

Civil Rights History Project
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Interviewee: Rick Tuttle
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Interviewer: David Cline
Videographer: John Bishop
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David Cline: Where did I put my little piece of paper? Okay. I need this. So, what I'm going to do is just sort of record a little opening announcement for the camera, so when they transcribe, they'll know who's here. And then, sort of like we did at the SNCC reunion, we'll just sort of walk through chronologically, I think, if that sounds good to you.

Rick Tuttle: Whatever is good for you.

David Cline: Okay. Great. So, good afternoon. Today is Thursday, April eleventh, 2013. We are in Culver City, California, recording for the Southern Oral History Program at UNC-Chapel Hill and the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress. I'm the interviewer today, David Cline, with videographer John Bishop, and today we are talking to Mr. Rick Tuttle, and I want to thank you very much for joining us and being part of this project.

Rick Tuttle: Glad to be here.

DC: So, what I'd like to do to start with, I feel very strongly that—in starting with someone's childhood, because I really believe that the things that we go on to do later are very much informed by where we came from often. So, with an eye toward that, if you could tell us a little bit about your upbringing and how you might see that figuring in your later work.

RT: Well, I was born in New Haven, Connecticut. And my father came from a longtime New England family, who settled New Haven in 1638. My grandmother Tuttle's grandfather rode with the Connecticut regiment that, a minute or two after the Massachusetts 54th was mowed down in the assault on Charleston at Fort Wagner, a minute or two later, these boys from Connecticut, who had been posted on the Sea Islands off Charleston, they were on the next assault wave. And he took a—this is a well-known story inside the family; that's the relevance. And Grandma Tuttle's grandfather, bless his memory, took a bullet and later died on the Petersburg front.

There's a recent Lincoln movie out called *Lincoln*, came out this year, where he had a grownup person's decision to make: whether to accept the Confederate commissioners and make the peace. They'd come back into the Union and block the Thirteenth Amendment to abolish slavery, which is why they wanted to get in when they did. Vice-President Stephens was there, on behalf of Jefferson Davis. It was a serious envoy. And Lincoln made a grownup decision—I would have made the same decision—and that is take thousands and thousands more casualties at the siege of Richmond and Petersburg, don't make the peace, win the war and abolish slavery.

The iconic photo of that that's on all the postings around urban areas to advertise the movie shows Lincoln with his entourage on horseback, riding through the casualties and the dead bodies at Petersburg. In a figurative sense, that is my grandmother's grandfather. He died on the

Petersburg front. He was wounded at Fort Wagner and died on the Petersburg front, and we would hear about Monroe Gillette from time to time.

My other side of the family is Arkansas. My mother's family had stories to tell of their own of Reconstruction and the Civil War, which were very different stories, stories of torture, stories of what happened when the Union Army came through, and they're very bitter stories. These are very vivid to a little boy—I'm the eldest in the family on that side—who listened to these stories from Mimmie, on the one hand, my mother's mother, and Grandma Tuttle, my father's mother, and so on.

So, I was raised amidst these stories, and they couldn't even agree on whether to call it the Civil War or the War Between the States. And I have very vivid memories on several occasions, when they happened to be visiting at the same time—we were living in Arkansas, and then Connecticut, Rhode Island, and northern New York, and we were an old-school family; one or the other was usually with us five or six months a year, the respective grandmothers, but they would sometimes get there at the same time—and the clatter of dishes as one or the other got up and stormed away from the table vivified this history, and that made some impact.

Later, Dad—there's a story in the family where Dad—oh, by the way, Monroe Gillette [0:05:00] got into the Civil War as a man in his early thirties. And like much of the Union Army, in '64, when the enlistments ran out—he wasn't a draftee. He had been a 49er as a young man and then had gone up there. One of the fascinating things about the Union Army—in his case, he was an enlistee, not a draftee—is they could have walked away from the war after three years. They re-upped. A vast number of those soldiers re-upped and continued to fight. He was one of them who did so.

Dad went in in that tradition. My father, in the Hitler war, the war against fascism, the Hitler alliance, went into the Marine Corps at age thirty-six, and they made fun of him until he won the All-Marine hundred yard-dash at Parris Island. After the war, I remember we were— Mom, my mother, and I, and my brother, and other brother who—she was pregnant with Ellen—we were down in Arkansas in '44-45, in Jonesboro, not far from Memphis, across the river from Memphis, and we were coming back. We took the Memphis train and we were coming back up to Cincinnati, where we would switch trains and go on in to New York up to New Haven and go back home. The family had made a decision to go back to the North.

And a powerful story in my memory is that, and pertinent to all this, is the train broke down north of Memphis. A lot of the rolling stock was very old. There hadn't been trains built since the 1920s, the Depression years followed by the Second World War. And the joke was that all the people who lived on the—the fighting men and women who lived in Oregon and California and New York fought in Europe, and all of the people who lived in the Carolinas and Virginia and Maine and Connecticut and New York fought the war in the Pacific. So, the whole nation seemed to be on the move. The trains were jammed. The hotels were jammed.

And the train broke down just outside, north of Memphis. And we were all anxiously looking, or my Dad was—I was a little boy, but I knew what was going on, I was five going on six—everyone was looking at their watches and fretting about would we be able to make the New York train. There was nowhere to stay in Cincinnati. And we were this little family, and Mom was pregnant with the fourth child, my sister, and me, the man of the family at age five, almost six. Dad was with us, and Mom and my two brothers. And we pulled in, and as we pulled into the train station, at the Cincinnati train station, great old-fashioned train station, rows and rows of tracks, at the far end—there were no other trains between us—we could see the New

York train, and it was, as the trains do, getting ready to roll, it was [makes puffing sounds] *phew, phew, phew*.

And Dad came off the train and turned to the conductor—as he was getting off, turned to the conductor, with whom he had had pleasant professional conversations, and checking on the time, and said, “Can you help us?” And, you know, “We’re a little family. We have to walk all the way over there. We’ll never make it. That train’s out of here.” It already was about two minutes to pull out. And the conductor said, “Sir, I’m sorry. I can’t help. I’m on schedule, and the companies,” all that stuff.

Dad then turned to the porter, African American, the Sleeping Car Porters Union, A. Philip Randolph’s union, and he turned to the porter and said, “Can you help me? Can you help us?” The porter—we weren’t in the sleeping car, but the porters were around. They saw the situation and grasped it instantly. And Dad—the porter looked at my father, and my father—Dad was in uniform, as I remember. My father looked at him. They looked at each other. And Dad stepped closer and showed him something. And it was a card. And the porter turned, looked up the line to another porter, a younger man, I remember that, like that [snaps fingers]. He went like that [snaps fingers again]. That train stopped. And we, in an orderly way, walked over and were welcomed onto the other train.

I said to my father, “What is it, Dad, that you showed him?” There was no money. There was no greenback. I didn’t know much about the world, but I saw what I saw. And my father pulled out the card and showed it to me. The card was a card of the NAACP. My father had been an active member of the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in New Haven, Connecticut, had coached—my father was a great athlete and also Marine Corps hundred-yard-dash, all that.

He was also probably the finest high school track coach [0:10:00] in New England at the time. They won nine out of ten Connecticut state championships [10:03] in New Haven and ran the great New Haven Harrier teams, hundreds of young men, a fair number of whom were African American. And so, I was a little boy around that scene—though he was no longer coaching; he had become a principal—but around that scene. The school where he was principal was predominantly African American, the Dixwell Avenue area of New Haven. And my father was engaged civically in various ways, not a particularly political man in the electoral sense, but civically engaged.

And that story has always stuck in my mind as what organization can do. To be organized, and in this case, to be organized around the right cause, is something that made a powerful impact on me. And the more I learned later about the sleeping car porters, I realized just exactly what a good move that was.

DC: Right.

RT: In any event, I grew up in the North and later went to Wesleyan in Connecticut and high school. I went to ten different schools before high school. Moved around a lot. The war was on. A lot of people were moving around in those days.

DC: Right, right.

RT: And then wound up in Plattsburgh High School, a terrific place. Like a lot of us, worked my way through college, construction jobs, and so on, and even was a bit of a farmer for a while. As a little guy, I delivered newspapers for three years. And went to Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut.

DC: Right.

RT: When I was there, when I arrived, we walked in and joined a fraternity, the Alpha Chi Rho fraternity. And our group of chaps at the local—we were one of the locals, one of, I think, twenty-seven locals—had a year or two earlier discovered a clause that was a Christian-only clause, or put it this way: to be a member of the fraternity, you had to pledge allegiance to Jesus Christ. And also there was a hidden clause, as I understand it, that was—though I never saw that clause, but people, my fraternity brothers said it was a hidden clause—about whites only. In any event, we became involved over the four—I wound up being president and active in the house. They were really quite a remarkable group of people, as it turned out, both in college terms, alumni terms, and also just generally.

So, when we got involved in the battle against discrimination in that fraternity, I don't think it took a lot of guts for us to be involved, even in the post-Joe McCarthy era, to be involved in the civil rights fight in the middle of a liberal arts college in the Connecticut River Valley, but it got us familiar with the vocabulary and the concepts of civil rights. And we were correctly—we were one of three fraternities, widely seen, out of twelve who engaged in this struggle. Some of them didn't have to; they didn't have these clauses. Others chose not to.

DC: Right.

RT: And I served on the Civil Rights Committee of the campus. But the main arena was working on these issues. We were trying to retain the property and to break from our national. And we did. We gave them one year to change. When they didn't do it, we fired them.

DC: Um-hmm. And this was what year did you start—?

RT: Well, I arrived in 1957. I broke a hand playing basketball, as a matter of fact, and [laughs] the joke was, "My God, coach, it's Tuttle's shooting hand!" They put me in the games anyway. "It's Tuttle's shooting hand!" The coach said, "So what?" [Laughs]

DC: [Laughs] Right.

RT: In any event, but I broke my hand a couple of times. The second time, I took advantage of that to take a year off, which I did, and did a lot of reading, a lot of thinking. That year happened to be 1960, which was a heck of a year to take off. I think it made some difference in my life, as I graduated in 1962. The battle with the fraternity, national, went on through those years.

DC: Okay. So, were you there at Wesleyan when the sit-in movement began in the South?

RT: Yeah. In the fall of '57, Little Rock took place. And I had—there's another feature to my upbringing, that when I was there as a little guy, I saw something of segregation. I saw a bit of it. I was a little guy, though. I was five and six. I went back down to visit family members just before going off to college, a year or so before, so my sophomore or junior year, [0:15:00] and saw something of segregation. Did not like what I saw, heard a lot about it, etcetera.

