

**Julian Bond Oral History Project
“The Making of Julian Bond, 1960-68”**

Interview with Joan Trumpauer Mulholland

**Special Collections Division
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PREFACE

This interview is part of an oral history project entitled, “The Making of Julian Bond, 1960-1968.” Unless otherwise indicated, the interviewer is Gregg Ivers, Professor of Government and Director, Julian Bond Oral History Project, American University.

The reader is encouraged to remember that this transcript is a near-verbatim transcription of a recorded interview. The transcript has been edited for minor changes in grammar, clarity and style. No alteration has been made to the conversation that took place.

Notes, where and when appropriate, have been added in [brackets] to clarify people, places, locations and context for the reader.

Biographical Note for Joan Trumpauer Mulholland

Joan Trumpauer Mulholland (b. 1941) grew up in Arlington, Virginia, and became involved in the sit-ins and other civil rights activities during her freshman year at Duke University. Ms. Mulholland returned to the D.C. area after her first and last year at Duke, and joined the Howard University branch of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC], the Nonviolent Action Group [NAG]. After participating in a Freedom Ride from New Orleans to Jackson, Mississippi and spending the summer of 1961 at Parchman Prison, she decided to transfer to Tougaloo College, a private, black women’s college located just outside Jackson, where she became the first white member of Delta Sigma Theta sorority.

Ms. Mulholland became a participant in the historic Jackson sit-in and boycott movement during the spring of 1963. She returned to Arlington after graduating from Tougaloo in 1964, raising a family and teaching in the Arlington County schools for forty years. Ms. Mulholland has remained active in civil rights causes and civil rights education, and is a member of the SNCC Legacy Project. She is the subject of a 2013 documentary, “An Ordinary Hero: The True Story of Joan Trumpauer Mulholland,” about her time in the civil rights movement

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American University

Joan Trumpauer Mulholland (06-JBOHP)
September 21st, 2018
Arlington, Virginia

Interviewer: Gregg Ivers
Videographer: Audra Gale
Production Assistants: Gracie Brett, Lianna Bright, Colleen Vivaldi

Code: Gregg Ivers [GI] Joan Mulholland [JM]

Today is Friday September 21st, 2018 and we're in Arlington, Virginia at the home of Ms. Joan Mulholland to conduct an interview for the Julian Bond Oral History Project sponsored in part by the School of Public Affairs at American University. My name is Gregg Ivers. I am Professor of Government at American University and Director of the Julian Bond Oral History Project. I am joined this afternoon by three outstanding American university undergraduates, Gracie Brett, Audra Gale and Lianna Bright, who are assisting with the production and videography of this interview. Ms. Mulholland entered the civil rights movement as a student at Duke University in 1960 and her path forward was a very unusual one for a white Southern woman and we'll let her tell that story herself rather than have me try to summarize it here. We'll also hear her observations on Julian Bond, who she met during her days working with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Ms. Mulholland, we are thrilled to be spending time with you this afternoon.

JM: And I'm honored that you want to be here, all of you.

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND

GI: [laughter], Oh, you're very welcome . . . But we should be thanking you and thank you, of course, for your hospitality and welcoming us into your home. What we'd like to do before we go into some more specific questions have you tell us a little bit about how you entered the freedom movement. Or a lot of it, however you want to . . .

JM: [laughter], Well, I'll tell you a lot. That's because the background that leads up to things I think in many ways is as important as the events themselves. I grew up in an area of Arlington called Buckingham Apartments. It was brand new. Garden style apartments. Very cutting edge for its time. And it was also known as virtually the only place in Arlington that would rent to Jews. And all these folks who had come for the government, well, New Deal jobs, a lot were liberal Jews from New York. My parents were from Georgia and Iowa. But now folks who made up and they're starting families and they need someplace better than

a boarding house. So, I would say that eighty-five percent – I once calculated – of my playmates in the neighborhood were from liberal New York Jewish families. Not that they were trying to convert anybody to their way of thinking. I found out years later that our Christmas presents were hid on the top of their closets and their kids sworn to secrecy. They wouldn't tell us which few presents what we were getting for Christmas and they wouldn't tell us there was no Easter Bunny. But I think a lot just sort of was absorbed from that environment.

Then, the more immediate, in my mind, "moment of decision" was when I was about ten and with visiting grandma down Oconee, Georgia, and I am not talking their fancy resort. We're talking the old logging town. Dirt poor community. Twice a day the train came barreling down the middle of the road, and down the middle of the dirt road were the train tracks. And that train was *The Nancy Hanks*. You know who Nancy Hanks was? Abraham Lincoln's Mama! So you know that train was owned by a Yankee, right?

I had the same playmate every summer, Mary. And we sort of dared each other one day to go walk through what we called "Niggertown," down past what my cousin had told me was a Coca-Cola bottling plant. I think now it was really just a sawmill, but that's a recent renovation. And so we snuck off and went down there. As poor as it was in the white section -- I mean, they had just gotten in running water a few years before and little fish might come through, so you didn't drink it, it was so much worse in the black area. And people just sort of disappeared into their houses behind. They'd be out sweeping their yard. You know, no grass, you use a broom to sweep. You've heard of that.

People just made themselves scarce there. Nobody was going to know anything about these two little white girls coming through. And that was sort of creepy. Then we got to the school and it was a one room shack. Never had any paint on it. The door was ajar you could see the potbellied stove. No glass in the windows, just wooden shutters. No grass in the yard, no playground equipment. There was one outhouse as I remember it. So what I tell audiences of young folks is this unisex bathroom thing ain't nothing new [laughs]! They had that in Oconee in the 1950s! Oh, it was depressing. And I knew at the same time – this is before *Brown vs. Board* – at the other side of town was a brand new brick school. Brick! For the white kids. It was the fanciest building for miles around. Still is, only now a senior citizen place.

Just staring at that school for the black kids, I knew it wasn't fair. It was not treating people the way we wanted to be treated, which The Bible taught us treat people the way you want to be treated. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," I believe is the quote from King James. I knew, though I couldn't really have put it in words, but I knew when I got the chance I was going to do something to make the South – I didn't care about them Yankees – but to make the South the best it could be for everybody, for all the Southerners.

