An oral history from Roger Hickey of the VSCRC, 2015.

Oral histories taken for the VSCRC 50th Reunion Oral History Project in Blackstone, VA. Professors Brian Daugherity and Ryan Smith interview former members of the VSCRC to obtain information about their work with the organization in the 1960s, in addition to their work with Civil Rights in general. Virginia Student Civil Rights Committee Oral History collection. https://archives.library.vcu.edu/repositories/5/resources/568

(Unedited)

There's a famous case of this guy who is sort of the local artist and had long hair and he was kicked out of VCU for having long hair. And it became a campus crusade. It must have been successful because of uh, anything goes these days. So, are we recording? We just got some preliminary stuff to get out of way. We're gonna ask some biographical questions. We'll talk about your work in the summers of '65 '66. A little bit about your what happened kind of afterwards.
Ryan [Smith] So my name is Ryan Smith. I'm a faculty member at Virginia Commonwealth University and I'm here with Brian Daugherity, who's also a faculty member at Virginia Commonwealth University. And we are going to interview Roger Hickey, a former member of the Virginia Student Civil Rights Committee, the VSCRC. We're talking today on Saturday, June 20th, 2015. Which is the 50th anniversary here, of the VSCRC in Blackstone, Virginia. So Roger, do you agree to be interviewed and recorded?
[RH] I do agree.
RS/[BD] Okay. Thank you. Can you tell us your full name?
[RH] Roger D. Hickey.
RS/[BD] Okay. Is that the name that people would have known you as at the time? And just kinda start at the beginning, I guess. When and where were you born?
[RH] I was born in Lexington, Kentucky. Right after World War two. My dad was going to law school on the GI Bill and he got back into the service after the war and we moved around all over the country and all over the world really. So I trace my involvements in civil rights to the fact that in my last year in high school, we transferred from Madrid, Spain, which was fairly sophisticated and even though it was Franco Spain at that time, but to Montgomery, Alabama. And I graduated from high school one year in Montgomery, Alabama, the year before they integrated. 1963. And and during that period, that was after the Montgomery bus boycott, but it was the year of the Civil Rights march on Washington which I watched on television. It was the year Kennedy was killed. And in my high school this all white high school. They cheered when Kennedy was killed. And this is, I mean, for a young guy who was an admirer of Kennedy, to see that made me realize how polarized the South had become and, and how much those kids were invested in, in a resistance to the civil rights movement. And and then I went to the University of Virginia from there. So I was ready to get involved with something and I was sort of shocked to realize how how conservative UVA was. So you'll probably interview David Nolan at some point

he was the first guy that I saw on campus that I think he was wearing an American's for Democratic Action button and I thought, Well at least there are a few liberal here. And so I got quickly involved in the kinds of things we're talking about today. Support for the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Several of my friends went down to Selma and and was quickly involved in local organizations that were doing support for civil rights and Students for Social Action, which was one of the groups that that helped many of the people in that group organized VSCRC went to the to the founding conference. And subsequently we, right after Selma, we had a big, big conference in at UVA where where John Lewis spoke with his head still bandaged from the Selma march on the SNCC Freedom Singers, lots of people from SNCC. And, and from then on, I helped to organize support for the Virginia students, we raised money. I wasn't down there living there until later, until '65, but but we were one of the groups on campus that was supporting that project and also doing what we could in Charlottesville to change things.
RS/[BD] This is all really useful we want to unpack a little bit at the beginning of what you had said there. What year were you were born?
[RH] I was born in 1946.
RS/[BD] Okay. And so before you get to Montgomery, had clearly a galvanizing experience there, especially in light of where you've been prior to that, was your father a lawyer? What brought the family to travel around so much?
[RH] Well he was in the Air Force. He got back into the Air Force after after the GI Bill. And so and he was a lawyer for the Air Force. So he was in the Jag core. So in the Air Force, you travel around, you get transferred every four years or less. So we lived in Japan, we lived in California, we lived in Colorado, in Spain. We lived all over the place.
RS/[BD] Did you have brothers and sisters?
[RH] A younger brother and a younger sister. Yeah.
RS/[BD] Did your mother work?
[RH] Yeah. She's a nurse. She worked as a nurse and in nursing homes.
RS/[BD] And before you went to UVA, this would've been in the fall of '63?
[RH] Yeah.
RS/[BD] Where are you active in social activism prior to that point as a high school student or anything of note?
[RH] Not, not really. I read a lot. I remember on the boat back from Spain reading James Baldwin's The Fire Next Time. All about the growing civil rights movement. So I was not, not terribly politically active. There's wasn't too many vehicles for that.
RS/[BD] Okay. So you come to UVA in the fall of 1963 and you begin to interact with people that were involved and SSA and some of the other groups. You mentioned a few those individuals. You also mentioned the founding of VSCRC. Can you tell us a little bit about that? That was the Hampton University meeting?
[RH] I was not, I knew people who went to that meeting, but I did not go. Subsequently, I felt that I was a part of that network that included black and white people on black and white campuses around around Virginia, which I thought was pretty unique. I'm not sure too many other Southern states had that kind of thing. But so I was not at the Hampton conference but heard about it immediately afterwards and was part of the planning for the Virginia summer project. And I mean, I guess what we were able to do was a publicity and fundraising.

