

# Jacqueline Byrd Martin

October 27, 2020

## SUMMARY

Jacqueline Byrd Martin was born in McComb, Mississippi in 1946. She attended the all-black Burglund High School where, as a 15-year-old in October 1961, she joined an all-school student walkout in protest over the expulsion of her classmate, Brenda Travis, who earlier that summer was arrested for attempting to purchase a ticket at the all-white bus ticket counter in McComb. Along with over 80 classmates who refused to sign an oath against any future protests, Ms. Martin was banned from Burglund for the remainder of that year, attending Campbell College in Jackson, 80 miles to the north where she finished her 10th-grade year. Later, Martin attended college in New York City, eventually moving back to McComb to raise a son and work for the City of McComb in multiple community leadership positions, retiring as Deputy City Administrator. She holds a B.S. in Business Administration from Belhaven University and is a Certified Training Professional. She stays active working with the [William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation](#) and [Sustainable Equity](#) to support community building, civil rights education, and life-skills coaching.

## LOCATION

Recorded via Zoom teleconferencing system. Jacqueline Martin was at her home in McComb, Mississippi. The interview team was in their separate homes throughout the San Francisco Bay Area during the “shelter in place” order due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## INTERVIEW TEAM

Sarah Barnes ('21), Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Piña ('22), Makana Leavitt ('21), Simona Nigusse ('21), Sam Yancey, ('22)

Instructor: **Howard Levin**, Director of Educational Innovation

## TRANSCRIPT PROCESSING

Transcript and video content represent the interview in its entirety with minor edits due to breaks and occasional language. Initial automatic transcription via Otter.ai. Howard Levin completed editing with support from Simona Nigusse ('21) (11/15/2020). Please report additional suggested edits to: [howard.levin@sacredsfs.org](mailto:howard.levin@sacredsfs.org)

### Notes:

1. content within [ brackets ] remain to be further checked
2. content within ( parentheses ) are editorial additions

Note: This interview follows a previous interview conducted by students at McComb High School in McComb, Mississippi 10-years earlier on January 21, 2010 as published on [Telling Their Stories: Oral History Archives Project](#). Convent & Stuart Hall students frequently reference the earlier interview.

## Introductions

My name is Simona Nigusse. My name is Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Piña. My name is Makana Leavitt. My name is Sam Yancey. My name is Sarah Barnes and today we're interviewing Ms. Jacqueline Byrd Martin on October

27, 2020, via Zoom.

**Howard Levin**

Jackie, as you know, we are here to record the conversation with you with the intention of publishing your story as part of Convent & Stuart Hall's Oral History Production class. We are recording video of this interview and intend to publish this on our school website as well as on other nonprofit educational websites, including a written transcript. This means that your story will be available once published to anyone via an internet connection. If you agree, please say your name, the date, and if you agree allowing us to publish your story.

**Jacqueline Martin**

I'm Jacqueline Byrd Martin. Today is October 27, 2020. Yes.

**Howard Levin**

And you agree. Okay. Jackie, what we would like you to do, we didn't do this 10 years ago, we want you to try to do like a one to a two-minute quick summary, a chronological geographical summary of your life.

**Jacqueline Martin**

I was born here in McComb, this is Pike County, southwest Mississippi. I went to school at Westbrook – it's the elementary school now – and then I went to high school. I began high school at Burglund High School in McComb. I attended Burglund High School, my ninth-grade year. The 10th-grade year was the year of '61 when we had the walkout. I finished my 10th-grade year at Campbell College on Lynch Street in Jackson, Mississippi, an AME Methodist Church school. My 11th-grade year was spent back at Burglund High School. And my senior year I went to Theodore Roosevelt High School in New York, on Fordham Road across from Fordham University. I graduated high school there and I worked in New York for a while. I started college at City University of New York, I started taking classes there. I stayed in New York almost 10 years. I moved back to Mississippi – I got married, somewhere in between there. And my husband and I moved back to Mississippi. I have one son and he was a young child at that point. And when I moved back to Mississippi, I went to work for a bank. And that was an experience. And after that, I worked for the telephone company. I worked for the cell phone company in New York and I also worked for the telephone company here in Mississippi. And then when they moved all of their offices to Jackson, I was growing a child so I elected not to move. And I stayed here in McComb. I didn't work for a little while. And then I started work at the city of McComb. At that point, I got very, very involved in this community with different organizations and just community building with people and everything. Because of the political environment, things change. Every four years you get a new board, you get a new mayor or something. But eventually, we elected a mayor who was part of the Winter Institute because he was on the board. And he had served in the legislature for a number of years, Tommy had, Thomas Wallman. When he was mayor he in turn decided that he wanted to build bridges in this community. He wanted to build bridges where people would talk to each other and come together and do things. So at that point, I did a lot of projects in the community and programs where all the people would come together in the community and then talk to each other and just kind of be in each other's presence. And I met Susan Glisson at the Winter Institute. She was the founding director of the Institute. I met her before it became actually the Winter Institute. Our introduction was made by Curtis Hayes Muhammad. Curtis is my cousin so he introduced me to Susan and that's when I met Susan. I worked for the city of McComb, almost 28 years, and I retired as a deputy city administrator. Hooray! I was glad to go.

While I was there, I did some programs with the school district, and the city of McComb, and the Winter Institute as partners. And we did some programs. And we did the Civil Rights Summit here in 2005. And during that Civil Rights Summit, we had a graduation ceremony for the students that were in the class of '61, that ended up graduating from Campbell, because of the walkout. And that particular class never had a class reunion. They never had anything like that going on for them. So we invited these students to come back. And then we will give them some honorary diplomas from the McComb separate school districts in high school here. And a lot of them showed up. And it was a very, very moving ceremony. John Dittmer came, he wrote

Local People. And we had a lot of celebrities and a lot of people here. And as a matter of fact, that graduation ceremony was played on our public television.