But I had come to a subtle opinion that this segregation business was a bad idea, a bad idea for the people who were being affected by it, who were Negro, or African American, and also, in some ways, crippling the whites. [Sniffs] And then, in addition to that, I thought a bad idea in many respects, including voting rights, public accommodations, other things.

But our battle was over here in this fraternity. And then, what's very pertinent, sit-ins took place. And I was out of college up in Plattsburgh when the Woolworth's sit-ins were taking place, and I have trouble now recalling whether I actually went down and actually was in the lines, the picket line around the Woolworth's in Plattsburgh. I know I wasn't at Middletown. I don't think I actually was there. I know I thought about it, but I was sort of disconnected from campus and disconnected from other people.

A little later, the next year, came the Freedom Rides. And something very important to me was that there was a professor at Wesleyan who had an instructor actually named John Maguire, who was—Professor Maguire was a religion teacher. I was not one of his students, but several of the fellows in the fraternity were, and he was—this was a pretty bright group of students and not easy to impress, and they were very impressed by Professor Maguire, who had come from Alabama. He was at Yale Divinity and then had been recruited to teach at Wesleyan, and he did and went on to a career there for a while. He wound up out here as president of Claremont Graduate School.

In any event, he received a—this we knew contemporarily—that he had received a phone call from his friend at Yale, William Sloane Coffin, that after the Anniston bus burned, which is in most high school and college history survey books and was all over the press on the first of the Freedom Rides. He said, “We have to try, from here, to call of conscience. And, John, I know you have final exams coming up.”

It’s in May, and he’s a first-year teacher. And there’s a rather famous moment where, in the world of the campus at Wesleyan, where he—I remember hearing it and then later reading about it in a book by George Plimpton and Jean Stein. It was on the Robert F. Kennedy funeral train. They interviewed people who were on the train in 1968. But in any event, it captures the story there, too, where John Maguire went in to see the dean of the department, the chair of the department, Dr. David Swift, and said, “Dr. Swift, I know this is unusual and I realize—I know what I’m doing. But I have a call of conscious—conscience. I have a call of conscience.”

Oh, John Maguire had roomed at some conferences with Martin Luther King, also. And he said, “I have a call of conscience. And I know we’ve not finished the semester yet, but I’m going to join William Sloane Coffin and some other people in New Haven and go down to New

York and go on the Freedom Ride.” Whereupon David Swift stared at him for a minute, Chairman Swift, of the department, picked up the telephone and said to his wife, “Please pack my bags. I’ve got some young foolish professor [laughing] going on the Freedom Ride, so I better come, too.”

DC: Love it, love it. Yeah.

RT: So, he did. And whence, without going too far into the details, Swift was a senior person around there. And as the saying goes, when Swift went on the Freedom Ride, Wesleyan went on the Freedom Ride. My roommate and I, at the time, both—Don Walls and I had both said to one another, not knowing about the Maguire, the faculty, you know, in the student recruitment, we had said in the Anniston bus thing that we were primed enough in this struggle to say, “We want to go on the rides.” But literally the bus had pulled out before we could get ourselves there. [0:20:00] We were not operational. It didn’t happen. But I know—I don’t just suspect, I know that I came to a subtle conclusion that when other opportunities would come up, I’d do my best to, in fact, get into this.

One thing about the Freedom Rides: The genius of the Freedom Rides—and it’s not as widely articulated when it, in the literature, comes up, but understood at the time, so I might as well mention it now and I don’t speak as a participant on the Freedom Rides; I was not on the Freedom Rides in 1961—it was clearly interstate travel.

DC: Right.

RT: And going from state to state. There was no question about it, that the Commerce Clause was clearly involved and that, therefore, that forced the issue.

DC: Um-hmm.

RT: And whoever over at CORE, Congress of Racial Equality, thought this up, assuming they also grasped that, which I think they did, and there had been earlier efforts in the 1940s to do this, out of Cleveland and some places, Ohio.

DC: Right.

RT: It was a stroke of genius.

DC: Yep.

RT: And they went down. I then came out to, when I graduated—this was in '61, the next year, 1962—and graduated and then decided on a whim to come west, to come to Los Angeles for a year, sunshine, play basketball, maybe play some tennis, and enjoy the beach and chase the young ladies. And I figured I'd go there for a year and then go somewhere else, come out for a year of graduate school. And it turned out I was admitted to graduate work here and some other places. I came out and my college roommate, Bruce Corwin, was extremely helpful.

We had—it was Bruce and Steve Trott, who is now on the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals senior status, former associate attorney general of the Reagan administration, former chief deputy district attorney in Los Angeles, former United States attorney, who he and Bruce Corwin, along with a man named Paul Cable, who is deceased, were the ones—these are separate times—were the ones who forced the issue in the fraternity. We had had a precipitating clause that we would break from the national if it affected anyone in terms of joining. In other words, if it was a real issue, not a theoretical issue. And it affected Steve Trott and Bruce Corwin. They said, "That clause is there. We're not joining." They had been educated to the issue, prepped for the issue, and everything else.

DC: Right.

RT: And Bruce Corwin and Steve Trott are two of the most remarkable, in their lives—they're both men my age—two of the most remarkable individuals I've met.

DC: So, this was here, or this was at Wesleyan?

RT: At Wesleyan. It was at Wesleyan. These were first-year college students. Remember I'm a year ahead of them.

DC: Right.

RT: Because I had come in the year before, and they'd come in—they're also class of '62. Trott—this is before your time and before your parents' time, both of you, but Steve Trott went on to be one of the famous Highwaymen, "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore," [sings] "Michael, row the boat ashore." So, they figure into the story a little bit later, by the way.

I came out here for graduate school. And why don't I pause and let you—?

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: [23:31]

DC: Okay, so, yeah, let's just pick up there where you're out to Los Angeles. And what graduate program did you enroll in?

RT: In history.

DC: In history?

RT: And I came west and the—in all seriousness, not only was it to chase the young ladies and play basketball and tennis, but I had done a paper, a long paper, in my junior year, having been away from college for a year and come back, on the American Progressive Movement. One of the great historians of the Progressive Movement is Professor George Mowry, who taught at UCLA. And I arrived and found his seminar was filled. But, me being me,

I marched into his office hours and said, “Professor Mowry, I came three thousand miles to work with you.”

DC: [Laughs]

RT: “I’ve read every single thing you’ve written that’s been published. I went to Wesleyan,” and so on. He said, “Well, I think we can work you into the seminar.” And that—a real wonderful man to me. And I—he wound up back at Chapel Hill, by the way.

DC: Um-hmm.

RT: He had been a student. He had been very close to Frank Graham when Frank Graham was—before Frank Graham became governor, or senator. For a while in North Carolina, he had been a student of—he had been a professor for a while at Chapel Hill [0:25:00] and wound up at UCLA after a couple of other stops, and a terrific man.

DC: Um-hmm.

RT: So, I’m—but I don’t know anyone to speak of in Los Angeles. And I—it was—but I begin to get acquainted with folks. But in my case, what precipitated my engagement in all this directly was I had been, along with Trott, Steve Trott, had helped bring the National Student Association to Wesleyan, an idea Bob [25:33] had when Bob ran for student body president, you know, for Wesleyan to sort of get campus politics out of the sandbox and into a fuller engagement. And I had played some role there at a conference, a regional conference, and we had made a report at Wesleyan. So, I was somewhat informed on National Student Association.

I [sniffs] wrote a letter in support of NSA when I was at UCLA, probably a letter that had little consequence—no one knew me—but it was defending NSA, National Student Association, when there had been a hostile editorial written in the campus newspaper, *The Daily Bruin*. So, I

wrote and then I figured I better get over to the office and see, [laughs] learn something about the men and women who were over at NSA in this chapter. I knew it was a strong chapter.

And I then met Steve McNichols. And Steve McNichols, who later that year, in 1963, became the NSA rep, was active in NSA, and it turned out—and they thought of me as a fellow NSAer, having had this background and so on. And met a fellow named Steve Robbins, who became national president of NSA. This was the year before the CIA involvement with NSA had been revealed by Mike Wood, a friend of McNichols.

But Steve had done the Freedom Ride, in fact, from the West Coast. Part of the idea on the Freedom Rides was to try to fill the jails and to come in a pincer movement, West Coast, East Coast. And in the course of that, a couple of years earlier, not only had Steve McNichols and Bob Singleton, Helen Singleton, Bob Farrell, who later was a city councilman, Bob Singleton, in Los Angeles, and Steve, and then Helen and Bob Singleton—Bob's going on to be a professor at Loyola Marymount, Helen very active in the arts—they went, the Singletons went on the Mississippi Freedom Ride and spent jail time, prison time, at Parchman State Penitentiary. And Steve McNichols and Bob Farrell had gone on the Houston ride, and McNichols had been very badly beaten in that ride. And, in fact, he had come out here as a very good tennis player and was going to forego that the rest of his life. But we saw each other and became acquainted.

He did a very good job of bringing interesting speakers to the campus. He brought Chuck McDew, who was one of the heads of SNCC. He also brought Malcolm X. It turned out we had hosted Malcolm X at Wesleyan and had spent a fair amount of time with him, because at our fraternity, actually, we had a tradition of having people—at these small colleges you do this some—have people for dinner and so on and so forth, and really make a full day of it, sometimes a weekend. I actually spent a fair amount of time together with him, read a lot about him, and

then here we are, three or four months later, after the summer, *bam*, in the fall, having seen him in the spring, seeing Malcolm X again. We recognize each other; we chat. I explain I'm now in graduate school, [laughs] I'm not following him around. And he laughed. He was relaxed about it, or he indicated he was relaxed about it. And then, went on to—I mean, McNichols brought in a very strong, building civil rights consciousness, and staying connected, a little later, with civil rights, head of the Civil Rights Division of the NSA.

I then pick up an article by John Poppy, who had written for either *Colliers* or *Look* about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the efforts of Sam Block and Charles McLaurin and Willie Peacock to register voters in the Mississippi Delta. And it was quite a story, harrowing experiences, the segregationists trying to get them. It's a world of people not taking them in, and then finding places to stay and registering voters. [Sighs] Ugh! And people, when they did try to register to vote, being cut off the welfare rolls by the county government. We're talking Leflore County, Tallahatchie County, and so on, either in the county [0:30:00] or not far from where Emmett Till had been killed in 1955. And I read it, very moved by it, and thought about it and then—a good deal—and then, all hell broke loose in Birmingham in May of '63. We're talking the academic year '62-63. Firehoses.