RS/[BD] So correct me if my timeframe is wrong, but then the founding conference was in December of '64, and then that would've been a spring of '65. Getting ready for the summer project?
[RH] Yeah.
RS/[BD] And what sort of fundraising? How did you guys go about that? And the same thing with publicity.
[RH] I'm a little vague on the on the on how much we were able to raise. I mean, we thought of ourselves as raising money. It was both, it was from students. It was from liberally, liberal faculty members. It was from to some extent some liberal Northerners. And, and the publicity was had to do with interacting with the Cavalier Daily and the local student newspaper. Both connected, getting articles that connected what was going on in the more exotic places like Mississippi with, with things that were going on right in Virginia, and to some extent in Charlottesville because there was still an effort going on to desegregate facilities in Charlottesville.
RS/[BD] What brought you to UVA?
[RH] It was an accident. I had a high school I mean, this southern high school guidance counselors there thought it was the Harvard of the South. And I think I I was not really aware that there were no women. Are very few women there when I got there. So I was very naive and, and sort of found myself in this, what was then a very, very conservative Southern school, which was very, very proud of itself.
RS/[BD] Let me ask what your parents or your siblings maybe thought about your entree into this civil rights movement.
[RH] Well, you know, it was a cultural revolution going on there, but my parents are basicall liberals, even though my dad's military guy. So their attitude was as long as you do your studies and don't get in bad trouble, we respect your views. There were times when it seemed like they thought I was too involved in this kind of stuff. But but but basically not a, not a not a big problem. And I think they were secretly proud of what I was doing.
RS/[BD] Perhaps they're glad it was Virginia instead of Alabama.
[RH] Yes, probably true.
RS/[BD] Was there any other activities going on in Charlottesville that you are engaged in or was it all leaning towards Southside, Virginia?
[RH] There had been a wave of desegregation in Charlottesville. In terms of eating facilities. Some professors, notably Paul Gaston, had been involved in altercations outside of a restaurant name Buddies. We so we made it a point when when we had when black students who were a small number at that time were willing to go into facilities and, and, and integrate them. But, but by that time the worst of the of the battle was over. There was some amount of pressure that we were able to put on the university as to why there were very few blacks there. And and Tom Gardner and I were really pushing on recruiting. They were not recruiting black student athletes, if you can believe that. And we got the we got the coach of the basketball team to admit that they were not recruiting and they just did not go to black high schools. And we made a big deal of that. And and sports was one of the ways in which even the deep south campuses got integrated. Finally is they wanted to win games, football and basketball game. So we were, we were known as the troublemakers. We were the ones who are trying to get more black faculty. We're trying to get more black recruiting of students. We quickly got a reputation from the deans