You've got to remember that back then folks identified every bit if not more with their state or even county as they did with the United States. You know those New Englanders are still new Englanders, first and foremost right? I was focused on the South as a Southerner and my chance to really do something. Well, when I was in high school, probably around '58

and "massive resistance" – state law. Massive resistance said that every school and school jurisdiction could be closed if one school was integrated by one black child. Under court order everything could be shut down, like it happened in Farmville [Virginia]. And we were afraid that was going to happen in Arlington.

FIRST STEPS TOWARDS THE SOUTHERN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

We went to the Sunday evening youth meeting at the Presbyterian Church – we always had a spaghetti dinner and salad – same old thing every week – and we were told one week that next week, some colored – that was a polite term then; black was rude – some colored students would be coming to our meeting, but don't tell anybody. Don't even tell your parents. Oh, for one thing, the American Nazi Party headquarters were literally around the corner. They could show up. They were known to show up and cause a disruption. Sort of like the Klan. The police could come and arrest everybody for breaking the public assembly law by sitting down and even eating together. Never mind you're sitting down eating.

Even worse, the church elders, deacons, whatever they were called could lock us out. So we kept it quiet and learned that the black Y[MCA] was behind this. Who initiated it, whether it was our minister or the Y, whether it was happening in a lot of churches or just ours, I don't know. Still don't know. Tried to find out. Still don't know. But they came twice and we had good fellowship and discussion. I think it was my first foray into this sort of thing. And then, when I was at Duke [University], wa-lah! The sit-ins had started. Durham was the second city to have sit-ins.

I went to the Presbyterian youth meetings on Sunday evenings. And we were told one Sunday evening that next week there will be some students who were involved in the sit-ins from North Carolina [A&T] College. They will be coming to our meeting to explain about what they're doing. But don't tell anybody because the rowdies could show up and cause a disturbance. The police could show up and arrest us or the administration could lock us out of the building. This was sort of *deja vu*. And they came, these well-dressed well-spoken college students and explained everything in legal and moral terms. They invited us to join them in the demonstrations. That was it.

FAMILY RESPONSE

GI: What was your family's response to your awakening and your desire to be part of something that at that time was not something a white Southerner would do?

JM: My mother was absolutely horrified. She was, "What do I tell the relatives? What will our friends say?" I mean, she grew up in very rural Georgia. I was born in Nicholson, which is past Athens [home of the University of Georgia] a good ways. The family would not understand. But she'd grown up where the church, the law and society all strongly supported not just segregation but superiority and inferiority. This was beyond belief. Now, my daddy, who had grown up in Southwest Iowa, where George Washington Carver was the hero to the kids because he always bought peanuts when he came to visit his friend the doctor there. He supported what we were doing. But he felt as a good government

bureaucrat, and we all know about good government bureaucrats, that you change the law at the top so that it has affects for everybody.

It's not just this guerrilla warfare of one lunch counter here or one lunch counter there. Of course, *Brown v. Board* had so much influence by 1960. I think mainly Daddy was afraid that his darling little girl was going to get killed. Which, you know, could happen. But it was a divide. My parents had always really differed on their opinions on the race issue. But they just sort of had other things that they agreed on. Let it be.

ARRIVING AT DUKE UNIVERSITY

GI: You talked about your family. What was the response within your social network your friends? Were you an outlier? Did they think you were doing something courageous or they think you were doing something crazy?

JM: I know I didn't really think about the impact it would have on me. You know, I was 18. But my college roommate, who was from New York, she also went on to demonstrations and there were a few girls on the hall – Duke was pretty Southern – who just did not speak to us anymore. And, on the other hand, there were those who are slipping us money under the door.

GI: Oh, is that right?

JM: Because of their father's job they couldn't, they didn't feel like they could participate.

GI: What was the response of the Duke administration? Were there other white students getting involved?

JM: Oh, yeah, there were other white students. Mostly graduate students, good-looking graduate school guys [laughter]. There were a handful of us and the administration sort of went ballistic. We didn't have any problem just picketing but when we got arrested that was when it really got nasty. My friend and I got out of jail and got back to campus after dark. Back then, when you came in there was a reception area in the dormitory. You had mailboxes there. And there was a note in ours that we were to report immediately to the Dean's office. So we went across this dark campus and in the administrative building there was one room with a light on you could see. We knocked on the door, the Dean of Women let us in, locked the door with a key, jiggled the key, dropped it in her pocket and told us to have a seat. She tried to get us to promise that we would never do anything like this again.

[She] asked, "Have you called your parents yet?"

"Well, no, we came right over like we were asked to."

[Ms. Mulholland assumes the voice of the university dean and points] "There's the phone!"

So we had to call our parents and tell them we had just gotten out of jail. Then they tried to

find out if we were feeling under stress or unhappy. Neither one of us had pledged, had gone to pledge week with the sororities, and this was just unheard of. We were not interested in joining a sorority, though I came to that when I got to Duke -- I mean, when I got to Tougaloo. I just didn't see going and sitting in front of a bunch of girls you didn't know to see if they were going to pick you to join them. I wanted to know them first. Just being like you were kind of pick the best chicken or something to butcher. Anyway, we had not pledged and had made history that way already. But perhaps we need a psychiatric help, some counseling and stuff. And we had a little of that imposed on us.

GI: So you actually had to go to counseling for participating in a sit-in?

JM: We had to receive some sort of counseling, I don't remember if it was psychiatric counseling. Some of the graduate school guys that had campus jobs lost them but they got reinstated with the past. The only thing that kept us from being expelled is, as I came to understand it, was that the university professors organization, whatever it's called, voted for us. Faculty, in my experience, was very supportive. I had one English professor, and I did not like English, but he was good for pop quizzes. I told him that there was a demonstration planned for the day of the next class and if I happened to be in jail and he gave a pop quiz could I make it up when I got out? And he laughed and smiled and said, "Oh, no, I'll bring it down to the jail, the jail cell. You can't cheat in there!" But no pop quiz. He didn't bring me anything but he was very supportive.

