secretary, and that was frustrating. And so you thought about teaching and did teaching, went where the job was, and got concerned about your African-American students and the opportunities for them.

Adickes: Yeah, and there were some things going on in New York at the time. I mean, all this, my eyes were opened to it. You know, I had never realized, or I had just never been aware of what there was to see. And it was through my students and their situation that I became aware of the terrible inequity in the society, based on, among many things, race. And there were certain organizations. There was activism; there was picketing. I was a checker, for example. I would go out with a black woman and we would go look at apartments for rent, and if she would go and be told that, no, it's been taken. And I would go in, and then they would say, "Oh, yes. You can get this apartment." I was doing things like that in a mild way. And then, I really got involved in freedom school efforts in 1963 through a project sponsored by the United Federation of Teachers, which is Local Two of the American Federation of Teachers in New York City. It is a more militant union than the National Education Association, and they sponsored--. There was, under the leadership of one of the union officers, Richard Parrish, there was a project established in Prince Edward County, Virginia, where the public schools had been closed after the Brown versus Board of Education decision, and--.

Millet: Which was 1954?

Adickes: Nineteen fifty-four. And that's when they set up private academies for white students, and the black students, unless they had relatives in other parts of the South, or other parts of the region, they were shut out of the schools. So, there was a Freedom School project in Prince Edward County, Virginia, where New York teachers went down. We boarded at homes in the black community, and taught just as we did the following summer. We taught in churches or whatever buildings we could use, and we found that the kids who had been shut out of school, who were now nine, ten, who had been out of school really were having--. The penalty on them was so much greater than the kids who had not been shut out of school, because they were so aware of what they did not know. It was awful. It was horrible. And after the summer--. It was just a summer program.

Millet: Which summer?

Adickes: This was 1963. I'm not sure what happened afterward in Prince Edward County. I think the schools were eventually opened, but I was very much aware of how those kids had been shut out of school and suffered.

Millet: Since 1954, until sixty-three, they had no schooling?

Adickes: Right, no schools. Unless they could go elsewhere. Unless they had family who they could stay with and--.

Millet: In another state, in another county.

Adickes: Another state. Yeah. It was horrible! It was horrible. And while I was in Prince Edward County, a friend of mine, Norma Becker, and I were contacted by people from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating

Committee [SNCC], and we, I remember, we met on the front--. We were boarding in homes, and our evenings were spent on front porches, and one evening on the front porch, Ivanhoe Donaldson, a SNCC organizer, spoke to us about the freedom schools, or about the Freedom Summer. They were planning this Freedom Summer: voter registration, a voter registration project and another component they wanted to include was education, schools. So, there were some very intense conversations about that, and Norma and I were committed to it by the end of the summer. And then over the subsequent months, we met with people from SNCC and then later CORE, and to a lesser extent the NAACP. They formed that Council of Federated Organizations which was right here in Hattiesburg.

Millet: COFO.

Adickes: And, we had some training sessions. We talked about pedagogy, and then--. Oh, Norma and I got active with the union. We wanted union sponsorship, and we weren't so sure how the leadership would react, but--.

Millet: The leadership of?

Adickes: Of the union, of the local. That was Al Shanker and the human relations committee of the union, and we went and gave a presentation. Well, it was like: "OK." There was a great deal of support, and that continued. We raised funds. And this information I got I had to check with Norma about, you know, all the things we did. We got, as I said, great support from the leadership of the union, and we printed up a statement. And we circulated it in schools. That's how we raised money. And we contacted other people, all our friends in the schools. Through the human relations committee--they sponsored us--we were able to recruit teachers. We took about thirty-three teachers down from New York City.

Millet: When you say that you recruited in schools, schools were still pretty much segregated at that time? Were they? I guess that's my question.

Adickes: Yes, they were.

Millet: So, were you recruiting from both white and black schools?

Adickes: Oh, yes. Most of the teachers who volunteered were white teachers. I mean, they were liberal, progressive teachers. They were people who thought as we did. You know, this is something terrible that's going on, and this is one way we can stop it. Other unions contributed money to the freedom schools. We were able to--. I don't know exactly how much money we raised.

Millet: Do you know a ballpark figure?

Adickes: No, I should have asked Norma that. Norma would know that.

Millet: It doesn't really matter. What other unions?

Adickes: I'm not sure about that, either. Probably AFSCME, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. The organizers from our union. There were three men who were very active in the union: John O'Neill, David Selden, and the editor of the union newspaper, Ted Bleecker. They contributed a day's salary. So, we had a lot of support. And people were very forthcoming. I mean, it was really a very well supported project. And, oh, we were able to rent cars. That was one of the things we were able to do, rent cars, when we were down here. And on UFT letterhead, we sent out letters to businesses and corporations and publications, and we got contributions and from the publishing industry, and I can't

identify any particular publisher, because it was the workers in these publishing houses that really spent the money to send the books. We got shiploads of books. I mean it was--.

The kids will probably tell--. Or, kids! (Laughter.) The students will probably talk about the books they got, because it was just like Christmas when I could open those boxes of books and say, "Here. Here. Here, Go Tell It on the Mountain. Here, Native Son." And it was wonderful. And it was just great. What was so significant to them was that in their own segregated schools, Hattiesburg at that time was a segregated system. And the students were quite bitter about the inequities. Their books, when they would get their textbooks, they were old textbooks, and they would open up, and there would be a label filled with the names of the students in the white schools who were no longer using this text. They got cast-offs. So, having their own brand new books and books by and about black people. I mean, it was just wonderful.

So, you wondered how we chose the places where we established freedom schools.

Millet: Mm-hm.

Adickes: Well, Norma and I, in the spring before the summer, came down here and went to Jackson. We went to the COFO office in Jackson and inspected sites, and the sites were chosen based on the willingness of people in the communities to open them. For example, Reverend Ponder here in Hattiesburg was the first one I think, and I'm not sure if it's in the state, but among the first to offer his church as a place where we could have a freedom school.

Millet: A very important gesture.

Adickes: Yes. And then, I didn't teach at St. John's. I taught at Priest Creek. So, other ministers followed, and Hattiesburg had--. I'm not even sure how many freedom schools they had.

Millet: I'm not, either.

Adickes: But they had more than quite a few other places. Hattiesburg was really an important center of that movement, and I think that's why the changes that have taken place in Hattiesburg are so much greater than other places in the state.

Millet: Very stark, when you compare them.

Adickes: Yeah. There was leadership here in the black community. And there was also a certain amount of economic wealth.

Millet: In the black community?

Adickes: In the black community.

Millet: For example, Vernon Dahmer. I think [he] is an example.

Adickes: Yes. Not wealth, you know, Bill Gates kind of wealth, but certainly people had wherewithal, and that enabled them to speak out and have independence. Also, they had leadership positions, like, Victoria Gray Adams and others in the community. They were recognized leaders, so there was that base of support that had not been developed elsewhere in the state. So, that's why Hattiesburg was, for me, such a great experience.

Millet: Sounds like fertile ground.

Adickes: Yeah. It was. You knew. And then the kids. I mean, Jimmella Stokes had been arrested. She had been part of that great voter registration drive in Hattiesburg.

Millet: And how old was she?

Adickes: Oh, I don't know. About fifteen.

Millet: Young.

Adickes: She was very young, and scared her mother because she refused to say, "Ma'am," to the person who was denying her--I forget what it was. But she was just rebellious and went to jail. She was--.

Millet: Rebellious and courageous.

Adickes: Very. Yes.

Millet: I think it would take a lot of courage to do that. Let me back up just a little bit, and ask you if you think there was anything in particular in your upbringing or your background that contributed to your being predisposed towards this work.

Adickes: Yeah, I was asked that question, oh, a number of years ago. You know. Where do your politics originate? And when I thought, I thought, "Well, it's not Marxism; it's Methodism." And it was religion. And that was true of quite a few people. I mean, yes, black people came from the churches, but white women, and there were a number of ministers' daughters who were active in the civil rights movement. Mary King wrote about this. She was a Methodist minister's daughter.