as being troublemakers. That's what Students for Social Action, which I was the chair of the second year that it was an existence after Howard Romaine. It was it was known as that kind of rabble rousing activist group that was trying to push UVA in a more progressive direction.
RS/[BD] And who else than would have been strongly involved with the group? You mention Howard, you mentioned David Nolan.
[RH] People here, at this reunion. Tom Gardner, Nolan. There were people who were not here. Alan Ogden. There's a, there's a group of people. And it grew because people came from all over. The California kids who came to UVA were just totally amazed. So it grew and become, became more diverse. Ultimately, all of that activity culminated in the, in the big student strike in 1960, 1970, '69, I guess after Cambodia '70. By which time I was, I was gone. But, but I really considered that big uprising as, as the result of all the work that we had done. And and so large and growing, a small but growing group of members of the Students for Social Action. Later there became several other organizations on campus. And then Black Student Union. And then a good number of faculty who, who were involved with us well, either advising or, or participating in some of the things.
RS/[BD] I recently reread Paul Gaston piece he has a pamphlet that he wrote Sitting In in the Sixties. That tells the story, the Buddies restaurant debacle. And so it's fascinating stuff. So before we turn it to South Side and VSCRC in particular, when did you finish at UVA and we'll talk a little more about it later. But when did you finish and leave Virginia I guess?
[RH] I graduated in 1968 in the summer and moved to, well traveled around a bit in Mississippi and Alabama, but ended up in Richmond, Virginia. So that's connected up with Bruce Smith and some of the other people who were working on VSCRC and continue to do political work including what we called, campus traveling at that point. So coming back to UVA occasionally and to other campuses. And by that time, the war in Vietnam was a big deal as well.
RS/[BD] It's just going to get us down to the Southside, Virginia. You had done some planning there in Charlottesville. When did you do- were you a resident in Southside?
[RH] I was not involved. I was not able to go down for the first summer, but the second summer I was determined to do that. And so I just made plans. I think the second summer, as I recall, they were expanding into more counties and a very good friend of mine, Robert Doert and I paired up and were assigned to Mecklenburg County. So we were officially employees working for the Virginia Students Civil Rights Committee, but we were hosted by local NAACP leaders and and other local folks.
RS/[BD] That would have been in 1966.
[RH] Yeah.
RS/[BD] So when did you hear about that first summer of '65.
[RH] I had visited for short times. I thought they were cracking the universe open. I thought they were, they were doing something that was clearly I knew enough about massive resistance and the and the political system that had evolved in Virginia to resist all kinds of African American power. That I knew it was very repressive in a kind of smothering way rather than a dangerous physical way. But but it was it was clear to me, especially by the time that the voting rights bill was passed, that if people there got a little powering, Got got the ability to register to vote, that it could transform the politics of Virginia and therefore the politics of the country. So and I thought it was pretty dangerous, say, I could tell. It was it was not a it was not it was not the Southside