GI: So there's no record of a "Pop Quiz from a Durham County Jail" to go along with "Letter From a Birmingham Jail?" [laughter]

JM: No, sorry [laughter].

GI: I take it this was after February 1960?

JM: I think this was probably April. I've got all my clippings!

GI: Did the Duke students coordinate with students from other campuses in Raleigh, Chapel Hill or anywhere else?

JM: Not with the Duke students that I know of. Now, the students at North Carolina [A&T] would have been in touch. At Duke, no, and it was getting on late. Now, I understand the founding meeting of SNCC there was consideration of sending me to represent Duke but it was decided that a white girl at that could endanger other people. And so they picked a guy, which people say, "Oh, that's gender discrimination," and I say no, that was common sense. I don't view it as anything otherwise Just common sense. You could have endangered them and that wasn't a good idea. I was not at the founding meeting.

THE ARLINGTON SIT INS

GI: Why did you decide to leave Duke after your first year?

JM: Well, I had had it with Duke. I knew I wasn't coming back and got a government job. But now the students at North Carolina [A&T], When they knew I was going up to D.C., they asked me to check what was happening at Howard [University] because they hadn't heard anything from the Howard students since the SNCC meeting. Back then making the phone call was a big production, a long distance call. No internet. All that jazz. I said, okay. And I wasn't quite sure, being from Arlington and this little white girl, where Howard University was but I found my way. Walking around campus, feeling a little out of place obviously, asking if anybody knew any students who were involved in sit ins or who supported the action, you know that type of thing.

It turned out a meeting was being held. I forget if it was that night or the next night, but I found out where and went to that and explained who I was asked would be huge meeting. And when they found out that I was from Arlington and had been arrested a couple times, they were pretty welcoming because they were planning sit-ins in Arlington. And I knew my way around, and knew the jail routine. So I was most welcome to join them. I sent a letter back to the North Carolina college students. We sat-in in Arlington. We started down at People's [drug store] on Lee Highway, which is now a CVS.

And moved on up to Drug Fair, about half of us. It was pretty calm down there. We didn't get served. But nothing happened. So about half of us walk a mile, I guess, up to Drug Fair in the Cherrydale neighborhood. And I sat there. It was pretty peaceful. Just in June we had the dedication of a plaque, unveiling of it on the building where the Drug Fair was. That group from Howard called themselves the Nonviolent Action Group. We used to like to have fun with the names of things – NAG! [smiles].

We sat in a bit, did maybe a week's worth of sit ins and then called a break so that the officials could talk with the store managers and what have you. Most of these store manager-types were from that liberal New York Jewish background. The guy who founded Drug Fair started in [the] Buckingham [neighborhood], and he and my father were on a first name basis. And he was one of them – liberal New York Jews! [laughter]. So basically they had no problem with serving us. No personal problem.

But the state law said the people who ate together could be arrested. You could even be arrested for sitting there together, but also the manager or the person who enabled you to sit together could be arrested. So I guess guys who aren't ready to go to jail that day was the main thing. But once the prosecuting attorney in Arlington said they were not going to enforce the law – there were no arrests – then we were served. We went and sat in again down in Shirlington, where we had to have a sit-ins, and not been served. We went to resume the sit ins and got served there and then in Buckingham.

GI: This is the summer or the fall of 1960?

JM: This is June.

GI: And you've made your decision that you're not going back to Duke.

JM: No way in hell [laughter]! I made that decision on my own. I didn't need to and I had not wanted to go to Duke. I had gone to Annandale High School, which was totally overcrowded. I wanted a small, church-related school where you would actually be recognized individually. What a concept! You wouldn't be crowded in like sardines. I wanted to go to Muskingum College in Ohio, and my mother wouldn't have it. I had to go to this prestige, "name" school. Who ever heard of that little college? I think really she wanted me to go to a "name" school that would be segregated. I found out later that John Glenn graduated from Muskingum. His wife had been my Sunday school teacher and I used to sit with them in church and often have Sunday dinner with him over at the minister's house. Small world.

THE FREEDOM RIDES

GI: So this is getting close to the fall of 1960. Had you made a decision about going back to Duke?

JM: I had not gone back to school. But when I saw what happened with Charlayne Hunter, aka Charlayne Hunter-Gault, and Hamilton Holmes at the University of Georgia.¹ Tear gas, driven off campus twice. Things like that. I saw what happened at [the University of] Georgia in Athens. The next town up the road is Commerce and the next one after that is Nicholson. This is where my family is from. And I felt that integration is not two or three black kids at a time through hell. It's got to be a two-way street. And I thought I would apply to a black college – HBCU was not yet in the vocabulary – at least not that I knew of. I knew I didn't want to go in Georgia because I had too much family there. I could endanger them, which I had no right to do. I didn't like to just jump into things on my own. I had joined the sit-ins in North Carolina and in Washington at the invitation of the groups there. And so I thought I should talk to the SNCC kids at their fall conference.

I remember several of the guys who were around. I don't remember any of the gals but why would I? They said, yeah, that's a good idea. If you're going to do it, you may as well go to Mississippi because those students haven't had any sit-ins or done anything yet and you can help them get started. So Tougaloo was the only college open to blacks that was accredited. Now I wanted to get a degree the accredited college. So I applied to Tougaloo. My high school, Annandale, refused to send my transcripts. Tougaloo contacted me that they had not received the transcripts. They'd gotten it from Duke. And so I called and talked to the counselor and there was just no way they would send it there. She didn't say the reason but she wasn't going to do it. She didn't need to say the reason. I knew. She knew. Tougaloo said they would accept me just on my Duke transcript, so that was okay. So then along comes the Freedom Rides. The Freedom Rides left from Washington.

We got to meet the folks who were going for their first Chinese meal, called the "Last

¹. Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes were the first two African American students admitted into the University of Georgia in February 1961. Calvin Trillin documented their story in a series of articles for the New Yorker, which later became the basis for his book, *An Education in Georgia: Charlayne Hunter, Hamilton Holmes and the Integration of the University of Georgia* (New York: Viking Press, 2019).