Millet: Mary King.

Adickes: Yeah. And having been brought up in this faith, and having found this faith significant, one could not bear the contradictions. If this is what you believe, then this is what you must do. And particularly in the Methodist Church at that time, the Methodist Church was segregated. That's the basis for that famous line, "The most segregated time in America is Sunday at 11 a.m." I think Martin Luther King said that. And, these women and I found that contradiction unbearable. Social justice was an important tenet in Methodism from the very beginning. Not that every Methodist believes that. There was also a split in the Methodist church from the very beginning which continues today, particularly now on the issue of homosexuality. The big Methodist church still calls it a sin, and yet there are many of us who think, you know, "This is absurd and completely unchristian." So, it was my religious upbringing that had a great deal to do with my commitment to this.

Millet: That's interesting. In Terror in the Night, there are very right-wing Christians who use Christianity to justify segregation. So, people, I think, can kind of pick and choose the things that they find in their religious philosophies. But, I agree, that Christianity, to me, seems to fly in the face of segregation. It just doesn't make sense to me, at all. And I just wondered if you might have a few words on Ivanhoe Donaldson. It's interesting to me that in our history books we know a lot about who did what during certain times, but I'm interested in, sort of, the human aspect of: what was he like? What do you remember about him? What do you remember about your initial meeting with him?

Adickes: Well, because I had subsequent meetings with him, too. I remember him as a very sincere person, a very courageous person, not a ranter. He was always soft-spoken. And someone whose

intelligence I respected. I remember, I don't know what the issue was, but I remember once we were talking. We spent all night talking about--. We were working out some disagreement, and I have no idea what it was. This was later. This was not during the summer of sixty-three; this was the summer some time when we were preparing to go to Mississippi. We talked about--. We disagreed. I mean, it wasn't just Ivanhoe and me; there were other people involved in this discussion where we just talked and talked and talked until we reached some kind of agreement. Where we moved, both of us, both sides moved somewhat. And that was part of his philosophy, you know. Dialogue. Norma's husband is a filmmaker. Her ex-husband is a filmmaker. He's made some important films. Harold Becker. And he made a documentary about Ivanhoe. I don't know if it's still available. If it's available, it's worth looking at because Ivanhoe was someone you'd look at and say, "Yes, this is a young man of great promise." And that's why what happened later is so disappointing. The fact that he was dishonest, took money.

Millet: And what is that all about? I didn't know about that.

Adickes: I have no idea. He was close to people. There were people who got power in Washington, D.C., in the city of Washington. And Ivanhoe had a position where he had access to money, and took it.

Millet: I see.

Adickes: Went to prison.

Millet: Scandal. Embezzlement.

Adickes: Yeah, and I don't know what he's doing now.

Millet: I guess there's always the possibility that he didn't really do it. People do get set up.

Adickes: No, I think so.

Millet: You think he really did it.

Adickes: Yeah, I think he did.

Millet: And tell me again, please, the first name of Norma's ex-husband.

Adickes: Harold Becker.

Millet: Harold Becker. OK. So, I'm pretty sure I know the answer to this, but for the record, did you participate in the training in Oxford, Ohio at Western College for Women?

Adickes: No.

Millet: And we've talked about the United Federation of Teachers and lobbying them which really just amounted to asking them, and they said, "Yes, we would like to do that." And why were they interested in the education of African-Americans in Mississippi?

Adickes: Well, they were people of conscience aware of the situation in New York City and elsewhere and very pleased to take the opportunity to make some kind of commitment. Ted Bleecker is married to an African-American woman, and this was before, I think--. I don't think they had children then, but they have at least two children, grown, adults now. So, he had a special--. Not that he wouldn't have anyway, but these were people, actually idealistic, decent, progressive people.

Millet: Who were willing to act on what they believed.

Adickes: Yes.

Millet: And so, to recruit teachers, you wrote letters?

Adickes: Yeah, and through the union newspaper. And we had organizational meetings.

Millet: Did you make presentations? Did you travel?

Adickes: No. I mean, this was New York City. We would just say, "Oh, we're going to meet." Arrange a meeting place and ask people to come and they did. And then we had some--. I'm not sure what kind of preparation we had before we left New York, but then we had training, too, at LeMoyne College in Memphis.

Millet: Hold that thought. We're getting right close to the end of this tape.

(End of tape one, side one. The interview continues on tape one, side two.)

Millet: So, you in July, early July of sixty-four, you and the other members of the New York teachers contingent traveled to Memphis and joined with other volunteers there for your orientation to Freedom Summer. Tell me about that experience.

Adickes: I remember Ivanhoe was there, and we did role-playing. The emphasis was on how to respond nonviolently in a situation. So, we role-played through a lot of situations where Ivanhoe and other African-American organizers played the role of sheriff. It was, I think, a particularly cathartic experience for them, you know, kind of bullying each other around. (Laughter.) And how to resist. How to protect ourselves if attacked physically. How to respond in situations if we were stopped on the road, for example. And that's what I remember mostly about it: the role-playing.

And I remember that was, while we were there, that's when it was learned that the three civil rights workers were missing, and we knew immediately that they were dead. And someone, I remember one of the presenters, one of the leaders of that training session had worked with Mickey Schwerner and was just devastated by the news.

Millet: Right.

Adickes: And I think, you know, we were all concerned, but I don't think anybody--. Nobody left as a result of that. Nobody said, "Oh, I'm going home. I want to get out of here." Nobody left.

Millet: Were people afraid and faced their fears?

Adickes: Yes.

Millet: Do you think anybody was just in denial, "Oh, it won't happen to me."?

Adickes: No, no. My game was to imagine all the possible ways I could get killed. (Laughter.) And if I could deal with my nightmares, then I could probably deal with a dangerous situation if it came up. And in

fact, that is exactly what happened. (Laughter.)

Millet: Wow. I want to hear about those dangerous situations. But just trying to stay a little bit--. I tried to stay kind of, maybe, in chronological order when I was thinking of these. So, people were not hopeful, then, that the three would be found?

Adickes: No, we knew that they were dead.

Millet: I remember reading of some other people's experiences around that, and one man who wanted to remain anonymous who was interviewed in--. I don't know. Some town in Mississippi [that] I can't remember. [He] said that after several hours of not hearing from them, they knew that--. It would have been good if they had heard that [the three civil rights workers] were in jail, even though [the three] would probably be beaten and mistreated there; at least they would know [the three of them] were alive. But after silence for maybe, I don't know, five hours or something like that, they knew they were [dead]. And it's just particularly heart-breaking, I think, because Jack Nelson talks about Rabbi Schlager remembering Mickey Schwerner as like an Old Testament prophet who was going for justice. He was going for human dignity. And Rabbi Schlager says, "I admired his courage. He never wavered. He never changed his course. He dismissed the idea of being killed. He never dealt with negatives. He showed a spiritual stubbornness for justice and human dignity." And, you know, he's just a person I wish I could have met. I wish he could have lived and shared his life with us through the years. Well, tell me about your arrival in Mississippi. Your first stop was a lunch stop in Philadelphia?

Adickes: Right.

Millet: What was that like? Were you a mixed group of whites and African-Americans?