we know today, it was a very polarized in and a place where violence was used to keep people in line as well. And and I thought I knew that VSCRC was a difficult process where there were battles and fights and a bunch of kids trying to figure out how to be effective. But it was also incredibly exciting and something that I wanted to be a part of.
RS/[BD] What was your role visiting down there in '65? You mentioned going.
[RH] It was simply visiting it was checking it out. I mean, all of us had a proprietary feeling about the project, that it was ours, that we had helped to to to build it. And I wanted to be able to go back to UVA and say, you know, I've been there and we should we should help raise money for it. So it was, and it was also very exciting to, Duke and Dottie here where the first interracial couple I ever met. And they were incredibly lots of fun and wonderful people. So it was it was an exciting place to visit and, and it was a place where where we were making an important difference.
RS/[BD] And how would you estimate about how many volunteers were South side in the summer of '65? How many counties or what were the kind of key counties that they were working in?
[RH] You've got to ask other people who have better memories. And I mean, we have some archivists here who it '65, it must have been five or six counties. We were just talking about who was where, when I left that meeting. And my impression is that we are it was a larger group in '66.
RS/[BD] Did you see anything in the initial visits in '65 that frightened you?
[RH] No, it was more working in the, I mean, sure. I mean, I heard stories for stories of people being followed or chased on a very isolated country roads. The summer that I was there. The Klan became very active. And I think there were there's some of that in the first summer as well.
RS/[BD] So I'm going to '66. You knew already that you had the time and space to be there for the summer. And you said you're stationed in Mecklenburg?
[RH] Yeah. South Hill. Mecklenburg county.
RS/[BD] And you had a companion, what was your companion's name? Robert Doert, who was a UVA student as well. Where did you meet him? The, my impression is that the local community leaders were a little bit leery about these two white boys coming into their town. And, and yet they felt, I can't even imagine what the social dynamics were on. What should we do with these guys? And so they, somebody in the mortuary business had moved their place of business from one place to another, built a new place. And so the old mortuary became our home. And so it was literally a morticians kind of cinder block house with big ol shower used to shower down the blood off of dead people and and you know, for big old rooms and that and just cold water. So that was our our that's where they put us. It's I'm sure it seemed safer than than putting us up with a local family.
RS/[BD] And naturally, there's no other roommates or just your Roger sharing this?
[RH] Yep. Yep. Yep.
RS/[BD] So then what was your main activity?
[RH] Our main activity and I got to be honest, I can't say that we accomplished a hell of a lot of our major activity was going out into the countryside mostly and knocking on people's doors and, and trying to convince them to register to vote. And there were I would say that there were not too many people that we actually accompanied into the courthouse to to get them to vote.

But what we what we hoped we were doing was, was getting them to think about the idea and getting them to understand that it was now protected by law. And trying to get them to talk to other people who had already registered to vote. So most of our activity had to do with either traveling out. Usually. We were lucky to be adopted by a local young guy who is a little bit younger than us, but about our age, who's going to be here today. Otho Purcell Junior, who is known all over the county is Otho Junior. And he knew everybody knew everybody was kind of at that point, I think, kind of rambunctious kid who was looking for adventure. But he was also accepted in every church in the county. So he was our guide who's kind of a cynical observer of the entire social structure of whites and blacks in that county. And and so he when, when, when he was available, he would go with us and Bob Doert's little green Valiant with Pennsylvania license plates. And we saw a lot of our time was was knocking on people's doors, sitting down, being nicely treated, if they would let us in at all. And and then the other parts of the activity were going to churches. And, uh, we would either be introduced on Sunday at services and talked about as the civil rights workers who are in town helping people register. Or occasionally we were asked to say something in churches as well. And those were of coarse, wonderful experiences. They're incredibly gracious. And often it would be a situation for homecoming or good old special weekend where people from that church would all gather. So that and the and the occasional meetings somewhere in Blackstone or elsewhere of the whole crew, Were our major activities.

RS/[BD] How would you describe the mood in those churches and homes, towards registering to vote or towards increasing this kind of activity?

[RH] I think it was a combination. My impression is that there was a group of people who had managed to navigate the system already. And they tended to be the more established people who we're somewhat independent of the whites or had their own base. And we're more middle-class. And therefore had managed to be seen as trustworthy and by the, by the whites who registered people and therefore had managed to, to get to be part of the system. It was fairly recent, but still had been. And then, and then a lot of people, basically rural people. But some of the congregation as well, congregations where it was still seen as dangerous, still seen as I don't think I want to be a part of this. I don't think I want to be seen with these white boys. Everybody knows everything that's going on. And, and I don't want to be thrown out of my house. I don't want to be fired. So it was a, it was a real two kinds of universes at least. And I think by that time, people felt that they, it was part of their obligation to be part of the process. And and many people were reluctant about that. So. Yes, we'll put you up for the night, but you gotta get out of here the next day. It was a dangerous. There was always lurking in the background, the possibility that we could be screwing people's lives up.

RS/[BD] In addition to voting rights, of course, there's some other big issues at the same time. School desegregation, for instance, or the war on poverty. How did some of those other civil rights related issues feed into what was going on with VSCRC?