Supper," that John Lewis had was at a restaurant managed by one of our NAG members, Paul Dietrich. And we saw them off. Hank Thomas went. Stokely [Carmichael] did not, contrary to what you might think from Taylor Branch, which I've called Taylor Branch out on putting him in Montgomery. I did that from the stage at some college up in Baltimore. He took it good naturedly. So Hank was on the bus that was burned in Anniston [Alabama] and he's standing outside the bus in the pictures. Following Gandhi, well if one person falls and can't continue the others have to take their place. Folks started from other sit-in groups heading down to take the place of those who couldn't continue. Paul Dietrich of "Last Supper" fame. Dion Diamond, who was really in that picture that Taylor Branch said was Stokely, and John Moody were the first ones to head out. Now, in Nashville Diane Nash's crowd gets credit for keeping things going. The D.C. group was out the door just as fast. It just takes longer to get down to Birmingham.

GI: And by now you consider yourself a member of NAG. You're all-in on this?

JM: Oh, yeah. It's been a year since I got involved. But actually our D.C. group was second only to Nashville in the total numbers of people that went on the Freedom Rides. Keep in mind that we had maybe 50 members -- max -- and they had hundreds. So as a percentage of our group that went on the Freedom Rides we had them beat. Real good. I consider Diane a friend, Bernard Lafayette, John Lewis and their crowd. We're all buddies. We did out do them, though. So then our group met up with Freedom Rides crowd when they got to Montgomery. And they were in the church when it was surrounded by the mob and the tear gas and all that. Each family unit could send one person to the basement of the church where there were two phone lines to make a call of maybe two or three minutes.

Paul Dietrich knew I had a phone in my little efficiency apartment right by the bed. Middle of the night I get this call. "Joan. This is Paul. We're trapped in a church in Montgomery. Can't talk. Send more riders." So we started rounding up people and then, June 6th, a group of us flew down to New Orleans and that's when Stokely got on the Freedom Rides. I like to say I brought Stokely on the Freedom Rides [laughs]. We got a day or two orientation - it cost fifty bucks to fly to New Orleans back in the day - and then we took the train, the Illinois Central from New Orleans to Jackson. We got off and got arrested real quick. I like to say the Freedom Ride gave me a free ticket to school and free room and board for the summer. So I stayed!

The sentences were pretty small, so it was "jail no bail," also Ghandian. But then they kept upping the sentences. So you had thirty-nine days to post bond, and you had to be in Jackson do it. So if you were in Parchman you had to do it the week before because they only took people down once a week. Well, I had an intermediate sentence. I had nothing else to do that summer, so I just stayed in jail as long as I could before school started. It had gotten really crowded in the Harris County jail before they took us to Parchman. In the white women's cell, we calculated that we had less than three square feet of floor space per person. People were sleeping underneath the box curled up in the dripping shower stall.

They had to do something with us. So they could have put us in the cattle barn, which they did with demonstrators later after Medgar was killed. Around that time, they decided to

take us to Parchman, which was the most notorious prison in the country. They took the prisoners who were on death row and moved them elsewhere in the prison system and put the Freedom Riders on death row, trying to intimidate us. But as a Southerner I knew their game. And it was roomier and the food was better [laughs].

TOUGALOO COLLEGE

GI: I guess that's one way of putting it. This is now the summer of 1961 and you get out of prison.

JM: In September, just before school started I think. The first week in September.

GI: You are now a second year student in terms of credit at Tougaloo. Who is your roommate?

JM: Well at that point there were four of us in a room, I think, my last year anyway [laughter]. Joyce Ladner, I think. Students were looking to see if I was for real. But being Southerners they were polite. It cuts across racial boundaries in the South. You're polite. There's one woman who is still my friend who said, "Well I saw you study just as hard as the rest of us in the library every night. That's when I figured you were okay." Second semester had just been my "semester abroad" program [laughter]. It was obvious I was back in the second year I was back. I mean you have some number of white students later who are coming down [to Mississippi] and checking things out. Most of them I suspect were really trying to get an understanding of the South since they were Yankees. But I was really there as a student first and foremost. I was by the second year. That's when I was invited to join this black sorority.

GI: And then you become the first white member of . . .

JM: Delta Sigma Theta.

GI: What led to the next stage of your activism?

JM: Well, it was just the course of events. The Deltas had a "just having fun" focus and they also had a "contribute to the community" focus. And the students who were my closest friends as Deltas were also close friends in the movement. Often there wasn't a whole lot of difference. We made the line that pledged after us do voter registration work. Maybe not go door to door because that could endanger their families, if they were worried about that. But they had to do something. Stuff envelopes back when we stuffed envelopes. Run the mimeograph machine, all that good stuff.

Tougaloo was "Ground Zero" for the civil rights movement in Mississippi. It received no money from the state. It was supported by Northern churches founded and supported by Northern Christians. It was a happening place. One of the professors who came, Dr. [Ernest] Borinski, who came from Germany, had fled the Nazis. He became a professor at Tougaloo. He wasn't down on the front lines but he was really in touch with the Jewish community.

He would have events on campus, bringing internationally renowned people. Whites, particularly the Jewish community in Jackson, could come out to these events. He would have the students get there first and sit. This is basically a dug out cellar that's been framed in a little bit.

We would sit at these on these long benches with a table maybe this wide and the benches were on either side of the table where he had a space down a little bit so whites from Jackson had to sit between or maybe you know two whites together in a mixed with the blacks. There was no escaping it. No further than you and I are from each other. It might be a renowned linguist from New Zealand. It might be, oh, Pete Seeger, who had run into Attorney [William] Kunstler from New York, whose daughter was at Tougaloo. They knew each other; they got to talking and Kunstler said where he was going. Well, shoot, back then you'd just hop off the plane when you wanted so Seeger hopped off in Jackson and he came out and gave us a hootenanny down there in this basement place. But it was good. Whatever was happening you were right there in the midst of it. It wasn't like Duke where something was happening way up at the front of the building and you could barely see it. You were right up close and personal.

GI: At what point do you become more involved with the SNCC/CORE office? I understand that you took an administrative position there.