And I'm not particularly a person wedded to the television screen, but I was—by that time, I'm with a family where I'm, in effect, helping take care of their kids on weekends and kind of a nanny figure. That overstates it, but wonderful family, and I have great admiration for both Norm and Gabby Reskin. Norm Reskin was something of a war hero. He flew fighter planes over Nazi Germany. There are stories of him parachuting out, the [31:15] helping him get out, getting back across the Channel, and flying war planes, and he was—

DC: What's the last name?

RT: R-E-S-K-I-N, Norm Reskin, Norman Reskin, a terrific guy. It wasn't just his biography. It's the kind of individual he was. And I said to him, keeping in mind this Freedom Rider business a couple of years earlier—I had a teaching assistantship lined up, I had a resident assistantship lined up, I wasn't married, I had no particular important person in my life, in that regard. I was eager; I wasn't particularly finding anyone willing. And furthermore, I had no debt. And it occurred to me if I'm ever going to be able to do something like this, now—I know a lot about these things from my perspective—I better do it.

And I asked Norm about it. We sometimes had graham crackers and milk when he got home, and I—family tucking in—and I said, “What do you think?” And he said, “Well, if I were—I have a mortgage and a family and the business and everything else.” He said, “But if I were in your situation, I'd do it.” Well, that's important to me. His views are important to me. It's still notional, but getting more of a live option.

And the John Poppy story—I could cite that, practically quote that story right now. And then, of course, several days of Bull Connor and the firehoses and all the rest of it. And I come across campus. And I should add that there was—she's not a public figure, so I just won't mention her name—there was a young lady I was particularly interested in, with whom I had shared my notions, my thoughts about this. There are gender components to these things.

DC: Um-hmm. [Laughs] Of course.

RT: And I had shared my thoughts about this particular article, the John Poppy piece, from time to time. I had no car, and from to time she'd give me a ride home to this place I was staying, and so on and so forth, a terrific young lady. And so, I am in the student—Kerckhoff Hall is right next to the Ackerman Student Union. It was really part of the student center area

there, and I am going to my mailbox to pick up the mail the next day or so after this conversation with Norm Reskin. And I bump into McNichols.

And I say, “Steve, I’m thinking of going down to help out with SNCC.” I mentioned the John Poppy article, which he may have been the one to point out to me in the first place. It’s possible. And, “I’m thinking of going down to Mississippi.” McNichols says, being McNichols, he says, “Well, terrific!” I said, literally, the words, “I am thinking about,” [laughter]. He says, “Well, it turns out Sam Block and Charles McLaurin are going to be at the University Religious Conference Center,” which is right next to the UCLA campus. “They’re going to be there tonight, and I’m helping out on their visit.” Now, he had just been elected—this is now in the spring, he had just been elected the NSA rep. He had civil rights credentials in the first place. And he said, “We can arrange a ride!” [0:35:00] And, as I opened my mouth, the young lady walks up, whereupon Steve turns to her and says, “Rick is going to Mississippi to help!” And I said to myself, speaking of myself, I said, “My man, it looks like you’re going to Mississippi!” [Laughs]

DC: [Laughs] That’s great.

RT: So—

DC: How these things work, yeah.

RT: So, I went down. It worked out. We made the arrangement. This is a world before cellphones and all the rest of it. But in any event, somehow McNichols had primed these chaps, you know, I would meet them again—this was in, I guess, late morning or early afternoon, and rendezvoused again with them at the URC, with Steve, at around five or so, or six-thirty or seven. It was a conference on civil rights to tell the story of what they were doing. And these

fellows had already been told about me and were agreeable to it. And I then—and then, McNichols said, “There are some people you need to meet,” in addition, if I was going to do this.

And so, with a mutual friend, a man named Paul Albert, whom Steve knew, was a graduate student at UCLA and very active and progressive and liberal in left causes, originally out of Ohio, and mature, more mature, in his thirties, a grad student in the sociology department—we go over to a party in the Hollywood Hills upon the election of a man named George Brown, who had just been elected to Congress in the '62 elections, it's '63, and very newly-elected city council member Tom Bradley. And the group of which Steve was—to which he was referring me, and the people hosting the party, I mean, a variety of people get involved hosting parties, but the core of this party was a group called Californians for Liberal Representation. These days we'd probably call it Californians for Progressive Representation. It was really quite a remarkable group of people. I'll give you an example: Two of Tom Bradley's first three deputy mayors came out of this CLR group some years later.

At any rate, we come to this party and introduce me, with the idea that Congressman Brown might be willing to write a letter that I could have with me, saying I'm a volunteer asked by him, written on special letterhead, observing voter registration practices in the South. The theory wasn't that it would do anything for me if I was in the hands of officials. But, rather, if I was in a situation where my life was in danger from people who were not officials who might hesitate if they thought in some way I was federal. And so, George Brown was a rather remarkable man and puffing his cigar. This whole UCLA connection—he and Tom Bradley had roomed together at UCLA at the co-op. And he was puffing his cigar and all the rest of it. Nodding, he agreed. And, sure enough, a week or so later, I'm in Mississippi, and this letter arrives. He did take care of it and sent it, and it may in some ways have been helpful.

Then, I went with—so, I went and stayed overnight to let my folks know. I had the decency—if my daughter pulls a stunt like this, heaven help her. But I call my folks, and my mother remembers, from Arkansas, she said, “Honey, not Mississippi!” [Laughs]

DC: Yeah, anywhere but there.

RT: Yeah. Well, there were a couple of other places, too, including parts of Arkansas. But that was her quick reaction. And so, I went down with them and arrived in Greenwood.

DC: Had you ever been to Mississippi before?

RT: When I arrived, I showed up and, you know, arrived, three fellows—we drove straight through. And Sam Block and Charles McLaurin really very remarkable, both African Americans, very remarkable organizers and leaders in their own way, even before the Civil Rights Movement. Sam Block was a well-known popular musician. Sam Block’s band was going around doing lots of dances and parties, tremendously well-known all through Mississippi in African American circles, and a real extraordinary fellow. He passed away some years ago out there in Los Angeles. [0:40:00] He was originally a native Mississippian.

So, in any event, I showed up. And one of the—and when I was there, one of the—I was there for a bit of time in Mississippi. And I remember, for example, going to a church south of Greenwood, north of Canton, Mississippi, a small rural church, and hearing in vivid terms the Exodus story and the Promised Land and getting to freedom, and giving special resonance to that wonderful song, “Go down, Moses, way down in freedom land,” and so on, all done deep in the curriculum of what Baptists describe as the Old Testament and very powerful linkages to what had happened to the Jewish people, the Hebrew people, in the exodus and the Book of Exodus.

In any event, I can remember being—we went to a voter registration rally in the outskirts of Canton, Mississippi. We were there, and different people, and they were about to have me say

a few words. [Laughs] I was the white guy. I was the white person around. This is the year before Mississippi Freedom Summer, '63.

DC: Um-hmm, right.

RT: So, I found myself sort of at this church and about to—here sort of representing the fact that there are people who are allies, [laughs] that we care, that up in the North and in the West, you've got support, and so on and so forth. And I was careful to limit my remarks to a very few words, but when I did speak briefly—and I was ready to speak again at this baseball field rally over on the third base side. And Willie Peacock walked over to me and said—before I spoke—and said, “Time to go. Just walk and don't look.” So, we just walked towards the cars and we got in the car. And then, I did take a peek. Coming down on the right field side, on the first base side, there they were, the Confederate flags flying, carload after carload after carload of guys in those cars. And the crowd—it was late afternoon, dusk, or early evening, summertime, dusk, and people just fading away. [Laughs] We drove out of there and got on the road and drove on into the night. We got back safely, but you got some idea of the menace, and so on. A little later—

DC: I was going to ask you, because you talked about driving with them across country to Mississippi—

JB: [43:01]

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay.

DC: I was going ask you when you mentioned driving across country to Mississippi, just being in a car, guys of different races, was—could be quite challenging to certain people at that time.

RT: We drove through without any—we didn't particularly stop. We highballed it. I mean, we were all driving pretty fast across Texas and across the Southwest, and we just kept—we just rolled through. It was no—we stopped—when we rolled into Greenwood, it was dark. It was late. It wasn't—people were still in the office, 708 Avenue N, I remember. After Rebecca and I married, we went back and visited it in 2008, just after the November election, and went to that spot. You know how you remember certain addresses. The building's gone, but the footprint is still there. The stoop, on where a lot of serious discussions were held, the cement stoop is right there.

DC: It's still there?

RT: Oh, yeah. Lots of—this was, when I say the SNCC office, I should modify that right away. It was the Council of Federated Organizations, COFO.

DC: Right.

RT: Which was SNCC, NAACP, CORE, and I may be leaving—SNCC, NAACP, CORE, SCLC. And I think everyone, in their wisdom—I had nothing to do with this. This was all done before I came along. I'm a very minor figure anyway in that constellation of people. But, you know, we can have our differences in New York and Washington, maybe even in Atlanta and other places. But down there, it's so serious, we'd better have a combined effort.

DC: Right.

RT: And so, it was a COFO operation. Now, as a practical matter, a fair number of the people there were with SNCC. For example, a man named Dave Dennis came in one day and he was with CORE, and so on. It didn't—I mean, everyone—it didn't—there may have been [sighs] episodes other places where these things were—I wasn't there that long, [0:45:00] but when I was there, it was consequential. They moved me on to Georgia.

But, because I was literally bunked in, sleeping on the same bed with Lawrence Guyot, and he was in charge of the office, because Bob Moses was up in New England. And we got up—I remember it was kind of a house behind a house in Greenwood near the office, and we were there. It would overstate it to call it a safe house but it was a hard place to find, to go and start looking for people in that area, that we were there. I mean, probably law enforcement knew perfectly well where we were, but on the other hand we weren't violating any laws in the immediate sense.

And I remember Guyot got up and somehow had word that Mrs. Hamer had—in other words, he knew this when I was awakening. He got up before I did. There were no cellphones, so he somehow—there may have been a phone in the location, or someone came over to get him, and I didn't realize that. But he said to me, as I woke up and rubbed my eyes open, he said, "I'm going to go bail out Mrs. Hamer, Fannie Lou Hamer, and some young ladies who were arrested over in Winona."