[RH] Well there was clearly the example of Prince Edward County where they just shut down the schools. And that was that was kind of a worst-case scenario that loomed over every other county in Virginia. And my impression is that the process of integration was going apace with the process of creating white academies. So that, that was in process. As we were there. There was generalized talk of if we got strong enough, we could we could create a poverty program

here in the county. I can't remember- I my impression is that there wasn't much going on, maybe a few programs out of churches. But that was that was in the air that I mean, that was supposed to be national policy that, that we were embed, embarked on a war on poverty. And I think in all of our minds, the idea was if, if black people in this county had more power, they could connect with the political system in a way that would bring money into the Southside, that would bring jobs into the Southside that would help the educational process in Southside. So that was in the news, in the press, in the air and part of the explanation of what we thought we were trying to do.
RS/[BD] So correct me if I'm wrong, but it seemed as if VSCRC felt that the vote was kind of the the the crucial issue, the one of the first step to leveraging power that could then address some of the other related issues?
[RH] Yes, I think so. There were in some cases in some counties there was more diverse activity going on. And and I I think that VSCRC was a vehicle for some poverty programs in places like Lunenburg or helped get people forward to apply for grants and things like that. But in a lot of the counties, the most obvious thing to do first was voter registration.
RS/[BD] And for future listeners and researchers. The Voting Rights Act is passed in the summer of 1965 and it goes into effect immediately. So why was it or why would it have been so difficult for African Americans to register to vote in Virginia in the summer of 1966?
[RH] Because it was Virginia. They were still wrestling over the poll tax in Virginia at that time. It would have taken U.S. marshals coming in there in order to enforce a massive voter registration effort. There were all kinds of subtle ways in which the people who ran the registration system that was located in the court house, that was located where the sheriffs were. There are all kinds of ways that they had to under cut what we were trying to tell people was their right to vote. So I was, we were there at the beginning of what became a process where people became more and more willing to, to, to vote and go to. The guy that I worked with later on in California, became the one of the campaign managers for I'm sorry, I'm blanking. The first government of first black governor of Virginia.
RS/[BD] Wilder.
[RH] Wilder was actually a lawyer for the Virginia Students Civil Rights Committee and my friend who is from Alabama, helped him get elected in, in Virginia and said that was the first, besides electing a few decent Democratic candidates Wilder was sort of the culmination, to my mind, of the, the, the possibility that, that black people and poor white people could join together and really make some big changes in a place like Virginia. So it was a slow process.
RS/[BD] You had mentioned as part of your work going to the offices of the VSCRC was that in Blackstone?
[RH] If I if I should be in this session reminding myself where we met.
RS/[BD] Was in somebody's house or?
[RH] There was there was an office in Blackstone. And they've just been circulating some photographs. It was a storefront on one of the main streets here in Blackstone. And and there were meetings in people's houses as well. So it was, it's sort of the the word went through that the telephone telegraph about having a staff meeting. And there must have been regular meetings as well. To know where to go and when.
RS/[BD] How many people would say?