JM: Well, it was still sort of semi-official. SNCC and CORE had a joint office down the street from Medgar Evers and the NAACP office. I could do secretarial work. That was my background. Summer jobs in D.C. Just sort of on a volunteer basis, I would be down there whenever I could get a ride into town. At the time I would be down there, typically in the summer, when they started bringing back the Freedom Riders who had gone on bail, sending letters to them, reminding them of their court date. Writing off mail and press releases, answering the phone. Just whatever little thing needed doing office-wise because to have me out in the field, particularly walking with a black person, could be hazardous to people's health. But I had a talent or a skill they could use for office work. There was the Freedom House on Rose Street just down the street and around the corner from the office. When a SNCC or CORE person was in town they could sleep there.

GI: During this period were you ever under surveillance by the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission?

JM: I would assume so, yes!

GI: I think it's hard now for younger people to imagine that the state is using its resources to spy on its own citizens . . .

JM: Really? Isn't it still doing that? TSA, telephone calls, email surveillance. What else is new? Been there, done that [laughter]. At the 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington people were speaking about this surveillance. The old civil rights folks weren't talking about it. We've been there and done that. People were making note of that. You just assumed that there was somebody listening. You couldn't necessarily figure out who.

Sometimes on the phone you could hear the noise at the police station and the whirring of the tapes.

GI: So nothing subtle about it. Are we in 1962 at this point?

JM: We can be.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS OF SNCC

GI: What kind of relationship did your office have with some of the other offices, particularly in Atlanta? Did your office ever communicate with the Atlanta office and Julian Bond specifically?

JM: No, not really. I knew who Julian was because he was so fine-looking [smiles]. Ladies let me tell you [laughter]! Gentlemen, too! They finally got a WATS line in so you could phone around a bit. You didn't have much over-the-phone communication.

GI: Why was that?

JM: Cost. And that every word was being recorded somewhere you knew for sure. Deep in your heart, you did believe that. So we communicated through the mail. Then there were conferences, SNCC conferences, in Atlanta twice a year. And that's where you really met the other people from the other groups. The SNCC staff and field workers. I tried to get to those. At one point toward the end there was some debate about having a white member of the Inner Council of the coordinating committee. I think it was maybe it was me and Joyce [Ladner] jointly shared it.

That's where I met Julian. And that's about the only time I'd see him would be these SNCC conferences. He was a married man and a gentleman. So it was a different relationship than some of the other guys like Bernard [Lafayette]. But I think we mainly appreciated his fine looks [laughter].

GENERATING MEDIA COVERAGE

GI: Can you talk about how the SNCC offices worked with the media during your time in the Jackson, Mississippi, movement?

JM: I really wasn't involved in that as much. I was not in Atlanta so I don't really know quite how it all worked but I knew they got the word out. Something I've taken to saying lately is the students the demonstrators take it to the street, the lawyers take it to the courts, but the press takes it to the world. You've got to be in touch with the press. Phone calls. You know something's going to be happening down on North Capitol Street this afternoon. You didn't want to say specifically because lines could be tapped, and so on.

But you let the press know what was going to happen, that something was going to happen without being too specific because you really didn't know yourself. You depended on the

press that way. And the press supported you for the most part. Nick Von Hoffman was totally in support. Sometimes if you needed to make a phone call and didn't have a dime, a member the press would give it to you. They were pretty supportive.

GI: Do you remember any other reporters of that era who were supportive of your work. I mean obviously they had to maintain an outward facade of objectivity and were covering the story. But underneath it, were there reporters who were sympathetic to what you all were trying to do and could help you in a way that maybe was more behind the scenes and off the books than something the public might know about.

JM: I'm really not good at names. There were other reporters. And Bill Minor, bless his heart, was totally with us.

GI: Do you remember who he worked for?

JM: At that point, [*The Times Picayune* [in New Orleans].² He was their civil rights man. He became the Mississippi office. Years later, he wrote columns for the [Jackson, Mississippi] *Clarion-Ledger*. And he wrote one about me, which is framed and hanging on the wall [smiles]. I mean that didn't get any better than that. Simeon Booker was pretty supportive. I mean even later. When Loki's movie, "The Ordinary Hero" came out, at the first showing at the Artisphere [in Arlington, Virginia, now defunct], which was so crowded, that they had the fire marshal was turning people away, he was sitting right out front.

GI: Was there a difference in how you all sought to communicate or deal with the white press as opposed to the black press?

JM: Not that I remember. Now I'm thinking Frank Hunt. I think he was with the [*Washington Afro* [*American*]]. I think he went on Freedom Rides and he was down in Rock Hill, supporting the demonstrators, participating with them sometimes in Washington.

The press was very good. There was a woman who went on to cover Congress whose name is Susanna McBee, maybe? I'd have to pull out [my press clippings] but she was there. mean They were cub reporters then, but they were really good. They would pass information [on] in Arlington. And the guy who went on to head the Moscow office for the [*Washington Post*].

THE JACKSON WOOLWORTH'S SIT IN

GI: Tell us how the decision was made to engage in direct action in Jackson.

JM: Well, they'd been having boycotts. They had picket lines in support of the boycotts when the time came. I was not in on the decision making. I wasn't supposed to be in that sit-in. Lois Chafee, who was a white dorm matron at Tougaloo, and I were supposed to be they called "spotters" – people watching what happened and prepared with change to go make a phone call if someone got arrested or violence broke out or whatever. Well, thought

². The *Times Picayune* ceased operation in April 2019.

the picket line would last. This was a diversion while the diversion was supposed to start down at Woolworth's. The picket line got arrested pretty much right away, which surprised us, so we phoned Medgar's office. We hadn't seen any squad cars or anything heading down to Woolworth's. No paddy wagons, so we decided to go check that out, and that was basically when all hell broke loose.

Now, our mistake in planning things was that we had finished finals at Tougaloo, so it was a good time for us to go after finals. But it was finals week at the nearby Central High, and the kids could leave the school on their lunch break, only they couldn't get lunch because we were sitting at the counter. So they didn't like that and, I think, as young guys are given to doing, one does this and the next one has got to go one more. You know, someone yells, then someone yells something nastier. One throws this on you, so the next one grabs something nastier and throws it on you. And so the store was basically being pretty messed up.