And I started to say words to the effect of, "Do you want me to come along?" I can't remember if I actually uttered the words or not, but he was out the door. And he drove over to get them, and we learned [sighs]—and did not come back right away, nor did they come with him. And we learned that when he arrived, they handcuffed him and beat the heck out of him with baseball bats in broad daylight, let alone on a Sunday, right near a Baptist church, just beat him up with baseball—really hit him, his head was swollen, and they threw him in jail.

I wound up over in the office. Now in charge is Willie Peacock, who was in Oakland, you know, or Wazir Peacock. It was Willie and me, and then there was some drop-off in age. I'm twenty-three at the time. Wazir, Willie is about my age. So was Guyot. But you drop off pretty quickly to nineteen-year-olds. Bob Moses was away, Sam Block was off somewhere else, and so

on. And that figures into it. So, you do what you're asked to do, and so on. And what I did, everything I'm saying I did right now, I did at the direction of Willie, and we worked very well together, with me essentially doing what he suggested. And he had some brilliant ideas, one of which was we realized—remember, this is Mississippi in 1963. It's much closer to the Mississippi of 1955, Emmett Till, or the Mississippi of 1935, Mississippi of 1925, and so on, than it was to Mississippi after the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Act, much different.

DC: Right.

RT: And there was no—in effect, no local law enforcement presence, and the FBI, the local FBI director—I happened to pick up a local paper—is running for state legislature, all-white, lily-white primary. And the bureau was not particularly interested in being involved in civil rights per se; they were much more interested in Communists than the Civil Rights Movement, and so on and so forth.

DC: Right. And the local sheriffs ran their little fiefdoms.

RT: Oh, yeah! And so, in any event, we called Claude Sitton at the *New York Times* at the time and also Carl Fleming at *Newsweek*. Willie—we divided up calls and called. And first called Julian Bond. Excuse me, I have this backward. He called Julian Bond, and *he* called these two reporters. That's what it was. And they may have called in to us. I remember some conversation, but now that I think about it, it was through Julian, who was communications director for SNCC and seemed to be always available, at two in the morning, at five in the morning, in the middle of the day, Sunday, through Sunday, you know, and so on and so forth. And very, very, very good at this, because the main thing we had—no law enforcement, no particular federal presence—was some press interest.

These folks called, and then Wazir, Willie Peacock, asked me to do another thing: [0:50:00] He asked me to call Medgar Evers to see about another [50:04] bail money. So, I called Mr. Evers, who says, “Well,” I remember words to the effect of, “Well, Mr. Tuttle, I will— [sniffs] I have to go out now to a meeting. I’ll call you when I get back. I’m just going out the door.” He was very nice. And he probably was thinking to himself, as he reached fumbled for his keys and reached to unlock the door to go into his home, “I’ve got to call that fellow back up in Greenwood, because of Mrs. Hamer and Guyot,” and so on and so forth. And it was then that Byron De La Beckwith murdered him. So, we then—

DC: Wow.

RT: And all hell breaks loose in Jackson. Medgar Evers had become a major regional figure and, to some large degree, a national figure because he had been the voice of Mississippi African Americans in the Till case, Emmett Till case, and NAACP director, etcetera. And in Mississippi, on the ground, right in the heart of an extremely dangerous and difficult place, murdered.

Willie Peacock gets another idea. We can’t find, or we don’t think—we can’t seem to find where Mrs. Hamer or the young ladies, June Johnson and the others who were with her, and now Guyot. And the danger was, the thing we were worried about, is they were being moved around. Then everybody’s responsible, no one’s responsible. You wind up with—people are dead and missing, and now, “I’m sorry,” and the jury can’t decide, and DAs can’t decide who to file against, and so on. I’m talking about including well-meaning people, the whole thing, because of the underlying structure. And the chances are in a segregated, all lily-white situation, you’re going to get people who simply want this stuff excused and go on in life as usual. So, it’s very, very dangerous.

It turned out they were in the jail the whole time. We just didn't know it and we couldn't find them, and the usual sources of information, for one reason or another, dried up. There was a pretty good underground because generally white folks down there in that setting didn't realize that African Americans, at least is what we thought, could understand what they were saying, and so on.

DC: [Laughs] Were saying, right.

RT: But that got shut down, which that itself was concerning, the normal conversation in front of people, and so on and so forth. So, [sighs] Willie Peacock suggested I call the governor. So, I did. And we scripted it, or he scripted me. I explained just who I was, you know, "I'm quite new here. I'm a [laughs] UCLA graduate student from California. I'm here helping in the civil rights effort here." He took the call. The governor took the call.

DC: Wow.

RT: And I said just what I said and said that we—let me go back a step. After Mr. Evers died, I started to say, all hell broke loose in Jackson. And that's the famous moment when John Doar, iconic moment, comes down the street holding up his credentials, saying, "I am John Doar from the United States Department of Justice," and so forth.

DC: Right.

RT: It's interesting, because Medgar Evers, in two ways—one I'll get to perhaps a little later—even in death, continued to play a helpful role in the Civil Rights Movement. And in this case, in the case of Mrs. Hamer and the others, as Willie Peacock and I said to each other a year or so ago, we were talking about this, what I was basically doing was that we kept them alive.

And I was thinking it's hard to remember this, but people would disappear. There were people being shot. And, for example, in the Medgar Evers thing, Mr. De La Beckwith didn't

bother to wipe off his prints. He just put down the rifle, went on about his business. There were all sorts of stories about this. There was no legal remedy here, nothing. So, in any event, we weren't sure what was going to happen here. What did happen is they were being badly beaten and brutalized in the jail. They forced trustees, African American trustees, or prisoners, to beat them, and so on and so forth.

DC: Right.

RT: In any event, I did what, exactly what Willie Peacock suggested. I called and did say to him, "Look, I'm here. I'm from—" I am who I am. I gave him my name—probably a wiretap around here, somewhere, on it, probably more than one—and so forth. "And we know [0:55:00] that you've got your hands full in Jackson." They pulled in everything, fish and game wardens, highway patrol, everything they had, because of these demonstrations, which were where—Jackson was teetering on the edge of even more serious problems. I said, "What I can report to you is that if Mrs. Hamer and Mr. Guyot and the others," and I named their names, Annelle Ponder, June Johnson, "if we're not notified where they are and how they can be—how their release can be secured, there will be major demonstrations up here in the Delta, here in Greenwood." Parentheses: (He knew what I knew, that Dick Gregory had come out some months earlier, and actually there had been public activity around the Civil Rights Act—)

DC: In that area.

RT: In Greenwood.

DC: Right.

RT: And so, the Governor said to me, "Well, son, are you threatening me?" And I said, "Sir, I'm not threatening you. I'm new here. I'm simply reporting to you. I'm reporting what I'm told and I'm asked to call you. I'm just telling you what's going to happen." And I'll never

know, or probably never know for sure, maybe you folks will find out if you go along, or it will become evident in some way or other. But we had a timeline, a deadline on this: We need to know by such-and-such time; it was later that day. And before that deadline, a couple of hours later, the highway patrol, which last time I looked, reports to the governor of the state, the highway patrol called and indicated where they were. They were at the jail, where we could go and get them bailed out.

Andy Young flew in—Andy Young actually drove in. He had been at a conference, I think probably in Alabama, in Birmingham. This I picked up from talking with him about it years and years and years later. He came in and—with bail money to go get them out. And I still remember—this was a very tough situation in Winona, and I still remember thinking the 23rd Psalm, “though I go through the valley of the shadow of death,” as he, understanding everything, got in the car and drove over to Winona to bail them out. And he has a whole story he tells about getting them out. And he did and brought them back. Meanwhile, word reached through the network, I’ll use the term “underground,” through reliable sources, that Mr. De La Beckwith, who was from Greenwood, which was where the COFO office was—

DC: Right, right.

RT: And had demonstrated his willingness and his capacity to do murder, said he was going to go “kill the white boy.” I was that white boy. So, they realized that danger, and so they put me under a blanket, after half a day, I guess, of discussing it, and took me to Memphis to the airport. And I flew to the SNCC office in Atlanta and went in there. And from there—SNCC was—I went on Chatham County. I went on to Savannah, but when I was in Atlanta—SNCC was always, to its great credit, pushing in those days, pushing the envelope. And there had been a settlement reached by the civil rights organizations and the Atlanta authorities: Take it easy in

Atlanta on various civil rights activities, particularly lunch counter sit-ins, and so on and so forth. But SNCC wasn't necessarily always part of that consensus.

And so, I was part of a group, I remember, one day walking down to desegregate a lunch counter. And I remember passing by—it was at some distance, you know, I'd say, forty or fifty yards away, but I had a clear line. I could see Lester Maddox out in front of his restaurant, and he had a pickax handle. He was out there. I don't remember—it was sort of his emblem—I don't remember him specifically having the pickax handle but I remember him out there, he's a visible figure, pointing and gesturing, and so on and so forth. But we went on by to another restaurant.

And I remember we were sitting there, and this is just a, you know, straightforward restaurant sit-in desegregation, standing on the shoulders of the sit-ins in 1960. [1:00:00] And there we were, it was—remember, it was before the 1964 Public Accommodations Act, the Civil Rights Act. And I still remember, pretty vivid in my mind, there was a line of black and white were there. We're in Atlanta, not in Mississippi, and not in rural Georgia. And a lady had this—you know, the waitress, who was so upset, her whole world was being turned upside down, and she had this vat of absolute boiling water. And she was standing—I'm at the lunch counter, and she's right—I'm right here, and she's above me, standing above me. I mean, my head's here, and she's here. And there was an African American here, an African American here, a white person here. She's standing right there. And I looked at her, and she was looking at me and she was extremely upset.

Behind us were some reporters, and one of whom I'd run into. I'd gone to Wesleyan, and he had gone to, and he had graduated Williams just that spring. His name is John Kifner, and John Kifner was down covering the Civil Rights Movement for the *Berkshire Eagle*, which is Berkshire in western Mass. And he later went on to a very distinguished career with the *New*

York Times, widely known as a reporters' reporter. We're talking Beirut, we're talking the Fred Hampton killing in Chicago, on and on and on. But he's standing there with his—I had my back to him, so I take it he was standing there with his notepad—and others.

And it was a very long forty-five seconds. A voice at the far end said, "Alright," and he called her by name. "Alright," he said, "now, let's all settle down." And a police officer walked in, sort of rapped his baton down, turned to our picket captain. She stepped back. And he, the officer doing the duty, and he came in and he turned to whoever was in charge of us. And then, there was a moment or two, "Okay, do we—?" I wasn't in the command of this. I was doing what we wanted to do. But I take it it was not a day we were going to go to jail, take an arrest. And so, we did not and left.