**Jacqueline Martin**

After I retired, I started doing more work with the Winter Institute. And that's what I do now, I do part-time work with the Winter Institute. I also do work with Sustainable Equity, Susan Glisson's company. And that's pretty near what I do. I stay involved in this stuff in my community because I want to see this community thrive, and the people here thrive. So I kind of stay involved in it.

**Howard Levin**

Thank you so much. That was excellent. OK, Sarah, take it away.

**Sarah Barnes**

In your 2010 interview, you mentioned two childhood friends that you had, one that you met when you were three and the other that you met when you were six that you continue to have relationships with. And I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit more about how those relationships began and developed and how are they now?

**Jacqueline Martin**

I'm still friends with those two women. And over the years, one of them lived in Minnesota, when she graduated from college, she moved to Minnesota. And one of them lived in Texas for a long time. One of them is here in McComb now, she's retired. And one is down on the Gulf coast. Those relationships, they just evolved. If we didn't talk to each other in a long period of time, when we did talk, we'd pick up where we left off. And I'm very, very grateful to have those women in my life. I have some other women, over the years, I've been close to some other women that I've built relationships with. And I've lost a lot of women. And I'm from a large family and I've lost three sisters. So as I have gotten older, my circle has gotten smaller. And so that's just one of those things that happen with age I think.

**Sarah Barnes**

Those two women, how did you meet them?

**Jacqueline Martin**

The one that I was friends with from three, our parents knew each other. This is a small community. The ones that I knew from three-years-old, her dad used to come out and pick me up – we lived about four blocks from each other – and he would ask, "Can Jacqueline come play with Ava," that kind of thing. Our parents knew each other. And the one I've known since I was six, interestingly enough, when she and I really got to be friends, was in the first grade because we both kind of cried during the first-grade year. And then our parents would meet up at the school, bring us to school, and they would meet up and, and everything. And both of us would get spankings in the process, too. And we laugh about that now. And what happened was, she is a middle child in a family and I'm a middle child in a family. And those older siblings taught us how to read and a lot of stuff. So when we went to first grade, we knew all that stuff. So it was actually from boredom that happened. But she and I are friends to this day.

**Sarah Barnes**

Looking back on your education part of high school, what are your thoughts now about the quality of education you received?

**Jacqueline Martin**

I think the quality of education that I received at that time was pretty good. It was a segregated school that I went to here. But we had teachers that genuinely cared about us. They taught us things that were over and beyond the curriculum that was set up anyway. I believe that for the time back then, that the education was okay, the quality was good.

**Sarah Barnes**

And going back to your parents earlier on, what did your parents do for work?

**Jacqueline Martin**

My dad did kind of manual labor. He worked at the railroad, where they laid cross ties and stuff for some years, but it was always work that required outside labor work. Neither of my parents were very educated. My mom went to about ninth grade in school, and my dad was less than that.

**Sarah Barnes**

A common theme in your 2010 interview was that your parents taught you that if you said you were going to do something that you would do it, basically to be a trustworthy person. And I was wondering if you can give any specific examples of that, whether it be you or your parents?

**Jacqueline Martin**

My parents were not formally educated, but they were very wise people. And I can remember my mom saying this little thing, "Once the task has begun, never leave it until it's done. Be it great a bit small, do it well, or not at all." And so that was like a common theme in the house. So you knew if you started something that you should do it and do it well. My dad was a person that – and his father was the same way – if he told you he's going to do something, he did that. They always, both of them, stressed to us, that if you give your word, that you should let that be "your bond" is what they would call that, and let that speak for you. And let that be like your character. You wouldn't just say, "Oh, I'm gonna just do this," and you have no intention of doing it. I know that sometimes that happened with people because they don't learn how to say "no." Yeah, I've encountered that a lot here, where a person will say, "Oh, yes, I'm gonna do that," and they actually have no intention of doing it, but they just don't know how to say "no." But they also don't realize that if you don't learn how to say no and set those boundaries that you're "yes" has absolutely no value.

**Sarah Barnes**

My last question would be if you could compare McComb, what it was like in 1961, and what it's like now?

**Jacqueline Martin**

In 1961, there were very few people here that were registered to vote. I can't remember the exact number, because I have that somewhere. And the population was probably mental remember, 11 to 12,000 people. And then now we're here in 2020, it's not much bigger than that. It means that the county itself has grown, but as far as the city itself, it basically has not grown very much population-wise. In 1961, we still had areas that had "White Only" signs and "Colored Only" signs that kind of thing. We don't have any of that going on now in 2020. But the population has not grown a lot here in that many years. The population of the actual county where we exist has grown, but not so much for the city.

**Howard Levin**

Jackie, can you say a little bit more, can you flesh out a little bit more of Sarah's question with regards to the difference between 1961 and today of McComb with regards to the African American and black community and where people live in the situation of that difference. How has that situation changed?

**Jacqueline Martin**

It has changed because back in '61 the people in this community, the Black people, lived in several communities. The Burglund community is north McComb. Then you have the Baertown community, south McComb. You have Whitestown, that's kind of east of McComb. And then you had Algiers which was kind of southwest of McComb. These were primarily the black communities. That's where all the black people lived. But now in 2020, we have both, we still have those communities. And those communities are primarily still Black, you know, African American. But we have a lot of other communities here, areas where we have subdivisions and all of that. And there are no subdivisions in McComb that's not integrated, basically, you could

say. Whereas it might just be one or two black families, but still it would be some black families living in those communities. And then when you go in stores, the essential workers – now that it's a pandemic – you see black people working there. When you go into the banks, you see black people working there. Whereas that was not the case in '61. If you went in any establishment in this town, it was primarily white people. Except in our own communities, because in our own communities, like the Burglund community, we had little convenience stores that are owned by black people in these communities. But other than that, if when you left the community, there wasn't any black people working in any of the other establishments.