GI: Who organized the sit-in? Whose project was it?

JM: The NAACP. But you had people from CORE and SNCC who participated. Now Lois and I, when we got down there, things were getting rough and somebody, probably Ed King, suggested, after Memphis [Norman] was beaten and taken out, the one guy, that we sit and support the girls, sit with them. Annie [Moody] and I got pulled off, and taken out through the front door and got back in. But we couldn't get back to where we'd been sitting, so we took whatever seat we could get to. And John Salter joined us. But it had been started as an NAACP thing, Medgar and John Salter. But SNCC people were sitting in. We didn't have quite the competition you had other places.

GI: What do you mean by competition?

JM: Membership overlap. You supported each other's actions.

[Ms. Mulholland walks over to the wall in her living room, where the picture of the Jackson sit-in at Woolworth's hangs, and describes the sequences of events]

George Raymond was with CORE, who ended up sitting there. So that got pretty ugly until things closed. The important story of that day is not getting sugar dumped on my head, as I say I was sweet enough already. But the guy Fred Blackwell who took the picture? An interesting story. He had come in as a second-string photographer because the first-string guy had gone to get his film developed, back in the days of film for the evening paper. They sent the second string guy, Fred. Fred had graduated from the same high school as the kids in the crowd. He hung out with the older brothers and sort of knew a bunch of them. The guy with the cigarette lived three doors down the street from him. So these were his people. When he came in his sympathies were all with the kids from the high school. Fred got permission to stand on the lunch counter.

The manager said, "It ain't never going be open again. Sure, you can stand on it." And so you can see the pictures of him looking down on us. He could see us there and he could also see

down the count with the other group, with George Raymond, Lois and Pearlina Lewis all were sitting. He could see both groups by pivoting.

So Fred is standing on the counter taking this picture during the demonstration. The guy with the hat and the glasses? He is one of the big segregationists; he's also a bootlegger, so the kids will go across the county line on the weekends to get liquored up. The guys with the sunglasses on are FBI agents. So Fred took that, and it is probably the most used of any sit-in picture, even more than the Greensboro Four, because I think there was so much violence inherent in it, but no but nobody's being clobbered in that moment. At the bottom [of the picture] when they close the store, the crowd's going out, the guy way down at the end is our college president.

He heard what was happening and he came down to try to negotiate closing the store for our safety. He had to talk to the national office. But he was probably only college president who actually sat at the same counter as the students during these kinds of demonstrations. The guy with a clerical collar is Ed King. He was a chaplain. He was the spotter in the crowd, to report back to Medgar's office. Those are my glasses he's holding. The thought was that his clerical collar would have perhaps a calming influence. Didn't work [laughs]. It was a nice try, though.

Now to me the important thing about this photo at the top is that when Fred Blackwell came in his sympathies are with his buddies. After three hours on the counter, standing on it, watching what his friends were doing, watching what we were doing, his sympathy shifted to the demonstrators. That, to me, is the power of Gandhi and nonviolence. That evening when the pictures appeared in the local papers, I don't know whether they were Fred's or the first-string photographer's, a kid at a rival high school saw the picture, and his heart changed. He went from being just your everyday segregationist to supporting the demonstrators. I say that's the power of the press. To change people's hearts. And this picture went world-wide. It was even colorized in the *Paris Match* [magazine]! That's pretty big, back then. Colorized was before color photography in the press. First, you added color to the pictures to make them look fancier. That's sugar in my hair. Now, I have some mustard there, too.

Now, that's really blood on John. He was being the "white guy" supporting the demonstrators. At least they thought he was white until they found out he was a tribal member, a Native American. But he got hit with brass knuckles, drawing blood. They mixed water and pepper together and threw in his eyes.

But as he says, "I just sat there smoking my Pall Malls. I was not going to let the sons of bitches see me suffer." But that's the story on that one – the power of the press.

COLLABORATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT CIVIL RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

GI: Can you talk about how the different organizations – the NAACP, CORE, SNCC – approached their work in Mississippi? Did rivalries exist or did everyone work together?

JM: The NAACP was a little more conservative. They believed in taking things to the courts. And, of course, SNCC believed in taking it to the streets. CORE had more of a Yankee philosophy. But on the ground we could all work together and call on each other's expertise. I mean, where would we have been without the lawyers? CORE had more money than SNCC. SNCC would pay me my \$10 per week. And when they didn't have it, Tom Gaither [of CORE] might slip it to me. We all supported each other on the ground. Okay, it was like, you're going to take it up action in this town and we're going to go to that one because you've got this thing covered.

But it wasn't really like, in my experience, like a competition. Now at the national level I understand it was more pushing your organization, fundraising being an issue and all that. But they [CORE] were more professional, more New York. They came from a different place so to speak, both socially [and] economically. I think all of us were members of the NAACP chapters, too. We were not tuned in to them as much as we were to take it to the streets. But I think that was also a generational thing to some extent.

GI: What do you mean by a "generational thing?"

JM: The NAACP was more adults, established people that, by going to jail and taking it to the streets, you had a lot to lose. I think that was a thing with [Dr.] King's group [Southern Christian Leadership Conference], too. They had more adult roles in the community – families, mortgages, things like that to think about. Whereas the students were more, take it to the streets. We didn't have responsibilities that the older folks had. And we thought they were a little bit slow on taking it to the streets and supporting that. At this point, I can see a lot of the reasoning. I think it's always the college students who aren't bogged down – well, now you've got student loan debts, which we didn't have and stuff like that. Then, you were in a much better position to go with the direct action thing. But the adults groups often are better spokespeople because the people on the national level the press, they're more in that groove.

THE MURDER OF MEDGAR EVERS

GI: You've mentioned Medgar Evers a number of times in the course of our conversation this afternoon. What was the impact of his murder in June 1963 on the movement in Mississippi?

JM: I was not there at the time. I was up in D.C. with the SNCC/CORE thing. But I think that people felt, he's died, it could have been any of us. We owe it to him and his memory to carry it forward and maybe up it.

GI: Can you talk about Medgar Evers and his legacy?