As we walked back, John Kifner said to me, "I'm going to put away my notepad. I'm going to join this effort." No, excuse me, that's *not* what happened. As we walked back, we talked about it, Wesleyan and Williams, small colleges, common ground, and so on, went on back. Very shortly thereafter—that conversation did not happen that way. It happened in another place.

Went back to the SNCC office, and there were marches going on in Chatham County, Savannah. And the people in the SNCC office in Atlanta, one of whom was Casey Hayden, another of whom was Dicky Romley, Casey Hayden, for sure, and I think Dicky Romley was the other, talked to me, to Bruce Gordon, whom I'd met—I'd been there a few days—and also a young man named Joe Ayer, who was nineteen or so, a student at Haverford College. Bruce, twenty-three, was a year or so younger, had been in the military, done a little time at CCNY and then at either Morehouse or Morris Brown, studying theater, but joined the Movement, African

American. And we had gotten acquainted in those few days around Atlanta. They had sized us up some, and so on and so forth.

And they said, “We’d like to send you folks down, the three of you down to Savannah. There’s a Southern Christian Leadership Conference affiliate named the Chatham County Crusade for Voters, which has been carrying on demonstrations. Hosea Williams, the Reverend Hosea Williams, and Benjamin Van Clark are very charismatic folks. We think you folks might be able to help there, help them with some nonviolence work and also just be supportive [1:05:00] in various ways.” So, we drove from Atlanta. It was one of these things, you do it. You just go do it. So, we drive down—

DC: So, the three of you were—who were the other two again?

RT: Bruce Gordon

DC: Bruce Gordon.

RT: And Joe Ayer. So, we drove down there. And I remember we arrived at night at a church in Savannah, and the place was packed. And they had been doing these night marches. This is for desegregation of public facilities, meaning the restaurants, hotels, the DeSoto Hotel there and other things, employment issues, and so on. The voter registration was more than most places. I’m not saying it was as good as it should have been, but the Chatham County Crusade for Voters—actually, Mr. Williams’ wife had run for county commission, I believe it was, you know, an electoral campaign, a year or two earlier, hence the Chatham County Crusade for Voters. They were at some variance with the NAACP chapter there, which was working in its own manner. But Hosea Williams and Benjamin Van Clark and others were—had mobilized very major night marches.

So, we arrive, and here's this—walk in and there's this spellbinding oratory from Reverend—he became a reverend—Reverend Williams, a chemist at the agricultural department, World War II, badly wounded, left for dead, came back, and was beaten up as a serviceman, one of these servicemen in the forties, 1945, I think, beaten up coming off a train or bus upon returning from service, etcetera. But anyway, a remarkable man, and he had gotten his college degree at one of the Atlanta colleges, and the child of a man named Blind Tom and a lady, and just remarkable guy and terrific individual, and children, and so on and so forth, but worked for the U.S. Government as a chemist, Ag Department.

And Benjamin Van Clark, who was a terrific, recently-out-of-high school student leader. I still remember the scenes when, more than once, but that night was the first time I saw it. Said, “Alright, now, we're about to go out on the march and we all know what will happen, in terms of discrediting us, if weapons are found on anyone. So, please put your things in these baskets.” And they passed around these baskets, and there was [laughing] the clatter and clank of brass knuckles and zappers, all kinds of knives, switchblades. But think of the political consciousness that took, think of the commitment to civil rights and what that meant, what they were willing to do and people were willing to forego, that normal things that one carries in—

DC: In self-defense.

RT: In self-defense, and so on and so forth. And so, off we go on the marches. And we're quite regularly in mass, what are called mass meetings, in these churches. And we go on to—we stay at a place, we go upstairs, I didn't particularly notice the first night or two where we're staying, and it didn't dawn on me the place we're staying is a house of prostitution. And it's something that I've thought about a good deal since, and that is, what you have is the ladies were there, and they knew who we were. We acknowledge each other, we see them, you know, we're

upstairs. But this was a pro bono thing. The owners were doing this as part of the Movement and furthermore, on occasion, were actually putting their places of business up for bail money, risking them. It's really quite remarkable if you think about it a bit.

So, after a few days of marching, one of the most darned fool things I've done or agreed to do is they came to me, the leadership came to me, Ben Clark, and said, "Well, Rick—" remember, I've been out there marching. I'm one of two or three whites and—one of two, to be literal about it. These marches—all kinds of cameras—it's public marching, and *click-click-click*, eyes were a little glazed from the flashbulb, and so on, and this or that, journalists, security people, others, [1:10:00] and plus, just people found it interesting. So, here we are. They say, "Well, we're going to have you engage quarters away from here. And we want you to go to white supremacist meetings," to public meetings.

So, I go and agree to it and I get a place to stay. And you have some question of what do you do during the day, I mean, what do you do with your time? I saw *Bye Bye Birdie* so often. I kept going to the same movie over and over. There were two shows, and there was a library there. And I would basically tuck myself in and then go to the meetings, which were on the outskirts of Savannah in Chatham County, and would—now that I think about it, I don't remember how I got there. I may have walked. I may have taken buses. I don't remember exactly how I did, but I did and was—these were not, you know, tiny secret conflicts. These were public meetings held by people whose world was turning upside down.

DC: Right. Was this the Klan or was it other named organizations?

RT: One of the meetings was Klan, public Klan meeting, possibly two. The others were white supremacist meetings.

DC: Yeah.

RT: Committed to segregation. There was—people would be introduced here and there, who were introduced as the deputy, as, you know, “our good friend so-and-so, who’s with the police department,” etcetera.

DC: Right.

RT: You know, some of that going on, and so on. Here I am in these crowds, having marched around publicly for [laughs] for several days.

DC: Right.

RT: And what the assignment essentially was to have an ear there, have eyes and ears there, and let the folks know in the Civil Rights Movement if—numbers to call and things like that—if there was any imminent risk or threat.

DC: Right.

RT: I got no serious information. At some point they basically said, “Why don’t you—you know, we tried that. Okay, now, let’s come on back in.” So, I came on back in, into the civil rights—back to the place where I’m staying, back into the office, and was there for a few days. And then, one night, and it happened to be a night, the only time I was there where I was sick. I just got good old-fashioned sick for a night. So, I slept in. That day all hell, that night all hell broke loose in Savannah. A fire broke out. Someone burned a building. Things got out of hand. The context was Hosea Williams, Ben Clark, and the others were all being thrown in jail. So, there was no real leadership in the Savannah structure.

Oh, by the way, there’s something I need to come back to. The day after we arrive, John Kifner shows up and says, “After what happened in that restaurant, I’ve decided my place is not to be a reporter but to join in this effort,” and he did. And Kifner put away his reporter’s

notebook and made it clear he was a part of our effort. So, he was also part of our group. He'd come in that summer.

In any event, all hell broke loose. The governor indicated he'd be calling out the National Guard. A day or so later, Andy Young, Reverend Young, and Reverend Bevel, Jim Bevel, James Bevel, had come to Savannah. And so, they're in the office. I am now in the office with the Chatham County Crusade for Voters with these fellows, and all of a sudden, this sort of—and a couple of other people—when suddenly, ahead of a commotion at the door, voices raise for a minute. Then in come several police officers from the Savannah Police Department. They walk up to me. I'm behind the desk. I happen to be standing behind the desk, phoning, or I may have stood up when they came in. I'm on the phone, so—and I get off the call.

And they walk up to me and say, "You're under arrest! We have a warrant for your arrest." I said, "Could I—" at that moment, I realized I had one major assignment. Say what? The major assignment was for them not to realize who else was in the room. If they pick me up, that's one thing. If they pick up Andy Young and James Bevel, they've picked up two of Dr. King's Big Five or Six: Ralph Abernathy, Reverend Abernathy, Andy Young, Jesse Jackson's not yet on the staff, James Bevel, who had done Birmingham, [1:15:00] Andy Young, who I mentioned earlier, and so on. And Andy and—I did see out of the corner of my eye for a moment that Reverend Bevel and Reverend Young got very interested in the floor.

DC: [Laughs] Right, right.

RT: As they were sort of walking away, easing themselves away. And I say, "Well, I want to see—I want to see the warrant."

DC: Right.

RT: They pull out a piece of paper. I said, “I don’t see my name.” Said, “There it is: John Doe, white.” [Laughter] I say, “My name is Rick Tuttle.” They said, “That’s good enough—John Doe is good enough for us, son!”

DC: Wow.

RT: And so, they cuff me and take me out. And I, you know, I stay south of being obstreperous, but north of being so docile that they start to look around the room. And they have their job, which is get me out of there. They take me down the stairs. And, as I go down the stairs, a reporter from United Press, who knew who I was, was coming up the stairs. He sees me, and I think to myself. “Oh, my poor mother.” [Laughs]

DC: [Laughs] Yeah, right.

RT: So, we get in the car, and they take me down to the jail and go through the process. And I remember that night. I have enough sense to keep my clothes on. And they put me in solitary. So, I’m in solitary, and there was light in my face, pitch black, and I hear a voice, a disembodied voice, saying, “I’m not in the Klan. Hey, Bubba, wake up. I’m not in the Klan. Hey, Bubba, wake up. I’m not in the Klan.” You know, I wake up on my own pace, you know. “I’m not in the Klan.” But now, I’m awake and I actually am sitting up. And I look around, and there’s a rugged looking guy, nice tight crewcut, “I’m not in the Klan. But my brother is.” [Laughs]

DC: Oh!

RT: [Laughing] And I happened to know that night the Klan was marching in Savannah, a big night march, on top on what had just happened!

DC: Right.

RT: The governor’s all over the place, Governor Sanders.

DC: Right.

RT: And so, they keep me there in solitary for a bit. They bring us down to court. And they had me in there, along with, I'm going to use the term, number forty-five—that could be off, it may have been forty-one or forty-nine, somewhere in the forties—other civil rights people, including Hosea Williams and much of the structure of the Chatham County Crusade for Voters SCLC operation. So, we went to—we were represented by James Nabrit III, whose father was president of Howard University and Howard University Law School. They advised us to not be sworn, to give unsworn testimony, or else they'd come after us on perjury charges, and so on and so forth. So, we gave unsworn testimonies—

DC: Hmm, that's interesting.