Adickes: No. Not all the teachers who were recruited went to the same place. I came down with about six other teachers who were going to Hattiesburg. We left Memphis and we stopped in Philadelphia. Oh. I remember, it was the Fourth of July, and I remember on the way down, I could see no backyard barbecues. I mean, there was just no--. It was like an ordinary day. This was not like a holiday at all, and then the same was true when we got to Philadelphia, and I knew, well, "Ah. This is the city." There were the signs still, "colored bathrooms," "white bathrooms," and so forth, "by order of the police of Philadelphia." And I knew that this was the place, this was the city, or around here, that they had disappeared. And I thought, "Where? How? And by whom?" Where had they been taken? And how had they been killed? And by whom? So, that was on my mind when we were in Philadelphia. And then, when we finally arrived in Hattiesburg and, you know, just looking at this city now, it's just not like the city I remember. Because it was a really kind of dowdy, tacky town. We came in to a really crummy, rundown Greyhound Bus terminal, and our instructions were to call the COFO office as soon as we got there, and we did, and they came and got us. And then we were driven to this Fourth of July picnic. Vernon Dahmer was sponsoring it, and I guess, it was on his property. And when I first saw Vernon Dahmer, I thought he was white. He and I both have German ancestry so that accounts for his light skin, but I thought, "Oh, what a courageous man!" (Laughter.) "A local citizen, a white citizen who is sponsoring a Fourth of July picnic." Well, then of course, later I learned the facts of his life. And it was lovely. And we were meeting people, and I remember just having a very good time. And I remember encountering one of the best things about Mississippi, as far as I'm concerned: the pink and purple twilights here are just stunning. And as the sun was going down, Victoria Gray Adams started dispersing us all to her relatives. We were going to stay there. She said, "We've got to get out of here." Darkness meant danger. So, she had us all assigned and we were transported to our hosts' homes before darkness fell. And I was dispersed to--. I'm not sure what the connection is. I know that most of the people we were dispersed to were relatives of hers. Mrs. Addie Mae Jackson. And I was dispersed to her home. So, I went to her home, and I was the only one of the teachers who went there. She had a small home. She was raising her dead daughter's

children, her granddaughter. Her grandson wasn't living with her at the time, but her granddaughter was there, and I think her granddaughter is still a teacher in Hattiesburg. In the Hattiesburg High School. I think that's where she teaches.

Millet: Would you know her name?

Adickes: It's Stubbs. Mary--. It would be Mrs.--. I think that's right. I'm not sure if that was the name of her first husband. I think it is Stubbs.

Millet: It would be interesting to talk to her, to get her oral history from her.

Adickes: Well, I've written to her. I stayed with Mrs. Jackson that entire summer, and then when I left, I continued to stay in touch with her. I usually called her every Christmas, around Christmas and/or--. Well, always every Christmas, but sometimes, also, on the Fourth of July. I always sent her something for Christmas, and she was always just so delighted with whatever I sent her. I remember once sending her a really nice pot, a Creuset pot, with a lid, and she was--. I think I got that for her before I left town. I brought her something to thank her for having me in her home that summer. She couldn't stop talking about that. I mean it was like one of the best things that ever happened to her. And every year, I sent her something, and she was always so delighted with it. She didn't have much education, but she reminds me of Ms. [Oseola] McCarty. She is a Ms. McCarty kind of person. She worked all her life. She said, "Now, I never cleaned folks's homes." But she had jobs in a radio station, a local radio station. She had institutional jobs. So, she was able to make a decent living to take care of her grandchildren. And she had a nice house, and she had a car. She was very, very proud of these acquisitions. Years later, when I came down here, she had a new home. She was so proud of her home, her new home, her car. She had a car; I don't think she drove it very much anywhere, because she was well on in years, but she still had that car in front of her house. She was a strong, you know, just a terrific person, and, I mean, it was through her I learned of the changes, except of course, when I came down myself, but she was the one who told me that things would never--. She said that once, "Used to be, the white man got the job. Now, if you've got the skills, you get the job." She said, "Things are different, now, and it's never going to go back to the way it was, despite Reagan." This was in the Reagan years when there were all kinds of attempts to remove a lot of the support that had been in place. And when I came down here, of course, you know, I could see how much Hattiesburg had changed.

Millet: And that was what year?

Adickes: Let's see, I came down here in sixty-five, briefly, I think. Then, I came down here in 1980, and I brought my oldest daughter with me. And I took her to the library, you know, where we had tried to get library cards, the students and I. And that was then. Now, I understand there's an even newer library.

Millet: Oh, yes. I hope you get to see it.

Adickes: Yeah, I plan to, but even the one that was here then, in 1980, was such an improvement over the library that the kids had tried to get--. The kids! The students had tried to get cards from. And it was completely integrated, so that was certainly an important change.

Millet: Yeah. It's revolutionary. There was a revolution. What happened to Mrs. Jackson's daughter? Do you know? The dead daughter.

Adickes: I don't know. I don't know how she died. I mean, she had died a long time ago, when her grandchildren were very young, so, I have no idea why she died.

Millet: And was that her only child? The daughter?

Adickes: Yeah.

Millet: So, she had those grandchildren as a living legacy from her daughter.

Adickes: Mm-hm. And now, Mary has two children. She has a son from her first marriage who is now out of college, I'm sure. And she has a daughter from her second marriage.

Millet: OK. Well, you have given me some words that described your first impression of Hattiesburg. I just wonder if you want to expand on that. Can you think of anything about that, you know, that would be interesting for somebody to read 100 years from now?

Adickes: About the town itself?

Millet: Hattiesburg.

Adickes: Well, Hattiesburg was very much segregated. And there was a black community with the black businesses.

Millet: Were those mostly on Mobile Street?

Adickes: Yeah. And there was the rest of Hattiesburg, and I didn't go much into the rest of Hattiesburg. I went downtown to the business center, or what was the business center at the time. I banked. I had a checking account at the local bank, or a savings account. I forget which. And I remember a great to-do when I went in, and they knew who I was, and the women in the bank were just, oh, so excited. I mean there was a sexual subcontext to all of that, too, that I was living out there in that black community. And this I got from both sides.

Millet: And they were sure, I guess, that it was only because the black males desired the white females.

Adickes: Oh, and vice versa. That was the only reason we came down here. And then later, when I was arrested, after we had tried to have lunch together, that was one of the first things the police officer, one of the police officers said to me. No, I'm sorry. Did he say that? I heard that a couple of times. Yeah, no, he said it to me, "Are you fuckin' them niggers?" I heard that a couple of times. That was what this was all about. "White women are going to bed with black men." Not that a lot of that didn't happen, but where we were, I was in the heart of the black community. I mean even if I had the energy after all those days and nights in ninety degree heat, even if I had the energy, there was that black community, I mean, very conservative. I wouldn't have dared flout their standards and misbehave in such a way that would have shamed and horrified them.

Millet: That puts me off on a tangent that probably isn't really germane to our subject, but I'm going to share it with you anyway (laughter) that I was just transcribing an interview with Sheila Michaels. You might remember Sheila Michaels.

Adickes: Yes. Yes, I do.

Millet: And Sheila talks about how she perceived that Jim Forman made a pass at her at the office. She had spilled her purse, or he had, and everything went on the floor. And so they were in this situation of picking the stuff up and putting it in her handbag, and he was, you know, feeling a little silly for having spilled her purse, and he made a pass at her, or what she perceived was a pass at her, and she laughed.

She said [in her interview that she] was incredulous, really, that he would do that in such a high profile place, where she felt like people were watching with binoculars and the rooms were bugged. [And, especially, since he was married.] And so, I guess she kind of spurned the advance, and she felt like she paid for it later. But I think that's kind of the same reaction that you had of, "I don't want to flout their values. I don't want to disregard their values and treat them with disrespect." And I think for me--. Well, I was in the fourth grade in 1964, and I was in Alexandria, Louisiana, and all my classmates were white, and I didn't think anything about that. I had no idea that anything else was going on in the world except my little life, and as I got older, even though I'm from a racist family, I sensed that making blanket judgements about people because of race, or gender, or anything like that, is a mistake. You know, it's condemning it prior to investigating it. It doesn't make sense. So that when the schools did start to desegregate, I was open to the African-American students who came in. But, still, when I first started working with the Civil Rights Documentation Project, there was yet in my mind to be a shift of perspective. And it happened because I listened to African-Americans, you know. And it's real intimate; they're right there in your ears when you're transcribing and editing. And they were talking about the values that my grandparents had. And these are people who are my parents age, and they were just amazing. They were talking about how much their parents loved them, how much they loved their parents, the sacrifices that they made in order to finish high school. And then, they could get their tuition paid out of state for college if they would leave Mississippi. And they would do that, but they could hardly wait to get home because they were concerned about their parents. And it changed the way I view the African-American community for that to happen to me. And I guess when I hear you say, you know, "I would never treat their values with disrespect," that's what I think of. I think of those values of love for parents and wanting to please them, and really an extended kinship where people count on each other for support and, you know, a very strong family life. And I wish everyone could have that experience. Well, what date did your freedom school at Priest Creek Baptist Church open?