JM: Medgar knew that the money for the NAACP came from the North and that they were more conservative. On the other hand, he was one of the planners of the Jackson sit-in and boycott. He understood also where the students were coming from. And he understood Mississippi because he was a Mississippian, whereas and we're as folks up in New York you

know from somewhere knew intellectually but not in their gut was Mississippi was. On an individual level, a reporter asked me on the 50th anniversary of his assassination and the sit-in and all that, what do I remember most about Medgar. And I said his smile, it was the most beautiful smile. That wasn't what he wanted to hear, but that is my lasting memory that he could just smile in a way that would melt your heart and not in a romantic sense. Maybe Myrlie [Medgar's wife] has a different take on it [laughs]! That's Myrlie's picture over there with my son, Loki, taken not too long ago. You wanted to do things in the movement that he would like. He had that big smile.

GI: Can you give us your assessment of the Kennedy administration? Did you believe it was doing enough to help you all?

JM: Hell, no! They were young and they were Yankees. They wanted the Freedom Rides to stop because that was bad international publicity. They tried to stop them. They struck that deal with the power structure in Mississippi that they could arrest everybody as long as there was no violence against us. Well, the word goes down from the top to the Klan and everybody else that they were not going to protect us. You had to drag them into lawsuits and things. We didn't trust the FBI any further than you could throw them and they were in cahoots with the power structure in Mississippi. On other hand, you knew you had to get a report off to the FBI of what had happened if you wanted to build your case for further action. So, no, we didn't put much faith in the Kennedys. They needed to be dragged into everything that they did. Now Bobby turned out quite differently . . .

GI: Do you think Bobby Kennedy's change of heart was genuine?

JM: I hope so. I think so. But I don't really know. In the late 60s, early 70s I was all into having babies and taking care of little kids. There was an anti-[Vietnam] demonstration here or there and I would be down there. But I was too far removed. Last year, I was speaking at the University of Kansas in Lawrence. They were showing my son's movie on the civil rights movement. During the Q and A some guy asked a question and I couldn't quite figure out what he wanted. I said, "Well, I'm a Southerner. I need to know where you're from to understand what you're getting at." He said, "Well, I'm from Connecticut, but my wife is from Greenwood, Mississippi, where cotton is king!" Clearly, that man was clueless on what he was saying. So afterwards I had a chance to meet the wife.

I said, " Oh, you're from Greenwood. Did you know the Beckwiths?" Byron de la -- the guy who shot Medgar Evers. I didn't say that last part.

"Oh yeah," she said. "He used to sit in the doorway of the church with a rifle across his lap."

"Mm-hm, okay," I thought."

She continued. "And we knew how to hit the floor. My daddy showed Kennedy around the Delta, he was the one who escorted him. And at home we knew how to hit the floor if we heard a loud noise outside. We could hit the floor and crawl."

I said we used to do that on campus, too. And so I knew she knew where I was coming from but that husband was clueless [laughs]. The Kennedy connection . . . I knew she was okay.

THE MARCH ON WASHINGTON

GI: Tell us about your role in the March on Washington and your impression of it.

JM: The March on Washington was a coming together of all the groups. I ended up back in D.C. working at the Washington office again, typing like mad in the press office and answering the phone. The day of the march I was in the press tent handing out stuff. It was mind boggling, the crowd. It was upsetting to us, the students. John Lewis had been so sensitive in his speech. "We cannot march nonviolently through the South like Sherman marched through Georgia." Well, that sounded real good to me but no, that was going too far. You had to have your speech approved ahead of time so they had to take out little tidbits, what I consider most brilliant line of the whole time. Then King gave his speech and then he went totally off script and beyond it with that "I Have a Dream" business. Why wasn't he censored? Why didn't they cut the mics? That wasn't in his approved script. And I think the students felt like, "Man, get your head out of the clouds and give us a call to action!" I Have a Dream! Really? Ooh . . .

Looking back it is a beautiful statement of the world we wanted to see but what we needed was a call to action. At the end of the Selma-to-Montgomery march, King gave his speech standing at the state capitol where Wallace said "Segregation now, segregation tomorrow segregation forever." And King said, "How long, not long!" And spelled out the problem of what we need to do. That was his best speech.

GI: Did you attend that speech?

JM: Yes. I was working up here in D.C. and they had chartered trains not just chartered railway cars but trains for people who went from D.C. to Montgomery for the last day and then we were bussed out to where the folks were camped and marched in together. And that speech just did it. In fact, my ticket stub is on display at the African American Museum [of History and Culture in D.C.]. That was good. But King's speech, "I Have a Dream," just didn't cut it with me or a lot of younger folks. And the *Washington Post* did not pick up on King being the powerful speaker. It was A. Philip Randolph.

GI: The March on Washington is often held out as the apex of the civil rights movement. What did it mean to you?

JM: It was a good moment but it was more like a picnic [laughs]. There were fears of riots. The Klan was big in Maryland. The Nazis were in Arlington. There were rumors or reports depending on how you view it, that the Kennedys were going to stop [the March], call out the National Guard or federal troops to prevent the buses and trains from getting to Washington. And when that didn't happen, when the buses were rolling in and people were coming and coming that's when it took on a picnic feel for me. It was a great day. And then less than three weeks later we had the Birmingham church bombing.

LIFE AFTER COLLEGE

GI: You graduate from Tougaloo in the spring of 1964 but you did not stay for Freedom Summer. Can you tell us why you decided leave Mississippi?

JM: I just felt it was the natural thing to do. When you graduate from college you usually leave the college and leave the area. I got a job with the Smithsonian. I found out the lady I worked closest with was asked if she had a problem with that because I had been arrested. But my movement experience was carried over in the job at the Smithsonian. "Oh, you want to burned cross? Yeah, I get you that. You want some picket signs from Durham? Yeah, I know where they are, down under the stage in the basement of the church." I didn't personally bring this stuff up but I arranged this stuff that they got. It may or may not have my name on it.