RT: Which was put in the record. So, we did. And the judge was Judge Victor Mullen, who in his own way was a very remarkable man. He's blind, completely blind, apparently since childhood, and was raised as a very strong Talmadge faction part of Georgia politics and was a segregationist, and so on. In the meanwhile, what he had done, he was using something he thought of and made it clear he had thought of it as time passed—peace bonds, where they get people to swear out complaints and have bonds issued, where then you have to put up property in order to be released from custody, that what I was doing or others like me were doing was disturbing their peace. It's not a disturbing the peace charge. It's disturbing the peace enough so that a peace bond is issued. They used to be used in domestic disputes of one kind or another.

DC: Interesting.

RT: And what he did is he put on bail terms that were very onerous. Now, think about it for a minute. Savannah is a city of about, what, two hundred or three hundred thousand. And he would stack the—the charges were stacked, so I had seven peace bonds brought against me.

Hosea Williams had seven or eight, and so on. Each one he required unencumbered property, and you just didn't have enough.

DC: Right.

RT: And so, what you de facto had done with forty-nine, forty-nine or forty-five or fifty people—

DC: Right.

RT: And then someone would be let out, Hosea would be let out, and then, they'd put him back in and make the charges again. Anyway, what I recall is, is that the gentleman who was the one who was in court who gave testimony [1:20:00] that I had disturbed his peace, he himself was an older gentleman and couldn't identify me in the courtroom, plus I had not been there.

DC: Right.

RT: But even across a courtroom, and so on and so forth. But anyway, the—so, I go back in. Later, Ronald Goldfarb, who has made something of a reputation for himself years ago as an expert on bail and preventive detention and this sort of thing, was that fall lecturing at the Yale Law School. And a friend of mine, Peter Dibwad, who had gone to Wesleyan, an acquaintance of mine, was, as he put it, “dozing in the back,” and Ronald Goldfarb is discussing onerous bail bond cases. And Peter described that [laughing] he woke up to the fact that my name is mentioned as part of this case.

Well, the—so they kept me for a while in solitary. It turned out not far away was Hosea Williams. I realized he was there, but we were careful to speak to each other, because we didn't know who else was standing there listening. We couldn't see, and so on and so forth. And then they put me in the white cell block. So, I went into the white block. And across this wire screen and across on the other side were the prisoners in the jail who were African American, the

males—the young ladies were upstairs—including Bruce Gordon, who had been thrown in, also. He'd been picked up on one of these things. [Sniffs] So, I'm there, and coming into the jail were—and I wasn't quite sure what would happen, but I had a pretty good idea, because I'm in there, and they're putting fellows in there who were picked up on car hijacking, you know, on car thievery, drunk driving, pretty busy there late Friday night, Saturday.

DC: Right, right.

RT: And the [laughs]—and I was in fairly good shape. It turned out I did a lot of pushups and all this sort of stuff and I was pretty fit. And at UCLA, I had finished second in the intramural 400 meters, the 440, and third in the 880, you know, and so on and so forth. I had done a lot of walking and all that business, do endless one-arm pushups, all this stuff. And so, these guys never touched me. And some of them didn't particularly like what I was doing. Civil rights? What's all this? I later learned—I was still there—I later—Bruce told me later—by later, I mean, we were still in custody, but we could speak to each other through the grating wire. There were two things: They spread the rumor that I was one vicious gangbanger out of New York, and don't mess with me. I'm really not sure how plausible that was.

DC: [Laughs] Who spread the rumor?

RT: They did, the civil rights—

DC: The other civil rights folks.

RT: But what also happened was, and it's really quite a remarkable story, not unlike what I mentioned early about the houses that put up their bail money, you know, and so on.

DC: Right.

RT: The trustees—these are guys doing easy time. These are the people who get the cigarettes, get the candy. They can go out on—go across the street, bring it back, pick up

newspapers. They're called bridge boys, and they wore rather distinctive outfits. They were in jail, I mean, they're—and one of them was a fellow named Popeye, who was a well-known welterweight fighter. Remember Savannah is a port town, seaport, so there's Longshore Unions, green shops and stewards, everything else.

DC: Right.

RT: Nice, strong, tough, great guy, very friendly to me, and what apparently he and the others did is they said to the white guys as they came through, you know, they're strip searching them, giving them the usual stuff, you know, yeah, when you go into jail, body cavity and all the rest of it, said, "Listen. You leave this guy alone. He's with us. If you touch him, we're going to beat the hell out of you." Now, think about that for a minute. They had easy time. They're willing to put it on the line in a segregated corrections, you know, jail situation, where if they—and they're creditable guys in terms of following up this threat [1:25:00] to anyone who would mess with me, a relative stranger, I mean, except I'm involved in civil rights, they could wind up in a state prison farm, and that's hard time. They certainly wouldn't be trustees.

DC: Right.

RT: They were willing to roll that out and put that on the line. Think about what that meant. We decide, after a while, because we have some communication back and forth, quite a bit of it, because they're right there, the African American civil rights prisoners. There are plenty of other people in the jail, but they had in that area everyone being held. We decide—Bruce Gordon—I think it was Bruce who thought of the idea, and that is to—we're not criminals. We're people doing something that's good and we're going to do everything we can to act that way. And so, I'm ninety-nine percent sure this is Bruce's idea. Maybe someone else might have mentioned it. We're going to run a freedom school. So, I wound up teaching history. He taught

theater arts. Someone else taught mathematics, and so on. And we had these little clusters of people [1:26:16].

DC: [1:26:16].

RT: And it was very interesting the impact on the guards. They began to see this. It was interesting. There was another thing that happened as well. But this went on a bit, etcetera.

And meanwhile, there were efforts—[laughs] my mom and dad [1:26:43]. And so, they were attempting to represent to the judge—the judge had it in his mind—remember, Mississippi. Who am I? I'm twenty-three. I'm not nineteen. He had it in his mind I was something fairly big-time. He wasn't sure what, exactly, but I was pretty big-time. So, [laughs] I'm there.

And when I'd been out at UCLA, one of the things I did on Sundays—I'm raised Episcopalian and Methodist—was go to Canterbury, which is the Episcopal—in fact, it raised some money to go, to help finance my trip. I ran around for half a day or a short time. It may have been that very afternoon, I can't remember, but I raised—and Father Crowther, who was the Episcopal priest on campus, had made some phone calls, raised some cash from the Presbyterians, from others, for me from Episcopalians, the Methodists, and so on, University Religious Conference people, to help underwrite my trip down there, and the experience was just wonderful. He had been involved in the fraternity fight. He had blasted the fraternities and sororities for segregationist practices at about the time we were involved back East. Well, he later wound up bishop of Kimberley in South Africa. He got thrown out by the apartheid regime. He's going to a national conference in Toronto. I'm being represented to the court as a fairly harmless person. He shows up, Reverend Crowther shows up, to bless me—he's on his way—give me communion, and to do everything he could to be sure I wasn't being mistreated. And a

little later, Congressman Brown sends down, George Brown sends down a couple of aides. So, the judge [laughing] is saying back, “Wait a minute.”

DC: “What’s going on?” Yeah, right.

RT: [Laughing] Yeah. And then, there’s another episode where the—

JB: Can we stop?

[Recording stops and then resumes]

RT: Well, meanwhile, so I’m—are we rolling now?

DC: Yeah.

JB: Yeah.

RT: So. Okay, sir?

JB: We’re rolling.

RT: So, I’m in—sitting there in custody, and so are all the others. We have these bail terms that are very tough, and no one’s quite figured out how to solve them. And Hosea Williams is also in custody. He’s not in the main block. They had him over in solitary where I had been, and then he was out. He got out.

And there was also a distinct possibility that a major effort would be mounted in Savannah. It was a summer where lots of people went to jail. Tom Hayden, in his memoir, actually took the trouble to have the research done, or did it himself, as to the number of people who went to jail in that 1963 period. It was the Birmingham [1:30:00]—bracketed by Birmingham over here in May and the March on Washington.

DC: Right, right.

RT: Followed by the bombing of the—killing of the children in Birmingham and the church that was blown up, dynamited. In any event, a lot of people, a lot going on.

DC: Right.

RT: And we thought we might get relief from the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. The problem is Senator Eastland was talking about splitting the court, judicial chair. And so, the court was hesitant to become involved in it. The presiding justice had the same last name I do, Elbert Parr Tuttle, so there was always a little sense I might be related. I made it clear I wasn't, but I'd get asked that from time to time. In any event—and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund was spread out all over the South, all over the place.

DC: Right.

RT: So, my folks—I'm—a) there are very few whites there, b) my dad is with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration as the education program director, and it becomes, you know, in a minor but significant way, fairly newsworthy: "This fellow is here," and so on and so forth. And I had been perfectly aware of the fact when I went down that part of the assignment of whites who go down there is to do what we're told by civil rights people and to work with them, and at the same time perfectly aware of the fact that if we draw fire, we're going to get a lot more attention to the cause than a lot of other people would. And I understood that.

In any event, the—Dad and Mom were reaching out to do whatever they could. And word had gone to New Haven, Connecticut, back to New Haven, that, you know, Fred Tuttle, Fred and Mary Emily's son is in jail down there in Savannah, and so on. And word reached Izzy Wexler, who was head of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith in southern Connecticut.

And he and Dad—in looking at my father's diaries, I realized this—he and Dad both as men in their mid-thirties, back to what I was saying earlier, Dad went into the Marine Corps and Izzy into the Army in the Hitler war. And they were two men with families, both thirty-three,

thirty-four, thirty-five, thirty-six years old. It took a while to get in, and they got into the war in '44, trying to get into the Hitler war. So, a lot of people did joint good-bye and good luck parties to them around New Haven. They knew each other, liked each other, were very close to one another anyway, educators, and so on. And so, this fit. This fit very, as it got explained to me, very appropriately into a sense of, "Well, these fights go on," one way or another, the fight against fascism, the fight against segregation, the fight against this and that and the other.

Anyway, Izzy contacted—used his contacts to reach the Anti-Defamation League network in Atlanta, who in turn reached Dr. William Wexler, same spelling but no relation, who had been an alderman in Savannah and a very prominent individual and a doctor there. And Dr. Wexler, through another track, people in northern New York, in Plattsburgh, Joe Bornstein reached out to his ADL contacts, and a very good friend of the family, and reached Aaron Bushbaum, who was an attorney in Savannah, starting a business practice, two small children, who graduated from Emory.