**Howard Levin**

What about the black business community of '61 compared to now in the black neighborhoods. How does that compare to today?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Now it doesn't exist. When I was a girl that were stores, little convenience stores in the black community. There used to be a theater on Summit Street in our own community. And then there were businesses, a thrift store. Now that does not exist. So if I want to go to the drugstore, I get in my little trusty vehicle and drive to the drugstore. So it's not as if I could just walk to any of those kinds of places.

**Samuel Yancey**

In your 2010 interview, you talked about how you went door to door canvassing people to become registered voters. Tell us more about your personal experience when doing that. And maybe how did your parents react to that?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Back in 1961, Bob Moses came to town. And when he came here, he was to work on a voter registration project. So he arrived somewhere around mid-July, somewhere in the beginning of July. We had a gentleman in his community, his name was Webb Owens, and he was a retired railroad employee, he retired I think in Chicago somewhere. McComb was founded as a railroad community because all the shops that the Illinois Central Railroad for repair and everything was located here in McComb. So that was a large employer back then. So Webb Owens kind of went around and asked some of the parents if their kids could kind of work with Bob, because basically what we would do was to go door to door and encourage people to vote, to register to vote or to just to attend a mass meeting of voter registration class. It was not like me by myself. Hollis, Watkins was involved in that and Curtis Muhammad got involved and some other students here, because school was out at that point. And just going door to door and encouraging people to get involved with this voter registration project. Some people because they knew you – and then our community is pretty small, so they knew you – so they wouldn't say, "no" or "yes" either way, they would just listen and then close the door. And then you had some people, because the fear was so thick here during that time, then they would not even open the door to have a conversation about it. That's kind of how it went. And Webb Owens was one of the people that did fundraising for Bob Moses and for that project when Bob came to town. This went on until maybe the first – the beginning of August, somewhere through there. And then the first week of August, around August the 7th, I think, that's when they held the first voter registration class at the Masonic Temple. And keep in mind that in order to be a registered voter, you had to interpret part of the Constitution. And that – whatever it is that a black person had to interpret – was left up to the circuit clerk of wherever. So instead of them actually using the Constitution, sometimes they would just ask ridiculous questions like, "How many bubbles in a bar soap," or just ridiculous stuff. The classes were held to teach people how to interpret parts of the Constitution. And prior to that, you had to have paid a poll tax, like two years prior to you registering to vote. It was I think about 20-21 questions that you had to answer in order to become a registered voter back during that time.

**Samuel Yancey**

Could you give us a visual tour of how the NAACP classes were set up for voter registration?

**Jacqueline Martin**

These classes were not set up by the NAACP, first of all. They were set up by the Student Nonviolent



Coordinating Committee. And that's the organization that Bob was part of. The NAACP – CC. Bryant was the president during that time. And he's the one that asked Bob to come to McComb. Because when he originally came to Mississippi, he went to Clarksdale, the northern part of the state up in the Delta, with Amzie Moore. And they weren't quite ready for him. And so CC Bryant asked him to come here. A class, if I remember correctly if people showed up, then someone would speak to them and tell them the importance, like Bob would speak, and tell them the importance of becoming registered voters and how this is where their power, their empowerment lies, is becoming a registered voter. And after that, it would be something similar to like a mass meeting where it might be a prayer and a song sang, someone would sing a song. Hollis Watkins had a beautiful tenor voice. And someone will sing a song. And then people would get to work learning how to interpret those questions that would be on the exam for them to become registered voters.

**Samuel Yancey**

Going back to the canvassing, going door to door? Can you describe some of the conversations you might have had with the folks?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Just basically telling them "we're here to talk to you about becoming a registered voter, and we have some people here in town", like Bob Moses had arrived at that point, "so we have people here in town that's going to help you to pass the exam to become a registered voter. That would be good for our community, and it would be good for us." So the conversations will go something like that. But remember, I was a young teenager, younger than you people. Okay.

**Samuel Yancey**

In your 2010 interview, you mentioned that some individual from the black community came down to Amite County to become registered voters and they experienced quite a bit of violence. Did that take a toll on your willpower to continue working for the NAACP?

**Jacqueline Martin**

I think you're talking about something that happened with Herbert Lee maybe that happened over in Amite County with Bob Moses. Young people truly believe that they can change the world. And young people, in turn, usually they're not fearful. And when any great change has happened in this country has been led by young people. So I don't think that it even struck a chord of fear in us, that I can remember. The young people when they are organized and did work with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, now prior to Bob Moses coming to town, you had CC Bryant, who was the head of the NAACP and he was also a barber. So basically, at his barbershop – and a barbershop, a beauty shop in our communities is a place of discussing everything, and it's one of those places that you can go and you can be there hours and hours and hours. It's not as if you get your hair done, you're there just visiting with the other people who are there. So he, in turn, talked to young people in his barbershop and those were the young kids from, like Joe Martin, and all that crew that was from that Baertown community. It wasn't that we were not aware of what was going on, we were very aware as young people. We watched the news, we in turn listened and we were just quite aware. So people were aware of what was going on over in Carolina with the sit-ins and the freedom rides and all this stuff. The young people in that part of McComb, Baertown, they had what was called – they had organized in like a youth NAACP group. And when they organized into a youth NAACP group, then Medgar Evers came down as field secretary for the NAACP and spoke to those young people. So they were quite aware.

**Samuel Yancey**

Were any of your friendships affected in working for the voter registration project regardless of the risk?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Not at that particular point in time. None of my friendships were affected.

**Samuel Yancey**

Can you recall any specific teachers that you had which might have shaped your point of view in fighting for civil rights?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Hmm? I think that the teachers that we had in school, I would tend to believe that all of them shaped our view. And I say that because remember now, this school was segregated, it was a black school, and all the students were black, and all of our teachers were black. So as I said earlier, they taught us the curriculum, but they also taught us about what was happening. And they taught us our life skills because it was important for us to know about the greater society, as well as our parents taught us that as well, as well as what you would encounter when you go out into the larger society. So I would tend to believe that all the teachers that I had kind of impacted my life. A teacher that I had an elementary school, there was a couple of that I was very fond of, just really very, very fond of. A teacher that taught me English when I was in 11th grade, her daughter is my dentist now. And so I'm still very fond of her and see her. But we were not brought up with any illusions about the world, put it that way. Because we needed to be very aware.