I think it's more because the Smithsonian was still not sure it should be collecting this stuff and they were a little cautious about it. For the Freedom Rides, we had used envelopes and any scrap of paper we could get to make a deck of cards. I donated mine. I'd forgot all about that until they pulled it out at the anniversary the Freedom Rides and had it where people could come by and see it. I could spread my information and spread my knowledge. Then I got a job at the Community Relations Service [at the Department of Justice] under Roger Wilkins, and I could bring an on-the-ground understanding – I mean it was just secretarial work – that other folks didn't have to it. When SNCC started the beginning of the "Black Power" stuff it had a march in D.C. – not a very big one but it hit the streets.

I'm sure this would not have made the records anywhere but Roger, Undersecretary of the Department of Justice, assistant whatever they call them, said, "Joan, those folks would know you, they'd trust you. Go down and find out if they've got food and a place to sleep tonight." So I went down and there are all my old buddies and walked along with them a bit. I found out they were taken care of. They were staying in what's called The President's Church on the other side of Lafayette Square Park. They were in good hands. I could go back and tell Roger, otherwise I feel certain he would have started pulling some strings. I'm also 99.9% sure that never made the official records.

I could use my experiences with the movement. When I was raising kids and I was working just around the corner, my kids went to the elementary school. The kindergarten, all the doll babies in the play corner were white. I made a bunch of rag dolls in every flesh tone I could come up with and clothes for them. I think it was the early 80s, the music teacher was asking for a song that would be good for the international pot-luck. I said, "Oh, 'Lift Every Voice and Sing,' the Negro National Anthem would the right good." She taught all the kids, at least in the upper grades, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," and they sang it at the dinner, probably the first school-wide singing of that in the county.

FREEDOM SUMMER

GI: Even though you weren't there for it, you did help with Freedom Summer. Can you tell us about what you did?

JM: Like everything else, I typed! A lot of voter registration forms, I typed that stuff up and cranked it out and stapled it together. Plans for Freedom Schools. I think I typed up a lot of that stuff. I typed up and ran off an awful lot of material for Freedom Summer.

GI: As a white woman who had been involved in the movement for some time, did anyone come to you and say, "Joan, we're thinking of bringing hundreds of white students down here for Freedom Summer. What do you think?"

JM: I remember a talk over at the Freedom House with Bob Moses. The conversation was about Freedom Summer and the only thing I really remember about it is recruiting the students, they will be good for press coverage in the North if their students who are down here, their hometown papers, etc. – just like the Freedom Rides – it gets the attention of the North. But somebody is going to get killed. And we know it. We can tell them. They may get killed. They won't believe us. But somebody will die. It was sort of a moral thing. Can we ask them to come down knowing that they will get killed and they won't understand it?

GI: You met Mickey and Rita Schwerner when they came down to Mississippi. What did you tell them when they arrived in Mississippi?

JM: The Schwerners had just arrived down from New York with CORE. It didn't matter that it was CORE. Everybody came out to Tougaloo when they got in the state. It was the safe haven, and they'd end up over at Reverend [Ed] King's house. And we would talk to them about what you really need to know as a white person working in civil rights in Mississippi, what you need to be aware of. We had so many people come through that we just sort of took turns, and they just fell my lot to be the one to talk to them. No, I really can't remember. Just, be cautious, be aware of what's around you. Don't antagonize anyone deliberately. Don't fight back, don't say, "You all are ignorant," all that stuff. I gave them the standard thing. Somebody was going to die that summer.

It was almost carload of white folks I was with coming back from Canton, a hard core town. It was under curfew and people were getting beat up that day and a bunch of us went into a mass meeting making sure everybody in our car was white so we wouldn't draw attention that way. We were stopped when we were leaving in the no man's zone between the old road and the brand new, just- opened interstate. We were supposed to get killed, as it turns out, to stop Freedom Summer. But now the leader of the opposition party in the India Parliament had been arrested in Jackson for going to a restaurant in support of blacks in Mississippi. He'd been arrested and jailed and, of course, the embassy in D.C. went ballistic and complained to the State Department, who passed the word on down the line to leave the Indians alone please. And the fact that Hamid Kizilbash, who lives in D.C., was driving the car. I think it was his car.

Ed King started saying, "Don't hit him," because they were hitting him with a crowbar, maybe. "He's from India." And we all started saying, "He's from India!" And they backed off, which would indicate that there was of line of communication with Washington on down. And that's what got us out alive a few years ago. I thanked him for saving my life by being

an Indian. He was not too happy about it. He's actually Pakistani. Their countries were in a virtual state of war. But a Pakistani can be an Indian when necessary [smiles].

IMPRESSIONS OF JULIAN BOND

GI: I'd like to ask you, as we finish up, for your observation on Julian Bond's role in the civil rights movement during the 1960s.

JM: Oh, he was fine [laughs]! I think aside from attracting more women even though he was a married man, and as far as I was concerned it was hands off, just to lay eyes on him was a pleasure [laughs]. I think the role of the press is not as appreciated as it should be. If you're doing something and nobody knows about it, it has a much more limited impact. If it's spread all over the world, that is big time. That is why the TV stations has to cut or have technical difficulties right in the middle of news or Kennedy's speeches or anything, because you don't want to work to get out. And so the press to me is maybe even more crucial than the lawyers in changing things because the lawyers are often court the press is taking to the streets in a different way. Julian was the press office. I don't know quite what all they did. But they got the word out. And if you don't get the word out you're not going to get anywhere.

GI: Do you think that Julian Bond was able to put the movement in the minds of the major newspapers and other media, particularly the white media, which was only slowly drawn into covering the civil rights movement?

JM: I think so. The fact that he was in Atlanta and that one of the more liberal papers in the South was the Atlanta paper, all of that worked together, I think, making it something, the news, something that people can identify with, their personal relationship with reporters and publishers helped a lot.³ And I don't think anybody could have done it better than Julian did. He knew his way around, he blended right in, literally and figuratively. Julian right to the end was Julian.

³. Ms. Mulholland is referring to *The Atlanta Constitution*, which was edited by Ralph McGill, who had a reputation as a liberal for his support for school desegregation and eliminating racial segregation in public accommodations. Other persons interviewed for this project have also discussed Ralph McGill. Not everyone sees him the same way.