[RH] Oh, maybe I don't know. 20. Sometimes.
RS/[BD] Were you still working on fundraising during that summer of '66 or did you have any sense of whether the funds are in good shape or whether there was money coming?
[RH] Well, it was all it was always a low budget operation that I mean, we were paid $5 a week, I think. And yet to the extent that we could get up to Charlottesville and and and talk to people. They would send us back with some money, but it wasn't like we're talking big money here. And there was some attempt to do newsletters and correspondence with supporters. But again, nothing compared to today's technology.
RS/[BD] And how did the, the white community and Mecklenburg respond to VSCRC and the two of you working in the county? And a bit more broadly, how did the white community in Southside respond to this project?
[RH] Well, I think the establishment tried to ignore us. The sophisticated whites who ran the place tried to ignore it. And those are the, some of those people claim to be good friends of the Negro population. And, but there was also a resurgence of the Klan in, I think, coming over from North Carolina in that, in that summer. So there were Klan posters on telephone poles. There were rallies that they were advertising. They were -- looking back on it, it's unclear to me what their political goals were, except for kind of generalized intimidation. But the Klan was clearly aware that we are in the community and, and they used as, as a foil to rile people up.
RS/[BD] Tell us about the end of that summer. So you rotated out in August of '66?
[RH] Shortly before the end of the summer, I had to leave my. My parents called me and said, Your granddaddy in Kentucky has had a stroke and you've gotta go you gotta go to Kentucky and help around the farm. So I think my parents were just incredibly happy to be able to tell me that there was an emergency to attend to. So I ended up spending the last few weeks of the summer tending to his herd of cattle who happened to have pink eye. And, and getting back in touch with my country roots, which were not too different from Virginia. Tobacco country, he was a tobacco farmer and and back in touch with my other relatives who were taking care of him, who it was, it was a Catholic family and therefore more liberal than most country people in Kentucky subject to attacks by the Klan as well. But still, they were kind of suspicious. I mean, they were kind of worried about, what the hell was he doing up there at Virginia. So that's the way I left the project and ended up going back to UVA, that fall and returning to a more support role with a whole lot more sense of what was going on there,
RS/[BD] What happened to the organization at that point?
[RH] To the VSCRC? My recollection is it kept going for for several years more and it gradually dwindled so that it became focused, I think in Lunenburg and with with one strong leader,
RS/[BD] Nathaniel Lee Hawthorne
[RH] Yes, Mr. Hawthorn. But that took awhile. I mean, some people like David Nolan took up residence and were there year round and and and so it it even though it slowly shrank, it was it was still active for many several years to go forward.
RS/[BD] So where did you go after graduation? Traveled around the south, Mississippi and Alabama. We had another network called the Southern Student Organizing Committee, which was founded by some of the same people. It grew out of -- its white people within the Civil Rights Movement, grew out of the Nashville movement. And, and so and I became for awhile a campus traveler for SSOC. I first tried back in Alabama and that I wasn't able to pull that off. I

just didn't know anybody there. But so I came to Virginia and Bruce Smith and I and others created a little beachhead in Richmond and traveled out to campuses and did both focus on civil rights and increasingly on the war in Vietnam.
RS/[BD] Did you continue to stay engaged after the sixties? With social issues of any kind?
[RH] Yeah. I mean, I was hooked. It seemed clear to me that there was a there was an economic system that wasn't working for anybody, either black or white. That the, that the boom of the sixties was, was, showed us what was possible but, but it was stalled and, and was less and less working for either whites or blacks. Vietnam War took up a whole lot of my attention and I, after spending some time almost a year at the Great Speckled Bird in Atlanta. And with a lot of these people and work, for example, ended up going out to California and helping to run a project, working for an advertising project against the war in Vietnam. And the sponsoring group was Clergy and Laymen concerned about Vietnam, which was a group that Martin Luther King helped to start after he came out against the war. So we recruited top advertising people to do TV and radio and print ads against the war. And then out of that, created an ad agency based on doing campaigns for good ideas. So what I, what, what inspired me in Virginia and then, and originally in Alabama, the idea of people changing history continues to inspire me today. After California, I came to Washington help to start a think tank which became known as the Economic Policy Institute, which is a major think tank focused on working people and economics. And then later a more political group called the Campaign for America's Future, which tries to take those ideas into the political system.
RS/[BD] Did you say you're currently in Richmond?
[RH] No I'm currently in DC.
RS/[BD] Yeah. Yeah. So looking back in general, it's an incredible kind of sweep after the fact that that '65, '66, what do you think your major accomplishments were or the accomplishments of the VSCRC?
[RH] I would I would say that first of all, the networking of students around the state, which to my knowledge, hadn't ever happened before. That, that, that in itself was an important thing. And, and then secondly, because that spawned all kinds of things in those college towns and in the activists that were involved, the actual accomplishments of VSCRC in Southside. I would say we spread the word. We spread the word that it was okay for whites and blacks to work together. We spread the word that it was increasingly okay to be part of the political system and register to vote and to make demands on the system. I can't say that we in Mecklenburg County registered all that many voters directly. But it was part of a, it was part of a social revolution that was going on. And mostly I think we, we did that, we had that effect in a positive way as opposed to a polarizing or negative way. So I think it was part of a process that eventually helped to free Virginia from the Harry Byrd machine and the massive resistance that had dominated the state based on the subjugation of black people.
RS/[BD] Pretty mature reflection, but I still get the sense that that's kinda how you felt at the time too. Probably you're thinking around those accomplishments, as well.
[RH] I think we I think we had a more romantic idea that that somehow we were going to make faster change, that we were going to go down and, and actually registered massive numbers of people. There would be some kind of mass movement. There were some demonstrations in some towns. So I think we were more ambitious than what we actually accomplished. But but