**Howard Levin**

Say more about that.

**Jacqueline Martin**

And what I mean by that is, I guess you could say it's basically what some people refer to as "The Talk," of how black families talk to their children, and how they tell us what we are going to expect. And even my son, I had to talk with him. It's not as if I can't say that you're not going to be discriminated against, or you are not going to encounter racism, because you will. It's unfortunate, but that's what's going to happen when you leave outside of your community. And then trying to ensure that he maintains – and part of that too is to help maintain a level of self-esteem. So you know who you are, and you are a worthy human being, although you're going to encounter those kinds of experiences.

**Samuel Yancey**

Did you ever encounter any personal experiences with white people?

**Jacqueline Martin**

When I was young or just in my life or what?

**Samuel Yancey**

Just in your life.

**Howard Levin**

Sorry, when you were young, up to high school.

**Jacqueline Martin**

No, no. Not in my young life. I pretty well stayed in my community. They stayed in their community. So it wasn't as if I had any reason to interact with them.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

So Jackie. So you told us in the last interview, and also in this interview, that young people think that they can change the world a lot. And so on the day of the march, what was the atmosphere like at school? Were you excited to go on the march? Or, when you were at the assembly with all of your peers, what were the emotions going through? Were you excited, hopeful, or nervous? What were you thinking about?

**Jacqueline Martin**

I believe there was some excitement, primarily because at that point, it was at the assembly that the question was going to be asked. And these were seniors, mind you, Joe Lewis, and Jerome Byrd, my brother, who was

president of the senior class, James Burnham, [Johnny Welcher], Carolyn Quinn, who was the daughter of Aylene Quinn. All of these were seniors. And they were the ones that were kind of leading that, to ask that question about why Brenda was not allowed to come back to school.

So the question was asked, and they were told that she would not be allowed. And I believe, if I remember, right, that Joe Lewis, I believe, asked the question, I don't remember exactly, but I think that's who actually asked it. They were told to come to the office. So all the students knew that if they go to the office of the principal, that they would really be in trouble. And then some of the students in later years were telling me that some of the teachers that they encountered as they were walking out, and they were being encouraged by these teachers to do that. So that was an interesting thing.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

Why was the question so controversial, the question that was trying to be answered?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Because Brenda had participated during the summer with Bobby Talbert and Ike Lewis, in a sit-in at the bus station, I think it was. When she in turn – when they got arrested, then she stayed in jail for a while. And school had started before she was at a point that she could come back to school. The question was asked because we just wanted another classmate to be able to come back to school. Why should she be penalized for something like that? Why should she in turn, not be allowed to come back to school?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Why would she not be allowed to come back to school? Because we thought that what she had done was brave and it was something that needed to happen. Just think of this: when we were children and we played – you know, kids get together and play – and we didn't have cell phones, we didn't have any of this electronic stuff, none of that. And had very few televisions, basically. So children talked to each other. And every day in school, there was a period of time in homeroom that you talked about what was going on in the world. And the teacher would ask questions or you would talk about the main stories that appeared in the news. So that helped the students be very, very aware of what was going on. And because we did have conversations, then we would just talk about stuff.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

Do you think those conversations kind of sparked the fire to go on that march or to go on that walk?

**Jacqueline Martin**

I think so. I think those conversations and being aware of what was happening, like over in Greensboro, in the Carolinas, and knowing that things needed to change. We, as a race are not asking for anything beyond what human beings should have. So that was basically it.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

Thanks for sharing that. You said that when you were marching that the community around you were very surprised that they saw students marching across the street. Was there anybody who tried to stop you, stop the protest, or who were yelling at you or hate speech or anything?

**Jacqueline Martin**

No, not at that point. Not that I remember. When the students left the school, then they went to the Masonic Temple. They made some signs. And then they walked south. And first, the conversation was we'd go down to I guess, to the county courthouse, but instead, we went to City Hall. People were just shocked, they were just surprised to see this. Because the attitude of the white community was that the black community was happy. And we were not dissatisfied with our existence. That there was no resistance that we would put up against our existence. So it was just shocking to them.



**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

You said that the students were kind of like the main contributors to the march. Where were the adults, like the parents or teachers of the students? Did they participate in the march?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Teachers, no. Parents, no. When the students went to the Masonic Temple and made signs – and that was the headquarters of SNCC, where SNCC was located, and to hold mass meetings and voter registration classes, and everything. They went there. The other adults that were part of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, went with us. They didn't let us go just by ourselves. Some other members of that organization had come into McComb back in August of that year. Bob was here already, and then some other people came in, Chuck McDew, and I think Reginald Robinson came in. Bob Zellner was a white person, he came in, but he came in, I think, maybe the day before the walkout. It was only a day or two. But he joined with us as well.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

Were they like the leaders almost? Did you see them as like your guides to the march or how to like really show your message in McComb?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Not really.

**Howard Levin**

Another way of asking that would be – I'm going to just try to rephrase that question. Who were the leaders? Who were the people that you looked towards for guidance on the march and during that day? Who were the true leaders of that?

**Jacqueline Martin**

The leaders were those high school seniors that I named. To me, those were the leaders of the march.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

It was all student-organized?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Yes. Student-led, students organized everything. The adults went with us because we were just being so, "Huh, this is what we are gonna do." And then they were older and understood the danger involved in it. And so they went with us so we wouldn't just go by ourselves.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

You said that the police that came in and you went to jail. Was that, during the march, were you expecting that to happen? When you saw them, what happened? What was your plan at that point? Was that still part of the march? Or did that kind of stop the protest?

**Jacqueline Martin**

You mean, being arrested? Being a part of the march?

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

Yes, yes.