Adickes: It must have been--. Let's see, I think the fourth was a Saturday and then the fifth was Sunday. We went to church. And then I think freedom school opened on the sixth. July 6.

Millet: So, you hit the ground running there on July 6. What was that day like? Tell me about that day.

Adickes: Well, it was very exciting. You know, we were looking--. This is something we had worked hard for. So, when the kids started, and I mean just started pouring into school, it was just very, very exciting. And we were kind of disorganized. You know, it took a while to get our routines going, but the first day--. I mean, we'd all begin--. We usually began the days, as we did the first day, just, you know, in a group. In a large group. And, I think there were three of us in the school. Three instructors, and we would each give a presentation or a talk to each other, and then disperse in smaller groups. Usually, I know I taught English and somebody else was a history teacher, and somebody else was a math teacher, and we usually dispersed, you know, just according to subject area, and we would go to classrooms. We would start in the basement of the church, then we would go to classrooms. And then when it became too hot, as it quickly did, we would go outside, and we'd sit in groups under trees. And I remember doing, in my groups, we did a lot of reading and a lot of writing.

Millet: Did you read out loud?

Adickes: No. I don't remember. We read silently, and we would discuss the text. I mean, it was just like regular school. I would, you know, expect them to read a certain amount on their own, and then we would discuss that.

Millet: And, did you break them up into age levels?

Adickes: More or less.

Millet: How did you decide?

Adickes: Most of the students who came were high schoolage. And certainly the ones I dealt with were high schoolage. I don't remember having a great deal or many younger kids. They were there. They were clearly there, but I didn't deal with them. I dealt with the high school students, and maybe that's why, because high school students were what I was teaching at the time. Maybe that's why the kids still remember--. Kids! (Laughter.) Former students still remember those days. So, it was good, I mean the kinds of discussions. And I notice when I'm looking at the pictures, I know I had males in the classes, but it was the girls who really, and this has been my experience all my teaching life, it was the girls who really took the opportunity and ran with it. And got as much as they could from it.

Millet: For all your teaching years, you see that happening?

Adickes: Yeah.

Millet: Perhaps it has to do with English and words, do you think?

Adickes: I've had some outstanding male students, but they've always been in the minority. I mean, they're singular. That's why I remember them. I remember a couple of football players who, you know, defied the stereotype. Just great readers. Very insightful. But the majority of my good students--. And most of my students have been, like, you know, midlevel. But always the majority of really good, outstanding students, honor students have been female.

Millet: Hm. Interesting.

Adickes: And that isn't just my experience because it was a subject of despair in one of the high schools I taught that by the time they got to senior year, oh, more than half the male students dropped out. So that when they marched down at graduation, it was almost, you know, it was overwhelmingly female. School isn't cool. I think that's--. And that may have been true here at the time. School was not cool. It simply didn't go with the male ethos. First of all, I guess, because in their experience, probably, women dominated, and that was tough to take. And, although I must say I have seen--. And this is really awful. I remember having years ago in a school, inner city school, having a particularly bright young girl who just loved Jane Austen. Adored Jane Austen. This is an African-American, inner city kid, just adored Jane Austen. Just loved the English classics and was so enthusiastic about it, and her classmates made fun of her. Mocked her. It was awful. And since most of her classmates were girls, it was the girls who were just picking on her. I'm very sorry I didn't keep track of that young woman, because I've thought about her so often since. What became of her. Because she was a student--. It was so rare that I would encounter someone who was a student, who just [gasp] was turned on, excited, inspired by what she encountered in literature.

Millet: Well, during the time you knew her, did she seem to be swayed a lot by her peers' opinions?

Adickes: No. She seemed absolutely not to hear them, which was wonderful, but I still regret that I didn't keep in touch with her. Keep a contact. Find out what happened to her, you know, in the years after that. She left school.

Millet: That must be both an interesting and frustrating experience for a teacher to think of all the students you've come in contact with and wonder what they're doing out there in the world. Well, what differences did you perceive--which, you know, you might not have really been perceiving it at the time that you were there in Freedom Summer, but maybe now, in retrospect you might perceive differences--between the

freedom school that you had in Hattiesburg during Freedom Summer of sixty-four, and the so-called public schools that African-American students had usually attended?

Adickes: Well, they wrote about that in that journal, too, in that newspaper they put out. They were very outspoken about the differences. They were furious at the inequity, as I said, about the books, about the fact that they couldn't use the public library. That's why we chose. That they had a little room downtown that they could go. I never saw it, but they talked about this little room where all the cast-off books were kept, and those were the only--.

Millet: The black library.

Adickes: Yeah, the black library. And they were particularly angry with their teachers. I remember one day, I think it was the principal of their school.

Millet: And was he white or African-American?

Adickes: Black. No, they were black. They had a separate school system. And with more compassion, one understands, you know. What else could they do except tow the line for the white establishment? The principal walked down somewhere near the school, near where we were having our classes, and the kids saw him, and he did not speak to them. He did not greet them. And after he passed, I mean, they hated him. They hated that man. They hated him for not being their advocate, for achieving whatever he achieved at their, as far as they were concerned, at their expense. So, we had that. There was that sense of: "Here, we know what a school is, finally. We have teachers who respect us, who want to hear what we have to say, who care about us, who want something for us in this life." Oh, yeah, but they took that back. Having tasted what school was, they were, I'm sure--. I mean, I'd be very interested to know. I never thought of this before. I'd be very interested to know what the academic year [laughter] sixty-four, sixty-five was like for those teachers in that school that they went to. Because it did change. It changed their aspirations. I'm sure if you measured college attendance before Freedom Summer and college attendance after it, there would be such a leap. And now it's a norm. You go to college. You go to college after high school, and now their kids have. They've gone to college, and their kids have gone to college. It's transformed the way of life for them.

Millet: Yes. It has. It truly has. There is still a need, and it's a need that crosses racial lines, for a special kind of mentoring for college students who are first-generation people who attend college. As you were talking about those first years teaching in Harlem how it was difficult to get those students to imagine being in college because they didn't have people in their family who had set the [model] and had done that. And that still happens today. There is a high attrition rate among first-generation college attendees that does cross racial boundaries. Can you describe an activity from the Freedom School, a typical activity that you would have done that would have been designed to develop the students' leadership skills?

Adickes: The dialogue between teachers and students, between students. I remember sitting under the trees in the shade in a circle, just the dialogue that went back and forth. You know that kind of--. And I can't remember all the things that were said, but I just know that that was a very significant kind of pedagogy where there wasn't one person standing up in front of them telling them what to do. I know from the photographs, from Herbert Randall's photographs, we did a lot of writing, so there was, you know, that was the activity, and then there was the role-playing we sometimes did. And I remember in particular the role-play of a slave revolt. And that was done a number of times. It was something--. I remember, taping my oldest daughter when she was with her playmates, their fantasy play of the wedding. They would do a wedding, and it was wonderful how they garbled the wedding ceremony. "Do you take this awful heavenly man to be your whatever?" [Laughter.] The role they wanted to play was, the kids that is, in the fantasy

wedding, was the minister; not the bride, but the minister, because the minister was the power figure. Well, in the role-plays, the slave revolt role-plays, the role that people wanted to play were the Toms. The ones who betrayed their fellow slaves. Someone would be massa and there would be the people who would play the--.