that's the way change happens.
RS/[BD] Anything else you'd want to add about your time working with the VSCRC or your role?
[RH] I, or we all really saw this as part of a social revolution that was going on and it was led by SNCC. We were, VSCRC would not be not exist except for the fact that the SNCC people came through, helped us, start it, helped inspire us, helped, helped every step of the way in terms of encouraging us.
RS/[BD] I don't want to interrupt, but nobody else is really talked about that. So if you could just expand upon how SNCC helped to create the VSCRC in any individuals that-
[RH] It's being talked about at this meeting. And the very first meeting that created the Virginia Student Civil Rights Committee was the idea of several SNCC leaders, campus travelers that they had. And and that first meeting which brought people from black campuses and white campuses together would not have happened except for the SNCC guys talking to a few people in Virginia and saying, why don't you do this? You don't have to go to Mississippi. And so, and we were all inspired by the bravery and that the vision of what Howard Zinn called the new abolitionists. People were just putting their lives on the line, breaking open a system that was that needed to be broken open. And and doing it in a way that was uncompromising. So we felt that we were a part of that. And that that every, I think a lot of people here today think that everything that they've done that has been political in their lives was greatly influenced by that feeling that it's possible to change something that seems unchangeable. And Southerners, especially knew, how unchangeable it seemed to people. So that if you can crack open that system. And at the same time conjure up the idea of the beloved community. Which until things got polarized, that was the dominant big vision. And that was the operative mode, which is, we can all do this together. That was the larger context which ultimately led to the movement against the war in Vietnam, which seemed uncrackable at the time that eventually lead to what the kids are doing now with online activism and and and social change around economic issues. So for me it was both an opportunity to get back to my southern roots, but also an opportunity be part of making history.
RS/[BD] And now of course SNCC at that that time period was going through a revolution of its own. By the time you go to Mecklenburg in the summer of '66, they're in the process of becoming a black organization versus a biracial organization. So I'm curious, how did the rise of black power within SNCC in its movement towards that direction? How did that impact the VSCRC and if so, how so?
[RH] Yeah, clearly it did. And Southern Student Organizing Committee, as well. But mostly the SNCC people were pragmatic. I mean, somebody was telling the story about Stokely Carmichael coming to Virginia during the Black Power emersion. And asking, well, what's that mean for us white people? And his answer was, get to work organizing, work yourself out of a job. That's the SNCC model. And then go find some, some your own people to organize. That was the and we had constant dialogue with the SNCC people. Some of it aggressive and hostile. Most of it was very, you know, look folks, you gotta go work in your own community. And and so it was, and most of us really understood basically that what we were about was black power. I mean, it made sense. So I was, I remember vividly being in a sharecroppers home where we were spending the night and on television, was Stokely at, in the Mississippi march. Saying, in public for the, you know, one of the first times, the black power chant. And, and, and it

was difficult for some people to adjust to, but it basically made sense. Things got crazy afterwards. But that's because of all kinds of things, including the FBI and the antiwar stuff. And but, but clearly, if you're going to build a political movement that empowers people, you have to build a political movement that empowers people. And, and in many parts of the South, Black Power is a reality now. And it's not one way or another way. It's all kinds of innovative coalitions and, and, and fascinating comings together.
RS/[BD] Very good, thanks for explaining that. I'd like to thank you for what you did in Virginia back in the 1960's. And I thank you for sharing your time with us today.
[RH] Sure, I'm glad you guys are here. This has been very helpful. So much appreciate it.
[RH] Thanks.
RS/[BD] Enjoy lunch.
[RH] Hopefully. I hope it's still there. So you're both teaching and research and history?