And meanwhile, coincident with that, Steve Trott, who I mentioned earlier, Harvard Law School, was over at a major firm in Cincinnati that had Proctor and Gamble as a client, and so on and so forth, or at least I assume they did. And Trott was from a P&G family, [1:33:48], and coincidentally also reached Aaron Bushbaum, had a person reach Aaron Bushbaum, someone who said, "Well, Aaron, this isn't my cause," someone in Atlanta, "but I know you're interested in civil rights, based on our conversations in law school." Turned out Aaron Bushbaum and Bill Wexler were family members through marriage in Savannah. And Aaron Bushbaum agreed to represent me, and William Wexler to put up his property.

DC: Oh, wow.

RT: To a stranger in a strange land, to use a phrase.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

RT: So, and my deal was I don't go out unless everyone goes out. And they said, "Fine, we get that. Your case, though, will create the precedent for that, because we're going to go to another judge and instead of having to put up [1:35:00] seven pieces of property, put up one piece of property."

DC: Right.

RT: And so on and so forth, and etcetera. And they—so, at that point, they come and see me. I'm cautious, because I'm not quite sure who these folks are. I don't know—did not know then what I know now.

DC: Yeah.

RT: I was cautious, polite, and careful. It turned out it was fine. They were both terrific. When the—[laughs] it turned out that when Aaron Bushbaum came in to represent me, he said words to the effect of, "I can—I'm told I can bring you a book. What book would you like?" I said, "How about *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*?" [Laughter] And he said, "Got it!" Plus, it's a nice thick book.

DC: Right.

[Phone rings]

RT: So, the [phone rings]—let it ring one more time, then it'll stop.

DC: Okay.

RT: I meant to turn it off. And then, so I now [phone rings]—he was now engaged. But one day he calls my folks, or reaches my folks, and said, "Watch out for this news story." And I had seen the same thing. It turned out I got the local papers and the *Atlanta Constitution*. The story was moving across the *Constitution*, the front page and page three, that the Chatham

County Crusade for Voters office, where I had been arrested and where the Civil Rights Movement—was in the office, apparently for a nominal rent, maybe a dollar or something, of the Mine Mill Smelters Union, which had been thrown out of the CIO in 1947 during the days after the Taft-Hartley Act was passed, as a Communist-controlled union.

And I saw this—I wasn't sure if I trusted my own judgment, but Aaron Bushbaum also saw it—he's somewhat more independent than I am, and both of us had the same reaction. And that is, it looked like the way this story out of Atlanta, which is—normally, the *Constitution* is a pro-civil rights paper. On the other hand, there was great fear about the Communists being involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

DC: Right.

RT: The trajectory of the story was aimed at me. It wasn't just that I saw it. Aaron Bushbaum saw it, independent of me. He contacted my folks and said, "I don't like the way this story is unfolding," because one day had passed and two days had passed, and so on and so forth. [Sniffs] And the reaction of the civil rights people in Chatham County was, "Well, we don't know about this Taft-Hartley." [Laughs] You know, "That was in the forties. This is early sixties," and so on.

DC: Right.

RT: And I think that was probably true. But, in any event, but here's this—who is this fellow? And he's come in, and Mississippi, and all that, specifically said Mississippi. But who is this guy? And it's starting to develop. So, Dad calls Bruce Corwin. There's a collective phone call going on here. And Bruce reaches—Bruce and his father are very engaged in it—Bruce reached Victor Carter, bless his memory, and Mr. Corwin, bless his memory, who had been the

chairs of the campaign of Stanley Mosk for attorney general. And Stanley Mosk was the attorney general—Pat Brown was governor, and Stanley Mosk was attorney general in California.

And on their say-so, Stanley Mosk writes a letter to the attorney general of Georgia, called the solicitor general, which says to the attorney general of Georgia, copied to the *Atlanta Constitution*, “Rick Tuttle is not a Communist. I’ve known him—my family friends have known him since he was in a fraternity together. You may not agree on what he’s doing in terms of promoting integration and civil rights. I do. But this man is no Communist. The young man is no Communist. He is a—,” and he said some nice words about me, and so on and so forth.

And the—but another thing happened. My mother called her girlfriend. Her girlfriend and she had been married the same summer, she to my—my mother to my father, down in Arkansas, and this lady had married a man named Francis Cherry, Frank Cherry. Frank Cherry went on to become governor of Arkansas before Faubus, and so on. [1:40:00] He then—he was a Truman loyalist against the Thurmond forces, you know, in the States Rights 1948 battle, the big dividing line in the South. He was appointed head of the Subversive Activities Control Board of the United States, and he called the publisher and said, “Knock it off.” And [snaps fingers] the story died. “Don’t touch it.”

DC: Right.

RT: “You’ve got the wrong guy.”

DC: Any idea where that story was coming from, who was pushing that to begin with?

RT: I don’t know. In fact, something I’ve not done is gone back and—I’ve gotten a little curious about—that interview we had a while back when I was at the SNCC conference?

DC: Yeah.

RT: And thinking about this one has gotten me—basically, I mean, except for that time and one other time, I haven't really sat around and reminisced much about this. But it stirred my curiosity to go back and pull those old—which I can do—I'm going to pull those old files and have a look at it.

DC: Yeah.

RT: But I might have a better idea later. But I'm just giving you a contemporary—a recollection of contemporary events. In any event, what happened was the—which all gets to the point of what allies can do. Because I was bringing to the table—I'm just doing what I'm told by the civil rights people, but bringing to the table a constellation of forces that was really rather considerable and I suppose was part of the insight that the civil rights leadership had, both at SNCC and other places, in terms of Freedom Summer the next summer. I'm not saying they modeled it on something I did, but there was probably enough of us doing this here and there to suggest that the benefit might outweigh the cost. I have *no idea* how others in the SNCC office, SCLC, and NAACP saw it. And the following summer, the SCOPE Project that Dr. King put on was wanting to put people in there. But when I was there, there were very, very few of us. But it was accomplishing part of what I had intended, which is to raise consciousness, get people discussing at the dinner table and everything else whether to get involved, and Fred Tuttle's son, and Mary Emily's son, and all this sort of stuff, etcetera.

And they—well, then we went to—Mr. Bushbaum, Aaron Bushbaum, and Mr. Wexler, and with them, I was there—went to another judge in Savannah, who made the rulings we had hoped for. And also, and then, it was also part of a package that arranged that the others also got out of jail. His name was—I'll think of the court's name in a minute. He was very nice. He saw me—he was a native of Savannah and he said to me after the proceedings, after he had ordered

my release, and Dr. Wexler was there to provide his property bond, he took me aside and said, “I’m sorry about all this, what’s happened.”

DC: Oh, right.

RT: He didn’t have to say that to me. It was very, very nice of him to say it. The others got out, and I, meanwhile, went back up north. It was part of the deal of my getting out, that I would leave the area.

DC: Yeah.

RT: And I would risk his property—they’d go after it. Oh, yeah, I could risk—I gave my word that I would not cause any trouble in Savannah. And it was over. By now it was September, early September. I came back up north, and everyone got out.

DC: Yeah.

RT: In jail, not only—

DC: What was the original charge when they arrested you?

RT: There were these seven peace bonds—

DC: That was it?

RT: Per each of us, that we had disturbed the peace under a Georgia statute.

DC: That was it?

RT: Disturbed the peace, alleged to have disturbed the peace of the people who had sworn out these—apparently, Judge Mullen had made no secret of it, he invited this procedure.

DC: Sure.

RT: As *he* saw it, from his point of view, he was quieting things down and took this on. Savannah, standing on the shoulders of what happened, because Hosea Williams was now out, had been out for a while, through a variety of techniques before the Civil Rights Act passed,

Savannah became the first city in the South to desegregate. They had a biracial committee and everything else. Then, I also want to be clear and fair about this. The mayor of Savannah, Malcolm Maclean, was widely regarded as a moderate. He had beaten the other faction some time earlier. [1:45:00]

And the other thing is that it's important to say, and that is in the context of my being in custody in the Chatham County jail, the comments of that fellow notwithstanding about his brother being in the Klan, and so on and so forth, I got a good deal of negative attitude from some people. There were some of the guards who were okay. But there were two things I saw that, in embryo, suggested some shift of attitude. One was the reaction to the freedom school. You could sense it, even among the more hardline guards, of a look of a kind of respect. And there was a second thing that happened. I was in custody—I was there for a month and a half, and I was in custody when the March on Washington took place. But we could hear it upstairs on the third floor.

DC: Oh.

RT: We could hear the television. We could hear it. We couldn't see it. And I was released a few days later, in September. But I detected a shift on the part of everybody, because after the March on Washington, there was some, I believe, some recognition began to settle in that the civil rights side might win and might get civil rights legislation passed. There was certainly no—was very tough—certainly no great grounds for hope for quite a considerable period of time.

DC: Right.

RT: Things were pretty bottled up and everything. But that was important. The march was important.

DC: Yeah.

RT: Back to Mr. Evers for a minute, without making too much of this point, a) even in death, Medgar Evers was helpful in terms of the release of, plus the Governor Barnett phone call about, “We know you’ve got your hands full in Jackson, and we’re prepared—or I can report to you that there will be demonstrations here in Greenwood. You know, have someone phone us,” and so on and so forth.

But the other thing was I’ve always felt this, that when I went over to Atlanta—one of the things we did a day or so after they got me out is we all went down to the train station and organized crowds to come down and gathered people as the funeral train of Medgar Evers came through. And I think one of the ways in which the March on Washington—I’m stretching a point, but I’m going to go ahead and say it, because I’ve thought it for years—one of the things that helped make the march so successful, where people came in from all over the country, including coming up from the South, some came in from California, but most people came in the eastern time zones and the South and North is, as people began to create, helped to create the organizational structures and the relationships and the contacts—this was all before Twitter and all before email and all before cellphones and everything else—but the relationships to gather on this funeral cortege going up to Washington, relationships that rather shortly afterwards, those same networks would have been deployed to gather people to carpool, get on trains, buses, and pour into Washington for the march. And I’ve always felt there was some—I’ve never mentioned it to Mrs. Evers, but it occurred—I’m going to send her a letter, because the fiftieth is coming up. I intend to send her a letter to capture that.

In any event, I came back out to California and then we remained involved in some things. Why don’t I pause for a minute and give you a chance to—?

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're back. [1:48:31]

DC: We're going to start to wind down, but maybe towards that end, as you're starting to, tell us a little bit about what you did then and where that motivated you.