(End of tape one, side two. The interview continues on tape two, side one.)

Millet: So, the Judases were the--

Adickes: --the roles they wanted to play because, in contrast to my kids who wanted to assume the power role, [the freedom summer school students] wanted to purge their anger at, for example, people like that principal. People that they felt betrayed them, that were not their advocates, and that's why they just, oh, they just loved that. They'd bow. Bowing and scraping, "Oh, massa!" It was something that was so energizing, so cathartic for them to be able to do that.

Millet: Yeah. Very interesting. Well, who were some of your students?

Adickes: Well, I'm going to be seeing them today. Jimmella Stokes. I'm not sure what her last name is now, or if she is using another last name than Stokes. She was the one who was involved in that voter registration campaign, who had been to jail, you know. The one with the--. Well, a real leader, and she is still that way. Then there were Carolyn and Dianne Moncure, who were from, I think they lived in New Orleans. At any rate, I think they were visiting their grandmother; they lived in New Orleans. They were in that group. Gwen Merritt was one of the students, and also Lavon Reed. These were students who were, you know, I was very close to, and were part of that group. Let's see there was Jimmella, Gwen, the students who went with me to the library.

Millet: It's interesting to have names because I never know at what point in the future somebody might follow up and contact them and get an interview or just, you know, need to talk to them. So, it's helpful to record names.

Adickes: Yeah. I corresponded with them, particularly Jimmella. I corresponded with a number of them. The Moncures. I certainly corresponded with Carolyn Moncure. I corresponded with Jimmella Stokes frequently for a while, and she came to live in New York for a while.

Millet: Did you see her?

Adickes: Yeah. We saw her. In fact, she worked in a project I was directing at Brooklyn College. She had married. She had a son. She was living in Brooklyn. I brought my oldest daughter. We met her. My oldest daughter met her. And then, we lost--. I would write her, but sometimes she wouldn't write back, and it disappointed my oldest daughter because she had liked her very much, and liked her son. But, I did see her, when I came back for that, in 1994, the reunion, thirtieth reunion. I came back here to Hattiesburg, and I saw Jimmella then.

Millet: Was Jimmella the student who received some of your settlement cash from when you sued Kress's?

Adickes: I think I had wanted, I had stipulated that she receive it. I don't think she ever got it because she had waited too long. It was to be for--. I'm not sure what happened.

Millet: Some of it was going for college tuition.

Adickes: Yeah. All of it went for college tuition, but I don't think she got any.

Millet: Oh. Well, someone did. Someone benefited from it.

Adickes: Someone, yeah. Dahmer's children. Vernon Dahmer's children got some of it. And I think there was somebody else, an activist in the--. I can't remember his name at the moment. A white activist got some money from it, too. All my share--. The settlement was split between my lawyer and myself, and all my share went to the Southern Conference Educational Fund which was dispersed for education to people who had been active in the civil rights movement.

Millet: Well, that has further made the world a better place, I'm sure. Can you remember some of the typical remedial education needs of your students at the Freedom Summer school?

Adickes: I don't remember. I didn't concentrate much on remediation. I didn't teach grammar. Or maybe I would once in a while talk about something, but most of the time it was really expression. I thought that was what was important: to read texts, to respond to the texts, to make a connection between the texts and their own experience, and to explore that in writing.

Millet: Did you have students turn in writing and then give them feedback about it? Or did they keep their writing?

Adickes: They kept their writing. I gave them feedback about it, but I didn't keep any of their writing. I wish I had, but I felt they should have that. If I'd had a copier handy at the time, I would have copied everything and taken it all home with me, but--.

Millet: Wouldn't it be lovely to archive that, if they wouldn't mind?

Adickes: Yeah. I don't know if they still have it. That would be wonderful, but I mean, I see those photos with all that writing and all those papers in their hands. No, I gave it back to them. I certainly didn't keep it.

Millet: Well, it was theirs, after all.

Adickes: Yeah, it was. That's what I felt. You know, you have a collection. You have a portfolio of your work.

Millet: Mm-hm. That's on the cutting edge in some of our schools in Mississippi now, is to keep a portfolio instead of testing and keeping grades which don't really tell parents very much about what's happening in [the] education [of their children.] Well, tell me about the adults who came to freedom school in the evening.

Adickes: These were people well on [in years]. Carolyn, the Moncures' grandmother came. These were people who were--. I have photos of them, and these are people who are really up in years. Seventy probably, you know, not even sixties. They were mostly in the seventies or even older, and they--. I don't remember all the things we did. Poetry. I remember different poetry lessons, but unfortunately the adults stopped at one point. There was one night, and it's too bad. One night we heard that the white folks were coming in cars, and that we should shut down the school. And we did that. We just dispersed people to their homes, and they never came back. They never came back afterward, so the evening classes, we had had the classes in the day for the regular students and then the evening for the adults, but after that incident, I don't think adults ever came back.

Millet: Just too frightening.

Adickes: Yeah.

Millet: Terrorism is horrible to contemplate. About how long do you think that adults did get to come before that incident?

Adickes: I'm not sure when that happened. It was four or six weeks. We weren't down here very long. We were down here eight weeks at the most.

Millet: So for those four or six weeks, mostly you think you did poetry?

Adickes: I don't remember. And they talked. They did a lot of talking. You know, they really shared their own history. I mean, they were adults, after all. I remember them, you know, just talking about the way things were.

Millet: Some wonderful stories. What do you remember about your freedom school newsletter, "Freedom News"?

Adickes: Well, I didn't have anything to do with that. I think that was organized at St. John's, and some of my students contributed to that. So, how that came--. I mean that was something that was produced at another freedom school. I had nothing to do with that.

Millet: Can you remember any of the titles of the poems from your Folkways album?

Adickes: No. I saw that question on your sheet. I was trying to think of that, and I still have the album that I used. And of course, it's an old album, and I no longer have a player.

Millet: What is it a thirty-three? It might be a seventy-eight.

Adickes: I think it's a thirty-three. Yeah, and it's a Freedomways. They probably have produced it since then, because it was the poets themselves reading their own work.

Millet: Langston Hughes, I understand, for some time, I'm not sure when, maybe the fifties and sixties, would read his poetry at Gulf Park College for Women, in Long Beach, Mississippi, and that is now a satellite campus of USM. I wish I could have been present for one of those.

Adickes: Yes.

Millet: Well, so your students wanted to close their freedom school experience with an action that implemented the Civil Rights Act, and they decided to integrate the Hattiesburg Public Library, but I had read in your journal that they considered and rejected several other activities, and I wonder if you remember what any of the rejected activities were?

Adickes: The one I remember most was going to the drive-in.

Millet: Going to the drive-in? So, they couldn't go to the drive-in?

Adickes: Well, it was dangerous. I mean, they had considered a couple of things, but what it was, was the danger that they could get hurt.

Millet: They would be trapped. How did they decide that? Did they talk about it?

Adickes: Yes, they did. I did not. I don't remember. They might have a different memory of this. I don't remember ever proposing this. Maybe they said, "We want to do something to bring closure." You know, to bring to closure this experience. And I would certainly have responded because I think that it was not the policy that if anybody else had known about this, it would have been discouraged.

Millet: Oh.

Adickes: We weren't supposed to take these kinds of actions, but I mean, so, it must have come from the students because I would not have deliberately gone against the policies of the administration, but they wanted to do something, so they considered it. I mean, it came from them. They considered a number of actions that I didn't know what they were talking about. You know, going to the drive-in. Where is the drive-in?