**Jacqueline Martin**

I think that there was some expectation since everything that had happened in all other places there was civil disobedience had ended up in arrest, so I'm sure that expectation was there, that it would happen. And it did.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

Right. You said – in your last interview – you said that you were singing a lot when you were in jail? What did the singing mean to you and the students? What made it so powerful?

**Jacqueline Martin**

The words of the songs. "We shall overcome." "This little light of mine." All of those songs are very empowering. I find music to be very empowering even to this day. For example, "Stand Up." I don't know if any of you've seen the Harriet movie, but that song from that movie, to me is very powerful. You know, saying, "I will stand up and I'll take my people with me." It's very empowering.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

I want to ask you a favor. Do you think you could give us a little taste of that song? Can you sing it a little bit to us?

**Jacqueline Martin**

I can't sing. I won't go into that.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

No problem.

**Jacqueline Martin**

Is that what you are talking about, the song "Stand up?" I'll put it up on my computer and play for you, on my iPad rather. But I can't sing.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

Okay, you got it. Yeah, it sounds like a good song.

**Howard Levin**

I told him that if he could get you to sing it, he would get a lunch.

**Jacqueline Martin**

He'll starve if he's waiting for me.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

It was worth a try. It was worth a try.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

When you got out of jail, what was the reaction of your parents? What was having a conversation like at the dinner table right after the march?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Some parents were upset, but then my mom was always a person that was I guess, before her time. She was proud of us. And a lot of the parents were proud of their kids. It's sort of like their kid stood up for something that they weren't able to stand up for. It was just an interesting conversation about the experience and what had happened and what will happen next, that kind of thing.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

And one last question. You said that the principal or some of the teachers disagreed with the walkout or kind of went against it. After the walkout, what was it like going back to school? What was going on? Were there any differences?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Going back to school, the next day or two, or are you talking about later on?

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

Yeah. The next day or two?

**Jacqueline Martin**

When we went back to school, then all the kids that had participated – the students that had participated in the walkout – understand that some students that actually walked out of school, they didn't go down to City Hall. When they walked out and then they thought about it, when they got down to Elmwood Street and say, "Oh my God, what will happen to my parents? Then they didn't go back to school that day, they just went home. So when we did go back to school, then the students were asked to sign a paper, saying a statement, saying that they would never participate in anything like that, again, that they'd just come back to school and just "business as usual." And so when the students refused to sign that paper, then those students ended up walking out of the school again. And those are the students that ended up not going back to Burglund, and ended up going to school in Jackson to the private school, the church school that I mentioned earlier. And that's where they ended up going to school. Some of the students that participated in the walkout did not go to Campbell, but they just moved out of state rather than (go to Jackson) and went to school just somewhere else. I know a couple of students that moved to New Orleans, and that's where they stayed the rest of that year. And some of them went up north, to different places and stayed. That's what happened. And now the people that were part of that workout that were adults and the young people who were over 18 years old, they were kept in jail until like December. It was only the students that were under 18 that were released that night. But the rest of them stayed in jail until around December.

**Jean-Luc Desnoyers-Pina**

And so, do you recall any specific conversations like with your brother Jerome, about whether or not to sign the pledge that the school gave you?

**Jacqueline Martin**

I don't remember having a conversation. I just remember saying "no." I don't remember having a conversation with him. But he was a very wise young man. And I'm pretty sure he would have told me "no." But I don't remember a conversation.

**Howard Levin**

He would have told you not to sign or "no, don't sign it?"

**Jacqueline Martin**

Not to sign.

**Simona Nigusse**

I know after you went to Burglund, you said you went to Campbell. So how was that like going to that school?

**Jacqueline Martin**

It was interesting because I was staying in a dormitory. And some of the kids that were there had never been away from home overnight. That was part of those students. We stayed in a dormitory and so that that was just an experience. Living in a dormitory I had three other roommates. It was an experience.

**Simona Nigusse**

Did you grow to be close to your roommates while you were there?

**Jacqueline Martin**

I was friends with the roommates. The people who were roommates, I had known them all my life, so it wasn't like, they weren't strangers or anything. And I knew their parents, and I knew other members of their families. I still have a relationship with two of the women. One of the females is deceased. And two of the women I'm still

in contact with occasionally.

**Simona Nigusse**

Sorry to hear that. How was the community different going from your close-knit community to a whole different community? How was that different for you? Or if it even was different?

**Simona Nigusse**

That was leaving from a McComb and going to Jackson, which was a city, the capital of the state. The school was located across the street from Jackson State University, which is a pretty nice HBCU. And from there, Lynch street at that time, during that period of time, that was a large black business community that was within walking distance of where the school was located, with shops and stores and stuff like that. It was an altogether different thing. It was like going from the country to the city, sort of.

**Simona Nigusse**

Also in your 2010 interview, you mentioned that while you were in Campbell, you traveled to different states and stuff with Diane Nash. So, explain where you guys went what you did, and did things like that.

**Jacqueline Martin**

We went to Atlanta and met with people there, some people that were part of the (Movement). I met Julian Bond there, and some of the old veterans, that was part of SCLC, the Southern Christian Leadership Council, and then other SNCC people. And we went from there to New York. And what we were doing was talking to people. And I met Senator Javits in New York. We were letting them know the plight of the students because these students now are at Campbell and it's not as if parents had money to pay tuition for these students. So it was like fundraising, as well as getting out to the larger community as to what was happening in Mississippi. So that was an experience.

**Simona Nigusse**

And did you know at that time, did you think, "I'm really making a change?" Did you know like, "I'm really changing lives for people" at that time?

**Jacqueline Martin**

At that time I felt as if we were making a difference. But I didn't know how much of a difference. But I did feel like we were standing up and making a difference.

**Howard Levin**

We want to know a lot more about your trip with Diane Nash. Let's stay on that for a minute. Say more about who you were with, where else you went to. Tell us a little bit more about that story, because I think that's a very important piece of your history that's missing.