RT: Well, I came back out here and the—one of my better decisions I made when I got back was not to become one of these people who sit around a college campus and endlessly tell these stories. I told them at the SNCC conference. But it was Rebecca—my wife passed away, and then I was able to get Rebecca to marry me, who after I—after we married in 2008, we went back to the civil rights sites. We went to Winona, Mississippi, which I had never visited but certainly I had engaged with, to Greenwood, went down to Canton. And then, I have family in Mississippi, went down to visit them near Philadelphia. And then, went across the South to Savannah and actually saw the jail cell where I had been.

DC: Oh, wow.

RT: Because that's now part of the Savannah [1:50:00] College of Art and Design.

DC: [Laughs]

RT: You can look in, and these are all artists. I actually saw the place I was held. And then, we went over to Atlanta and we arrived by coincidence in the—coincidence at the opening of the Hosea Williams Collection at the library in Atlanta, whose name will come back to me in a minute. It's a well-known—predominantly African American collections.

DC: I've been there. I know what you're talking about, yeah.

RT: It's on the tip of my tongue. But in any event, his family, those of his remaining family members were there, children, just by coincidence. When we were in Savannah, we arrived, and early before coming across it turned out that there was a pictorial collection of

Savannah of that summer of '63. And Aaron, Mr. Bushbaum, and his lovely wife, Esther, were available for dinner, and it turned out they told us that there was this exhibit showing at the Telfair Museum that was, I think, sponsored by the University of Georgia. We went. We walked in, and there were pictures from that summer from those marches of Benjamin Van Clark and “Trash” Brownlee and Hosea Williams and so on. And there were several quotes up, and there were two quotes from Rick Tuttle, which probably for almost anyone in Georgia would raise the perfectly natural question of “Who is Rick Tuttle?”

DC: [Laughs]

RT: But there I was! It was really quite a—there’s a book out on this now, a very well-appointed book. One of the interesting moments of my life, we were in Greenwood at 708 Avenue N, and at that moment, [sighs] I realized how little we’d done in terms of dealing with truly deep poverty in North America and the United States. One of the more moving moments I had is, a few moments later, after leaving the place where the COFO office had been, where I’d been when I went to Mississippi, we went to a store. We were looking around for people of an age where they might, you know, have some memories together and spend some time together. And some workmen pointed us in the direction of a store a block or so away. We went over to the store and as we pulled up—we were driving a rental car, a good-looking black rental car. It’s about five years ago. I hop out on one side, and Rebecca, looking very fit, hops out on the other. And it probably was hard to tell just exactly who we were, but there’s always a possibility—who knows who we were? We come hopping out of the car, and there was a group of young men, African American young men, on the corner, and they begin to move away from us very carefully. They don’t know who we are or what we’re doing.

DC: Right.

RT: And we walk into the store. And it turned out there was a lady there who had been around—she had been a young lady, a fourteen or fifteen year old young lady, around the COFO office, the SNCC office. And the next thing we knew, we were all singing civil rights songs. Her sister was there and someone else in this little general store. And a couple of the fellows who had been outside came in to buy a cigarette, you know, buy one cigarette at a time. And they get the picture. And when we walked out, the warmth of their reception was one of the most moving experiences that I've had—ever.

But back to 1963, came out and what happens later is we form a group on the UCLA campus near the Religious Conference Center and YMCA, the Student Coordinating Committee, and engaged ourselves in a two-pronged effort. Bob Singleton was the co-chair of it, and Russ Ellis, who was head of campus CORE, and me. And we busied ourselves in the fight for fair housing, the No 114 campaign. We registered—every weekend we'd mobilize over a hundred UCLA students, and on election day we had over nine hundred. We lost the referendum. Eventually, we won in the courts. Had major mobilization and we also were, in effect, a Friends of SNCC group. So, we did all sorts of things to generate support, including working with Paul Albert, McNichols, and others, though I'm not sure Steve was directly involved in this. He's over in the civil rights division of NSA at this time.

But we worked to attempt to persuade [1:55:00] Congressman Gus Hawkins, African American congressman from South L.A., Congressman Phil Burton, Caucasian from San Francisco, and Congressman William Fitts Ryan of New York, Manhattan, a reformed Democrat, to hold hearings in Mississippi. But we had all sorts of letters sent. We had people send it from their home addresses, and we'd get other people to send it—and lo and behold, they went and did it! This all at the time when we were just trying to—the congressional committees

themselves weren't going to do it. They were under the firm leadership of white segregationist Southern chairmen in most cases, not every case, but in most cases. But these folks went and did it, and that helped a bit. We did all sorts of things and were involved there.

And then, of course, the connection between the Civil Rights Movement and the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley is palpable. Jack Weinberg was raising money for Mississippi, and so on. We very much joined that effort and became deeply involved in those struggles. Sometime later, we became involved, a number of us, in the campaign of James Jones, who is the first African American male to be elected to the Board of Education, the Julian Nava campaign, which led into the Tom Bradley campaign.

Oh, and I met my first wife, who we lost to cancer some years ago, in the campaign of the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy. We were very involved in that. We had run into John Lewis some and were deeply involved in those efforts. And like a lot of people of that generation, we had five assassinations in less than five years, a combination of Mr. Evers, Medgar Evers, [phone rings] President Kennedy, Malcolm X, [phone rings] Dr. King, Senator Kennedy. [Phone rings] I'm not suggesting there was a unified conspiracy, but I'm confident it was a conspiracy to kill Dr. King. Clearly to me, James Earl Ray never could have done that logistically, the things he did, without a lot of support, logistics, finance, other things.

And then, to wrap up, we were for Councilman Tom Bradley for mayor, I think, before he was. [Laughter] He saw the data from the Kennedy campaign and saw we played a big role in it. We were able to get a larger turnout of African American voters and Latino voters, partly with the help of the farmworkers. And Mayor Bradley looked at that and realized that in a city that's thirteen or fourteen percent black, that you could get a turnout that might be eighteen or nineteen percent with the right candidate. We had shown that in the '68 campaign. And standing on the

shoulders of that, he realized he could make a plausible campaign for mayor. He did, lost the first time, we came back and won it the second time.

I went on to be the assistant and then associate dean of Student Activities at UCLA. I'm not under the Hatch Act. I remained very involved in politics and movements, very close to the farmworker effort, and then the boycotts, and so on and so forth. I was a member of the L.A. Community College board for two terms, played a role in getting the Labor Studies Center established there, for example, went on and was elected four terms as Los Angeles City Comptroller. And some of the fights we engaged in were, taking the mandate of that office fairly broadly, one of them was to be able to lead the way to get an ordinance passed to prohibit discrimination in the Jonathan Club, the California Club, Hillcrest Country Club.

DC: See, I remember those restrictions from my childhood.

RT: Now, they're illegal and punitive damages, big-time. And it was my privilege to play the lead role in that, and council member Joy Picus led the fight. You fight these battles wherever you can. I took it seriously. And the argument is for why the comptroller would be involved: Because you can't kid me. Major decisions at the big-time level are made by people who get acquainted informally and make the deal, and other people do the paperwork. They're done by people on the chance you get to know each other and their families.

For example, the model in embryo was my fraternity and that fight. There's a connection. And the biracial councils that got established in places like Savannah, and so on. And there are times when you have to push. I'm an affable man. I can also be pretty tough. And we pushed it hard. And a lot—some of my friends didn't like it. Others are now grateful because the [2:00:00] involvement of successful businesswomen, Latinos, blacks, Asian Americans, people who are

Jewish, other backgrounds, has helped sustain these clubs in some tough economic times here in Los Angeles.

In addition to that, I became involved in the antiapartheid fight as comptroller. And one of the things I did is played a role—and Zev Yaroslavsky played a huge role in this, Councilman Bob Farrell, Mayor Bradley—was we got—

DC: Just pause for a second.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: Okay, we're rolling.

DC: Uh, right, Jonathan Club.

RT: And the other—and another battle we got involved with—there are plenty of other things to do in the comptroller's office besides these fights, but it was important to do it. I won in 1985 and, as I mentioned, served four terms. Well, in that first term, we also were engaged in the battle to—it turned out to be successful, by the way—to get the city of Los Angeles to divest from any companies that were doing business in South Africa. I had been told reliably by a number of people that some of the companies either lied or choose not to know if they had ties there. And so, standing on the shoulders of the civil rights experience, there's nothing like an affidavit. And so, I think my contribution was in—I want to give credit to the council, Zev Yaroslavsky, the chairman of the Finance Committee, Bob Farrell, who had been a Freedom Rider, helped lead the way, and Mayor Bradley, and others—but I think the affidavit helped because that's a no-kidding proposition.

DC: Um-hmm. Was Tom Hayden around then?

RT: He was in Los Angeles but not on the Council. He had been elected to the state legislature.

DC: Right.

RT: He had been elected in the seventies.

DC: Yeah, I was just thinking of other civil rights veterans that were around in L.A. at that time.

RT: Oh, yeah, we had—and then, we got involved in some redlining battles, so—where you have your chance to get involved in those things is when banks merge. There's a point where, in terms of disclosure, you learn a lot about their activity, and so on. We got very much involved in those, and these struggles go on. As something we discussed just as we began our interview, this weekend Rebecca and I, tonight as a matter of fact, fly to Sacramento to the state Democratic Party meeting, where one of the things we'll be bringing up, and hopefully the Resolutions Committee will support us in doing this, is a resolution from the California Democratic Party, which calls on the United States Supreme Court *not* to reverse the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which I regard as an absolutely crucial part of the two great civil rights acts, particularly the part of having to do with federal pre-clearance. And my own view is we need more time under the auspices of that act to guarantee the rights of all Americans to be able to vote in those particular states. So, these battles in various ways go on.

DC: Yeah, that's exactly what I was just going to say. So here we are, documenting the Civil Rights Movement, and you're still—you know, we're looking at still fighting this.

RT: Fighting that fight, and also one of the things that happened is that that battle—I'm not surprised about it. It flows very naturally, and I think I'm speaking—it's nothing particularly unique—a wide consensus on this. We could see at the time that it opened up other rights, be there rights of issues of gender equity, rights for gay, lesbian and transgender Americans. In fact, we were careful to put it on the floor of the Council my support of the desegregation of the large

so-called private clubs in Los Angeles would include people regardless of sexual orientation, as well as gender, religion, race, and so on. So, anyway, the battle—the struggle is still on.

DC: Um-hmm. Well, let me just thank you very much again for being part of this project and for your work.

RT: Well, thank you. And thanks for all you're doing. I'm looking forward to reading your book on western Mass in the next [2:04:23].

DC: Yeah, okay.

[Recording ends at 2:04:49]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Sally C. Council