Maybe they considered one or two others, but what made them decide eventually on the library was that it was appropriate. Why shouldn't they as students be able to use the library? And secondly, they didn't perceive a great deal of danger that they would be attacked there by mobs in the library. So, I think it was the last day of classes, we went. At that time, you know, Palmer's Crossing was a suburb. We had to get on a bus and go downtown, and we stopped. We went to the library, and when we walked in, there was a young woman sitting at the desk. And this is the first time in my life I had actually seen this happen. Her eyes rolled to the back of her head when she saw us come in, [laughter] the six students and me. And we went up to the desk and the students said, "We want to get library cards." And she immediately called her supervisor who came down and started berating the students. And I didn't say a word, because I didn't think that was my place, and the students were very polite, but very insistent. And every time she would give them a reason for not giving them library cards, they would say, "Well, we don't see why, if anybody else uses this library, we can't, also." She, at one point, mentioned the Council, which I understood to mean the White Citizens' Council, would close the library down if she issued cards to the black students. And they would not give it up. They were just very polite, but they were very insistent [and] felt it [was] their right to have library cards. And finally, when she said that--. Oh, she would say things like, "Will you close your mouths and open your minds?" And they weren't--. She was doing most of the talking. And I imagine she was pretty scared. She must have been really scared of what was happening because it was clearly--. It was not going to be a normal day in the library. So, eventually she said, "Well, if you won't leave, I'm going to call the police." So, then, I said to the students, "What do you want to do?" And they said, "We'll stay." So, we sat down and the police came. About twenty minutes later, the police came and ordered everybody out of the library. Everybody, including us. So, we left Maybe they considered one or two others, but what made them decide eventually on the library was that it was appropriate. Why shouldn't they as students be able to use the library? And secondly, they didn't perceive a great deal of danger that they would be attacked there by mobs in the library. So, I think it was the last day of classes, we went. At that time, you know, Palmer's Crossing was a suburb. We had to get on a bus and go downtown, and we stopped. We went to the library, and when we walked in, there was a young woman sitting at the desk. And this is the first time in my life I had actually seen this happen. Her eyes rolled to the back of her head when she saw us come in, [laughter] the six students and me. And we went up to the desk and the students said, "We want to get library cards." And she immediately called her supervisor who came down and started berating the students. And I didn't say a word, because I didn't think that was my place, and the students were very polite, but very insistent. And every time she would give them a reason for not giving them library cards, they would say, "Well, we don't see why, if anybody else uses this library, we can't, also." She, at one point, mentioned the Council, which I understood to mean the White Citizens' Council, would close the library down if she issued cards to the black students. And they would not give it up. They were just very polite, but they were very insistent [and] felt it [was] their right to have library cards. And finally, when she said that--. Oh, she would say things like, "Will you close your mouths and open your minds?" And they weren't--. She was doing most of the talking. And I imagine she

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That was the line.

Millet: What a day for inventory! It just so happens!

Adickes: So, then we decided we wanted to have lunch. We went downtown, first to Woolworth's. It was completely packed. And then we went into Kress, and the rest I think you know about that.

Millet: Yes. Let me just stop this for a minute. *(There is a brief interruption in the interview.)* Make sure all those little dials are working there, and everything's going. Well, so, you guys went into Kress's, and the waitress said, "I have to serve Negroes, but I don't have to serve white people who sit with them." So, your students decided that they would--.

Adickes: "Well, if you're not going to feed Sandy, we're not--. If Sandy can't eat, we won't eat." So then we left.

Millet: And immediately you were arrested for vagrancy.

Adickes: Right.

Millet: So, what happened? Can you describe exactly what took place from the time you got in that police car until you were bonded out?

Adickes: Well, I was worried about the kids. I was worried. Kids! [Laughter.]

Millet: Well, they were kids, then.

Adickes: I was worried about them, you know, but I needn't have. They were perfectly capable of getting wherever they wanted to go on their own. And I was taken to this awful jail. And Lawrence Guyot was turning himself in when I came in, and he had a book that thick, and I was so regretful that I didn't have a book with me because I knew this was going to take some time. However, arrangements had been made for this. I had posted--. We all had left some money available for bail, and I knew that very shortly the National Lawyers' Guild would come and bail me out. And that is, in fact, what happened. I was bailed out in an hour or so.

Millet: An hour?

Adickes: Yeah. I wasn't there very long, fortunately, because it was a really horrible place.

Millet: Really. So, did you fear for your life at any time? Or even your physical safety?

Adickes: No. Not then.

Millet: Not in the hands of the police?

Adickes: No, I wasn't that fearful when I was arrested because it was so public. And, I mean, white people, you know. They weren't going to mess with white people. That's when--. That did happen in the police car. I had a pair of cheap sunglasses on, wraparound sunglasses, and when I got in the car, one of the officers got in back with me. You know, I was so dangerous, he had to be there to restrain me in case I would do something desperate! And while we were riding to the jail, he said, "You in the Liberace sunglasses. Are you fuckin' them niggers?"

Millet: Liberace sunglasses?

Adickes: Yeah, Liberace, he said that. I guess Liberace, the musician, wore wraparound sunglasses like that. But those were his exact words.

Millet: How did you respond?

Adickes: I think I said, "No one has ever spoken to me like that down here. I don't see why you should." Or something like that. I mean, it was like, I was "white lady." I had mentally put on little white gloves and was putting him in his place. So, I guess it was just, you know, the crudeness of it, just brought out that kind of payoff: "I'm not afraid of you. You're a jerk!" That kind of response. And, there were times, I mean we had heard that they were coming into the community at night. That's when I said, you know, we stayed up all night, a shotgun at the door because we thought they were going to attack us then. And, my feeling was, you know, I'm doing exactly what I want to do. I believe in what I'm doing. I'm just not going to be afraid. I was not afraid. I was not afraid. I mean, I knew that things might be dangerous, and I certainly didn't do anything out of the ordinary or try to draw attention to myself, but I certainly believed in what I was doing, and I certainly cared about the people I was among. So I just wasn't fearful.

Millet: Right.

Adickes: Fear, no. I wasn't afraid.

Millet: Although there is some evidence that they would harm white people when you consider, you know, Schwerner and Goodman.

Adickes: Right, but they were men.

Millet: And they were men. [And] that was in Philadelphia, not Hattiesburg.

Adickes: Right. And I just didn't--. Although they killed Viola Liuzzo.

Millet: That's right. In Alabama, I think. Right?

Adickes: But, I just didn't have that feeling. I don't know whether--. I just didn't ever feel afraid.

Millet: I had noted in another interview we did with Lawrence Guyot that--. I don't think this happened to him in Hattiesburg, but in some jail, I think it was Winona, maybe.

Adickes: Oh, yeah, Winona. I lived in Winona. Another Winona in Minnesota.

Millet: Oh, that's right. No. Well, maybe that's where I'm thinking of.

Adickes: Yeah. No, Winona was a terrible place. Winona was where Mrs. Hamer was beaten. Where they--.

Millet: Well, then that's probably where it was.

Adickes: There were certain places. McComb was a place like that. There were certain places that just, you know, you could see the letters running bloody, the name of the community.

Millet: Yeah. Kemper County, and Philadelphia. But Lawrence Guyot talks in his interview about being beaten in that jail and just absolutely willing himself to remain conscious because he felt that if he lost consciousness, they would kill him.

Adickes: Yeah. He was right.

Millet: And he also felt that it was his advocates on the outside who saved his life by getting on their telephones and using those telephone trees--.

Adickes: That happened more than once.

Millet: People calling in to say, "I know you have--."

Adickes: Yeah, I think it happened with Ivanhoe. Ivanhoe, yeah, was arrested.

Millet: "I know you have Guyot in there. I know he's alive. I want to know how he is." So, am I hearing you clearly that you felt because you were a white woman, and you were in Hattiesburg--?