**Jacqueline Martin**

We went to Atlanta, and as I said, I met a number of people and there was a whole newspaper article written about us. And I remember my picture being in the paper. And we talked to people about the plight of the students and where the students were, and what the students needed. And then the people who were not aware of what had taken place, because the walkout was the first student-led walkout that happened in the Movement, the one that happened with the students in McComb. And from there, we went to New York City. And there was a TV program that we were on, I don't remember the name of the program, but it was Diane, myself, and then the senator from New York was there, Senator Javits. And this woman – I guess it was her program, her name was Ruth [Hagy]... I don't remember exactly what the last name was, maybe it was Brown or something like that. And then she interviewed us and for us to tell the story of what was going on in Mississippi. And that was primarily it. And we shared our story with them.

**Howard Levin**

Have you seen that interview in the last 40 years?

**Jacqueline Martin**

No.

**Howard Levin**

And do you know about exactly when that was? What month? What day? Anything?

**Jacqueline Martin**

I don't remember all of that. It was before the end of '61. So maybe it was in November, maybe December? Somewhere like that.

**Simona Nigusse**

When you guys were traveling to different states, did you have any free time to do what you guys wanted to do? And what did you do during your free time?

**Jacqueline Martin**

When I was in New York I connected with some relatives of mine and had a chance to just do some visits. And then other times when we were traveling, we tried to take in some of the sights of the areas where for were., So there was a little free time. It wasn't like it was a long trip or anything. It wasn't a week, it was just some days.

**Simona Nigusse**

Also, when you said you're traveling, you mentioned that you met some important people like in the SCLC and the NAACP. Who, who did you meet? And how was that like?

**Jacqueline Martin**

I met Harry Belafonte, and he kissed my cheek and I thought I would never wash my face again. That's what that was like.

**Howard Levin**

Can you sing one of his songs?

**Jacqueline Martin**

No, I can't sing. But I met him. And since then I've seen him since then because I went to the SNCC conference that they had over in Raleigh, I don't remember when that was maybe 2009 or somewhere like that. And he was there at that point, along with a whole lot of veterans of the Movement.

**Simona Nigusse**

After that, you mentioned going back to Burglund. How was that like after you left for a year and then just came back?

**Jacqueline Martin**

It was different. I still had friends who I had been friends with all the time. But it was like an "us and them." We were the kids that are from Campbell, and these are the kids from Burglund. It was that kind of thing that year, which made it really kind of interesting and different. Most of the students that went back, they stayed there. I only went back that one year. My parents were divorced by then so I left and went to New York after that. It was a little different. And in our community, our social systems were church and school. But to me, it was a little different. As a matter of fact, in later years, some of the people that were part of that class during that time that walked out, but went back to school and stayed. And later years, I had conversations with a couple of them and they would make comments like, "You went further." It was almost as if there was some regret there, maybe.

**Simona Nigusse**

Did the students or teachers treat you differently when you went back?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Not really.

**Simona Nigusse**

Did you receive any backlash or anything when you went back to Mississippi from the community, not just the school?

**Jacqueline Martin**

No.

**Simona Nigusse**

Going to New York, how was that like, after you just came back to Mississippi, how was like going to a whole different city?

**Jacqueline Martin**

It was an awakening. And it was different because of course, the school that I went to was probably four times the size of the one that I came from. But I adjusted and made friends and met people. So it was an adjustment, but I did it.

**Simona Nigusse**

Did you notice a cultural difference going from the South to the city?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Yes, that was a huge difference. But New York City is a melting pot. So it was just meeting so many different people from different cultures. I'm a very curious kind of person so I always leave myself open for the experience of people. It was interesting, I made friends with a number of people from a lot of different cultures.

**Simona Nigusse**

Are you still friends with them to this day?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Not really. Some people that I made friends within New York are deceased now. So,

**Simona Nigusse**

Do you think that experience in New York changed you into the person you are, going to a whole different culture, did it change you?

**Jacqueline Martin**

No. I believe that who I am is who I've been. The young person that I was, I've always walked to the beat of my own drum. Let's put it that way. I'm not a person that follow other people or bend to peer pressure or do any of that kind of stuff. That's just not who I am. And when I graduated high school, I went to work, I was working part-time, then. Then I went to work for the telephone company, the New York telephone company. I started taking classes in college classes. And when I was 18 years old, I had my own apartment in New York City. And I was very comfortable with that. And that had to do with I'm the kind of person that I am. A lot of young women that I knew, they would go together and get an apartment. And so I learned a lot of skills from those women because they would fall out, or they didn't have the kind of conversations that they needed to have with each other. So I learned some very good mediation skills and negotiation skills because when they would fall out



and get mad with each other, there was always a phone call, "We're just going to go and talk to Jacqueline." And so they would come to me. Sometimes they will come and one might spend the night with me. They would gravitate toward me. And one young woman, her mother told me she says, "I don't know what we would do without you," because it seems that one is always kind of negotiating or mediating differences when you have three or four girls sharing an apartment and that kind of thing. But I never had a desire to share an apartment with three or four people because of the dormitory experience that I encountered I did at Campbell, I said I don't ever want to live that close in proximity with people. And I'm extremely introverted. It might not appear that way. But I am. And Vickie (Malone) had to talk me into doing this interview because I would not have if she had not contacted me. And because Vickie shows up for me, I couldn't very well say no, and not show up for her. So that's how it came about. But I am very introverted. I can talk to people and go out and even do training and stuff like that, but I still have to have time on my own to recharge, to really get myself together. I'm okay with my own company.

### **Howard Levin**

You guys will get a chance to meet Vickie at some point before our session is over. Simona. Anything else? Any last question?

### **Simona Nigusse**

Yes, I just have one final question. Do you think? Or how do you think your high school experiences and your college experiences made you the strong, resilient person or activist that you are today?

### **Jacqueline Martin**

I think my lived experience made me who I am today. So the life I lived and lived through as a teenager, and the life I've lived through as a young adult, has made me who I am basically. And whenever I, in turn, decide, "Well, I'm just not going to do any more work that's dealing with social activism." And then something would come up and then I'll say, "Yes." I have to keep fighting and keep doing this for change to happen. I think all of it shaped me into who I am today.