Adickes: It wasn't even that. I really didn't have that kind of arrogant thought: "My white skin protects me." I was aware, I do remember once, riding with Mrs. Jackson in her car and realizing I was putting her in danger, so I got down on the seat so I couldn't be seen. I was really concerned about not bringing harm to other people. I really wasn't that concerned for myself. I mean, I was afraid before I came down here, but I mean I wasn't--. When you deal with the reality, you know, it's a different situation, so I knew, you know, that night where we all huddled together, you know, that something might happen, but the other thing was that I knew that if people attacked folks in Palmer's Crossing, they were going to get hurt, too, because people--.

Millet: Although the SNCC workers were into the nonviolent technique--.

Adickes: Right. Nonviolence was tactical rather than ideological. I mean that was the way I was concerned about it, too. You know, what can you do with these people? There's no chance you can outweapon them.

Millet: Can you expound on that a little bit, that it was tactical rather than ideological?

Adickes: Well, I don't think that Ivanhoe Donaldson really was a follower of Ghandi. I think they just realized that this was the only way you could save your life. You had to learn techniques of dealing with people who had all the weapons. There is no way you could outgun them. So, you just had to learn nonviolent resistance. It was survival.

Millet: Although there was a component of the African-American community who did sit up at night with their shotguns.

Adickes: Oh, yeah. And Palmer's Crossing was that kind of community.

Millet: That was the population?

Adickes: If white folks had come into that community, they would have used those guns. I had no doubt about it. And, as far as I was concerned, that was fine.

Millet: I think that probably had to be that way. I think that if the whole community had been nonviolent, they just would have been squashed. Just my opinion. But, so, following your release from jail, did you get to talk to your students about that whole experience with the public library? And, did you get to debrief?

Adickes: I know I did, but I don't remember anything about it.

Millet: But you did get, at least, to process it with them.

Adickes: Oh, yeah. We talked about that.

Millet: And is it Eleanor Jackson Piel? Or Pile?

Adickes: Yes. Right, you asked me about her and--.

Millet: What is that pronunciation?

Adickes: Eleanor Jackson Piel. And I brought this down because--.

Millet: "Six Decades of an Unconventional Legal Life."

Adickes: This came out in the New York Times very recently, September 10, [1999].

Millet: Thank you. Well, I'll just write that on here: September 10 in the Times.

Adickes: And that will tell you a great deal about Mrs. Piel.

Millet: Just in your own words, can you tell me what was memorable about her to you?

Adickes: Well, we're still friends. We're very close friends. She has spent a life doing--. In fact, she was in Mississippi last month, down here on a capital case. I mean, she has spent her life in pro bono work, saving people that the whole system is--. Who would be dead, but for her. And that's what she's doing, now. This followed an earlier article where she had gotten a man released from jail who had been convicted of rape [before] DNA. This was before DNA, but it was DNA evidence that cleared him, and she was responsible. I think he had been in jail seventeen years, and she had gotten him out. But that is her whole career.

Millet: So, about how old was she then, in sixty-four.

Adickes: She was forty-four.

Millet: She was forty-four in sixty-four when she took on your case.

Adickes: Right.

Millet: How did she hear about you?

Adickes: She was sent by the Lawyers' Guild. And I guess they kind of said, "This case is pending." And she came out to the school to meet me. Her husband, Gerard Piel, who used to be publisher of Scientific American. Two great, fabulous people.

Millet: Shakers and movers.

Adickes: Just wonderful people. Wonderful people.

Millet: Well, thank you for that article. I will read that. Now, I feel like we're getting pressed for time a little bit, so I'm going to maybe just hurry through some of these.

Adickes: OK.

Millet: In your article, "The Legacy of the Mississippi Freedom Schools" that appeared in Radical Teacher, you said, [quote] "There were nights of terror I did not think I would survive, nights spent guarding the freedom school or staying awake with others in a living room, a loaded rifle by the door." [Unquote.] Can you describe for me a scene from one of those nights and what event--?

Adickes: Maybe, I've exaggerated. I don't remember that we stayed up many nights. I do remember one. I do remember nights where we thought people were coming, but I--.

Millet: Why did you think that? How would you--?

Adickes: We'd heard that. I mean, rumor. You know. Rumor.

Millet: Grapevine. On the street, you would hear.

Adickes: Yeah. "They're coming." And I don't remember ever being--. And, nights of terror is another--. I thought something might happen. You know, they might come and shoot into the house, and yet, again, I thought about that. I thought, "Oh, well." You know. "I'm doing what I want to do." So, I was reconciled. Reconciled, so "nights of terror" is a bit exaggerated, I guess.

Millet: That might be something that's dimmed, you know, through the years. It was probably more terrifying at the time.

Adickes: It probably was.

Millet: Of course, now you know, "I survived."

Adickes: Yeah, right. [Laughter.]

Millet: That night you didn't know what the outcome would be.

Adickes: Right. Yeah. But I don't remember being fearful. Having moments of great fear, or if I did, they were only momentary.

Millet: Well, in that same article you talked about being in contact with the community where you served and you knew [quote], "that what we did in Mississippi has indeed made a difference in people's lives, and the changes have been irrevocable, even withstanding the setbacks of the Reagan-Bush era." What do you think those setbacks were in the Reagan-Bush era?

Adickes: Well, the black community of Hattiesburg got a great boost from federal funding, and that this is a county seat was very significant, that they couldn't simply take all the money that was coming in and hire white people. So, they benefited from that. And yes, there were cutbacks, attempts to cut back a lot of those programs, but by that time, the community had prospered so, that they probably did not need that cushion any longer. When I came back in eighty, people--. My oldest daughter was with me, and a hard-to-impress child she was [laughter]. But people, when I was staying with Mrs. Jackson, people came flocking to see me, and wanted me to see their new cars, know about their new homes, and my daughter said, "It's like you were a TV celebrity." She was really impressed [laughter] that so many people wanted to see me, and it was displaying all the new prosperity. The homes, the college education, the cars, etc., the new jobs, the different things, the changes that had taken place, that a level of prosperity was achieved here in this black community that even the cutbacks of the Reagan-Bush era could not take back, and that are still obvious. And, when I came back in ninety-four and we did a tour, I remember we were driving through communities. You can't tell whether the owner of a particular home is black or white. I don't think. I don't think that's any longer.

Millet: That's wonderful. So, those would be, I guess, the irrevocable changes.

Adickes: Yeah. I didn't see The Free Southern Theater. I don't remember seeing it, and Pete Seeger, I very much remember when he came here.

Millet: What do you remember? What was that like?

Adickes: We went out to, I don't know where this place was. It was a building with a very low ceiling, like this, and it was an extraordinarily hot day. It was awful. It was just horrible. And he came in. We waited for quite a while, but he came into that building and played for us, and it was just exhilarating, listening to him.

Millet: Did you forget yourself and your surroundings, do you think?

Adickes: No. I mean that was impossible, but it was just wonderful for that man, who is I think one of the--. He's an American treasure.

Millet: Yes.

Adickes: Pete Seeger. It was just wonderful to see him because I knew who he was. I mean he wasn't anybody I didn't know. I knew who he was and admired him a great deal even before he came there. And I was just pleased--.

Millet: What was the audience like? What was the makeup of the audience and how did they react?

Adickes: They were almost all students, very young. And they were also--.

Millet: From little to high school?

Adickes: Yeah. Right. And I think that they were very moved, too. I mean, he was--he's quite old now and doesn't perform anymore, but he was a very engaging performer, and he specialized in children. He has recorded quite a few children's songs, and I don't remember what he sang, but I'm sure he sang those. And he draws children in very--.

Millet: And he did that particular performance?

Adickes: Right.

Millet: Well, in your journal you mentioned that Joe Harrison, prior to a debate, explained to your students the function of folk music in a protest meeting. I wonder if you could tell us, who was Joe Harrison and what did he say the function of folk music is?

Adickes: I really don't know too much about him. I know that he was around a great deal with his guitar, playing, and the kids, even just outside of school, because I have a photo of him doing that, and at meetings. I'm not even sure if he was a local man. He wasn't part of the organizers. I mean, I just knew about him as someone in the community, but I'm not even sure that he was a community figure. He was a good musician. He was certainly someone committed to the movement, and he shared his musical skills, you know, at any occasion that was called for or not called for. He was just ready to share his skill and knowledge with people. He died not too long after that summer, I think, because I know he's been dead for quite a few years. I don't know of what.

Millet: Do you remember what he said the function of music in a protest is?

Adickes: To bring people together. I remember that was, you know, to remind people of what it was they were doing, and to bring them together.

Millet: Solidarity.

Adickes: Yeah.

Millet: Well, that's no small thing, achieving solidarity.

Adickes: Yeah. Right.

Millet: And what about the SNCC-established community centers? Do you know anything about those?

Adickes: Well, one of those community centers must have been where Pete Seeger came. I don't remember too much about them. I mean, I was so totally involved in the school. I didn't know too much about other things.

Millet: OK. What about mass meetings?

Adickes: Mass meetings. I remember, I must have gone to a mass meeting, but I don't remember very much about them. [Laughter.]

(End of tape two, side one. The interview continues on tape two, side two.)

Millet: Dials are going. Our tape is rolling. And the first Sunday, which was July 5--.

Adickes: Yes. We went to church downtown. I don't remember which church it was, and the minister--you know, other civil rights workers went down there, too--the minister spoke about entertaining angels unawares. He spoke about us and to us, directly, and reminded the community that that's who we were. It was very touching but also a little embarrassing. You know, I certainly never felt like an angel. [Laughter.]

Millet: Well, I think you were. I do think you were. When and where in your life did you become aware of sexism?

Adickes: Well, I'm one of those who think that the women's movement was an organic outgrowth of the civil rights/antiwar movements, because I was certainly active in the antiwar movement and so were a lot of other women who eventually became feminists. So, I think it was a growing awareness. You know that "click" experience.

Millet: And by that do you mean a kind of a solidarity you felt with the women who were in those movements [as in "clique"]?

Adickes: No, an awareness that something is happening that shouldn't be happening.

Millet: That something clicks in.

Adickes: Yes. Right. Right. And one of the things I remember, although I don't think I came to feminist consciousness when I was down here, I do remember and it must be for this reason; I do remember that I volunteered to go to McComb. During the summer they started to establish freedom schools somewhere else, and I volunteered to go to McComb.

Millet: Very dangerous.

Adickes: Yes. And I spoke to Staughton Lynd. I said, "Well, I can volunteer to go to McComb." And Staughton said--. Staughton was head of the freedom school project in Mississippi, and Staughton said, "We're not sending white women to McComb, yet." And I guess I remembered that because, you know, the "we" was obviously male, and they had the power to decide to send white women or not send white women. So, that certainly made an impression. Although I certainly didn't object or fight with him, quarrel with him about it, it certainly seemed to me that there should be more participation in decision-making about such an issue. And then of course, I saw things down here. I mean, when I went to the COFO office in Jackson, it was, you know, like so many situations: the men were doing all the policy-making, and the women were doing the mimeographing. In those days it was the mimeograph. The women were doing a lot of the scut work, and that continued in the antiwar movement where I was also active. And finally, women said, "Enough." You know. "We've got to pull our own--. That we have something. That we have issues that we have to talk about." You know. The personal is political. And that's about the time that consciousness-raising groups started forming.

Millet: Is there a year in your mind when that occurred?

Adickes: I would say 1968, 19-. Between 1968 and 1970.

Millet: OK. And so, were there power struggles between men and women during freedom summer that gave life [to feminism]?

Adickes: Well, I wasn't part of them, but Mary King. You know there's that famous statement that Mary King and Casey Haydn[?] issued?

Millet: I don't know about that.

Adickes: Well, I have--. Oh, I didn't give you a copy of the bibliography. I brought down a bibliography that I gave to Bobs Tusa so that she could distribute it at the library MLA meeting tomorrow, but there is a book that you should read about this.

Millet: Alright.

Adickes: There are several books you should read about this, and they are listed on that bibliography.

Millet: I will be there, so I can get one.

Adickes: Oh, OK. Mary King's book and Todd Gitlin's. Mary King wrote a book called Freedom Song. Todd Gitlin wrote a book called The Sixties. There are others, of course, but those two deal specifically with the struggles between men and women in the civil rights and antiwar movements. And then the growth of the feminist movement. Todd Gitlin goes on at greater length about the genesis of the women's movement.

Millet: Well, it's about 10:45, and I think what I'd like to do--. Actually, it's 10:44. I would just like to ask you if there is anything that I failed to ask you that you wanted to include.

Adickes: Yeah. I do want--. You asked me about the clergy. I think that what was significant about the civil rights movement, was the participation of clergy. There was a Delta Ministry Project and Rabbi Lelyveld was here. I saw him after he had been beaten.

Millet: Those photographs are on exhibit.

Adickes: Right. And I think that was something that must be remembered, the involvement of the clergy in a very significant way. It was ecumenical--Catholic, Protestant, [and] Jewish, and it was very important, and the contribution was great. Also, I think the civil rights movement, since so many involved were not students, many were, but also many were not students, there was less ideology involved. People were prompted, well, by religious motives. So, you had a broader cross-section of people involved in the civil rights movement than, perhaps, in the initial stages, were involved in the antiwar movement, which was student dominated. Later of course, many of those people of good will and good faith participated, so, I think I want to make that observation before I close. I think I've covered a lot of things you've [asked]. My present social-political views are pretty much the same as they were. [Laughter.] I've never, like some, recanted. Or, I don't think I've ever betrayed my principles. I've been an activist. As a teacher, I've tried to challenge my students. I've encountered some very conservative and even right-wing students in my teaching career. I try never to be dogmatic; always to use the Socratic method. And I'm always very pleased when an outrageous statement from a student will produce a very cogent response from another student. I think it's more appropriate to come that way. I'm certainly, you know, a parent, late in life, of teenagers. So, I'm very aware. Even, when I was bringing up my children, I was certainly not going to the front line any longer, and I don't do that any longer, and I am pretty much involved. I'm a scholar and a writer and a parent; those are my principal activities, now. And I'm not going to Mississippi. I'm not even on picket lines anymore, but I'm glad to see that others are taking this up. I think the movement among students to protest the manufacture of their athletic equipment, etc., in exploitative factories in Asia, I think that's very important. I'm very pleased to see other people taking up the torch.

Millet: Mm-hm. Yes. Yes. Well, I guess if you could, just briefly tell me your opinion, out of everything that's happened, what do you think is the most important thing about the civil rights movement? The most important change that resulted from it?

Adickes: Not everywhere in Mississippi; not everywhere in the nation, but the--. And despite all the flaws still in our country, things moved in a way that was not possible without the civil rights movement. It would have taken, I think, another fifty years without the civil rights movement for all the advances that have come, to come. And Mrs. Jackson was right. It's never going to be the same. It's going forward. We still have plenty to do.

Racism, unfortunately, is still alive, and may be, as W.B. DuBois predicted about the twentieth century, it may continue to be the major problem of the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, if there is no change and no progress, what hope is there for us and how can we continue to do what seems to be futile? So, I'm very optimistic. And my optimism is based on what I've seen happen as a result of the civil rights movement. Nothing in my life that I participated in has ever, including the women's movement--. The women's movement has brought about great changes for women, even those who are ungrateful. Nevertheless, women never started from the place that African-American people in this country started from before the civil rights movement, so I think it's just been--. I've told my students this: "Nothing is better for you to do when you are young, than to participate in something larger than yourself. To contribute, not by yourself, but in company with others, to make significant change. And I think that's the thing that's going to bring, that to me anyway, brings the greatest satisfaction in my life, and I hope that you have an experience that does that for you."

Millet: Well, I want to thank you for being here in 1964, and for granting us this interview today.

Adickes: You're quite welcome.

(End of the interview.)