### **Howard Levin**

Can you recount any additional civil rights-related actions or activities that you participated in from that time when you were living in New York until retirement?

### **Jacqueline Martin**

After I left New York and came back to Mississippi. Because of the experiences that I had and there were students that were really studying about McComb because you know, McComb, during the Civil Rights Era became the "bombing capital of the world." So students were studying about McComb in northern universities and stuff. So some of the people that I worked with there at City Hall, they knew about my experiences and the people that I had met during the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and all the people that I had met in my experiences. So they would usually send students when I came to me. And so I would end up talking to students about the history of McComb, and what had happened. And at that point while I was working, basically, it wasn't like participating, the way I participated in and civil rights things was basically putting on programs to educate the people. Because what had happened was, after everything that happened here in McComb, it was almost as if – I don't know whether the people were just so traumatized or they just – but I think that was part of it – it just became a silence. And people just didn't talk about it. They didn't talk about their experiences. They didn't talk about the experiences when they integrated some of the schools. They just didn't talk about any of that. And you could hardly get people to even talk about it.

So then I started putting on programs – panel discussions, things like that – for schools. And then there was a school that used to travel here every other year, which Hollis Watkins was associated with, and these kids would travel, the whole route of the Civil Rights Movement. And so when they would come to McComb, I would always get panel discussions, people, together, and so it would be people that were activists, and people that participated in the walkout and other things, school desegregation. It would be people, black people, there would be white people that... like one judge would appear for me, who was actually on the school board back

during that time, and other people that have lived in this community during that period of time. So after having a number of these discussions, then people started to open up more. And they started getting to be more comfortable talking about their experiences. And so after that, it was easier to put on these panel discussions, and it was easier to put on the programs that we would have. And because I knew a lot of the veterans, then when we were having programs, I could contact some of them.

One program we had I contacted Bob Moses and he brought a lot of his students here from the Algebra Project, of which he did. And then Chuck McDew who was here back during '61, he used to come here to visit at least once every year or two years and bring students to Mississippi. He in turn sent busloads of students from the consortium of the university system of Minnesota here. It just went on from there. So those are the kinds of things I did, just getting people to get to a point that they could talk about what happened. Whether it's the black community and the white community as well. Because until you acknowledge and speak it out loud, and maybe name it, you can't heal from it. Those were the things that I dealt with and that was just in my capacity of working for the city as well as volunteering at the school and knowing people from the Winter Institute.

### **Howard Levin**

Thank you that was very helpful. One last quick question about this timeframe. You mentioned that you work for the city. I'm curious if you recall that first day when you went to work at City Hall, in the same building where you were in the jail. Do you recall that day? Do you recall any feelings or conversations about going to work there?

### **Jacqueline Martin**

Not really. When I went to work I worked in the Tax Assessor's office. So I didn't have any great feelings one way or the other. I was basically just trying to learn the position. And the way I ended up getting a job at the city was my girlfriend's dad ran for the City Board as a selectman because here we have the board of mayor and selectmen. And we all worked on his campaign and did phone calls and door to door talking to people and trying to get him elected. And once he was elected, a position became available, and he wanted me to apply for it. And that's how I ended up going to work for the city of McComb. When I first went to work there, I was frustrated. And that was because it was the most unprofessional work environment I have ever encountered. And then there were other black people that work for the city, but then they were just all clustered into some of the lower-paying jobs. After I was there for some months, there was an election. And the mayor that was elected at that point, his name was Newton James. And Newton James owned an insurance agency here. And he was one of the first agencies I believe that allowed you to pay for insurance like monthly, you know, like car insurance, house insurance, that kind of thing. On this particular day that I remember, I was really going to a job interview. And Newton James told me, he says, "Now Miss Martin, I think you're probably going for an interview." He said, "But things are going to be different, and we need people like you here at the city. So I just really want you to think about it." So I did go to the interview. And after he and I talked and we just kind of built a relationship. He used to call me his little protege. And so we kind of build a relationship. And I chose to stay. And I stayed because the city was going to hire a city administrator. And then I knew that once they hired a city administrator, then it would become a more defined professional workplace than what it was.

### **Howard Levin**

Thank you. There's a lot more we could ask. But we're going to jump to Makana who is going to talk to you about your retirement years.

### **Makana Leavitt**

All right. The first question I have is, can you just go in a little bit about the activities that you're doing as far as like you said, you're involved in a couple of organizations and volunteering and whatnot. Could you just touch on that a bit?

**Jacqueline Martin**

Since I retired?

**Makana Leavitt**

Yes, since you've retired.

**Jacqueline Martin**

Let me go back a little bit before I retired, okay. Before I retired, this is when we did that Civil Rights Summit here. There were a number of people that came into the state for the Civil Rights Summit just because they saw it on the Internet. They studied about McComb but they had never been to McComb. And most of these people that came were people that were from colleges and universities, things of that sort. We did that program, that graduation ceremony, all that stuff, that happened before I actually retired.

When I did retire, I traveled some, I went here, there, around, New York and DC, and so forth just visiting friends and family. And then I notified Susan (Glisson) that I had retired. And so Susan contacted me. And at that point, we were looking at doing a Truth Commission. And we did build a database, but we never got to the point of actually having a Truth Commission. During the time that I worked on that program where we had that graduation ceremony, the superintendent that was here at the time – we had a lot of meetings, so there was a lot of work – I talked to him about teaching civil rights as part of the curriculum there in McComb. And I gave him a book, "Put the Civil Rights Teaching Back" (Putting the Movement Back into Civil Rights Teaching) that was done by Teaching for Change, Deborah Menkart, and Dr. Jenice View. And I gave him a copy of that book, that manual, and he was interested in it. So he, in turn, invited Deborah Menkart and Jenice View here and we started getting the teachers ready to do this civil rights curriculum. At that point we had The People's Institute out of New Orleans, they came and did some workshops with teachers. So I had got involved in that. So even after I first retired, I still was very involved in that. And McComb is the model for the civil rights curriculum that exists in Mississippi. So I was very, very involved in that for a number of years. And then also, as I said, building a database for the Truth Project.

**Jacqueline Martin**

After that, I started doing some other programs, the Welcome Table, and stuff like that with the Winter Institute. Before I retired for a number of years, I was a trainer for the community college here. Southwest Mississippi Community College is probably 10 minutes from where I live. So I had been a trainer for their workforce for a number of years. So a lot of the people, the businesses here that exist in McComb, I had done a lot of training for their teams of employees and for the school district, the teachers, their administrative people, and all. So some of the trainings that I did were communication skills, management, supervision. I do Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, the Covey stuff. And so I did a lot of training. So I got to know a lot of people with doing that. So even after I retired, I did that when I was still working for the city of McComb. Then after I retired, I still would do training for the community college. I have not done any in a long time for the community college. But now what I do is we do facilitation of a community-building experience product with the Winter Institute. So that's what I do now, part-time. Does that answer your question? It is kind of convoluted.

**Makana Leavitt**

It did. Another question I have is now that you're a little more laid back now, especially with COVID, what does a week look like for you? Are you still working? Yes. A couple of days a week and whatnot?

**Jacqueline Martin**

The work that we do primarily it was face to face and we do our work in a circle. So we always have our people in the circle face to face. We were not sure how it was going to go over on the computer. But now we do the same work. But we do it on Zoom. So I'm still doing stuff. This week has been so far a little bit light. I have y'all today. But then last night I watched – and this might be something that y'all want to watch too – is Let the People Speak (Let the People Decide). It's a documentary. No, Let the People Decide. I'm sorry. I watched that last night because we had the film festival that happens and Oxford with Jackson, or wherever it is, The Winter Institute said we will do a film along with a panel discussion about the film. That's the film that will be done, Let

the People Decide. It's about voter registration. It's about the McComb Project of 1961 and it carries you all the way through to the 2016 election and beyond, about voter suppression and stuff. It's very good.

**Makana Leavitt**

You talked a little bit about these circles. Is there a specific topic that you usually go over as far as training and stuff like that?

**Jacqueline Martin**

What we do is considered as a community-building experience, because we, in turn, know that if people tell their stories, and they talk to each other – we're not here to teach you necessarily, but you are here to learn from each other. The first of so many sessions, we give a prompt, and then everybody speaks to that prompt, and that sharing their story. And then it's getting people to listen because people basically don't listen. They're either listening to respond, or they're listening, "Oh, what am I going to say?" All kinds of things. So we get people really to learn to do deep listening to each other. And we use stories to do that. And then we'll use third things sometimes like poems and quotes to get people to think about certain things. And usually, it's sort of a transformative experience. It's always very good.

**Makana Leavitt**

Thank you. You talked a little bit about your grandchildren and the 2010 interview 10 years ago, and you seem very excited about them. How are they doing?

**Jacqueline Martin**

They're doing great. My oldest granddaughter is a registered nurse. She has a Bachelor's in nursing. And my baby granddaughter is 13. And she was Teacher of the Year – I mean Student of the Year when she was in fifth grade. And just recently, she's Student Of The Year now in eighth grade. She makes very, very good grades. The teachers, the faculty, nominate the students that will go up for that honor of Student of the Year. And then they have to fill out all this paperwork and everything it all has to do with their grades and all that kind of stuff. Then they go for an interview. And, the faculty selects the student. So she student of the year, this year in eighth grade.

**Makana Leavitt**

That's great.

**Jacqueline Martin**

Yeah, I'm very proud of them.

**Makana Leavitt**

I have probably two more questions. As far as COVID is going on, how has that affected you in your life and, and your family life and whatnot?

**Jacqueline Martin**

We've been very fortunate that nobody's been sick, not with COVID. It just made my life, my little circle, very small. I'm at home is where I am right now. When it first happened, for months I didn't leave this house. I went out in the yard and I could walk in my subdivision. But basically, I didn't go to any stores or anything like that. I have a niece, that's a schoolteacher here and she said that she didn't want her mom nor I going anywhere. If we need shopping done, she did that for us. Also, it has made me reach out to people that I haven't heard from in a long time. And the same thing has happened with them because I've talked to people that I had not talked to in years. They've gone out on the Internet and kind of hunt you up and they'd call you or send you a message on Facebook. That's been an interesting thing. So I'm just here.

**Makana Leavitt**

Final question, kind of wrap it up. After looking back on your life, is there anything you'd change as far as your activism or your work or anything like that? Is there anything looking back that you wish you did differently?

**Jacqueline Martin**

I have absolutely no regrets. I've always believed that whatever you do, you give it your all and ensure that it's something that you truly want to do. I have absolutely no regrets. And then now at this point in my life, I do exactly what I want to do. If it's something that I don't want to do, I don't do it. So that works out just really, really well. But I have absolutely no regrets. I remember when I was a young girl talking to some older people – I've always been around older people because they're just so interesting to me and I just think that they are wonderful. And as you get older, you know, you get to be invisible. People kind of don't see you necessarily the same look and through you. But I can remember hearing some conversation with some older people years ago when I was a young person, and they were bitter. You know, they had all these regrets and "What ifs," and all that stuff. And I can remember telling myself as that young person, that when I get old and sit in my rocking chair, that I want to be able to share my lived experience with people, but I want to do it with no regrets, and no bitterness. So that's where I am.

**Howard Levin**

That's great. Thank you.

**Jacqueline Martin**

You're welcome.

**Howard Levin**

Jackie, is there anything you wish you would have included?

**Jacqueline Martin**

No. Just for general information, there were 84 students that attended Campbell.

**Howard Levin**

84. Let's go ahead and wrap up this formal interview. Thank you so much for sitting with us.