

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

Interview with Betty Garman Robinson

**Special Collections Division
Bender University Library
American University
Washington, D.C.**

2019

PREFACE

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

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

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

Biographical Note for Betty Garman Robinson

Betty Garman Robinson [b. 1939] grew up in Pleasantville, New York, and joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC] in 1964, after becoming involved in the civil rights movement while an undergraduate at Skidmore College and later as a graduate student at Berkeley. She served as a staff member for SNCC from 1964-1966, working in the national office in Atlanta, in Greenwood, Mississippi during Freedom Summer 1964 and later served as the Northern coordinator for the "Friends of SNCC" program. In 2010, Ms. Robinson was, along with several of her former SNCC colleagues, a co-editor of the book, *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC*, to which she also contributed an essay.

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“The Making of Julian Bond, 1960-68”
American University**

**Betty Garman Robinson Interview (12-JBOHP)
February 15th, 2019
Baltimore, Maryland**

Lead Interviewer: Gregg Ivers

Secondary Interviewer: Colleen Vivaldi

Videographer: Gracie Brett

Production Assistants: Lianna Bright, Audra Gale, Colleen Vivaldi

Code: Gregg Ivers [GI] Colleen Vivaldi [CV] Betty Garman Robinson [BR]

GI: Today is Friday, February 15th, 2019 and I am sitting in the dining room of Ms. Betty Garman Robinson in Baltimore, Maryland, to conduct an oral history interview for the Julian Bond Oral History Project, sponsored in part by the School of Public Affairs at American University. My name is Gregg Ivers. I am a Professor of Government at American University and Director of the Julian Bond Oral History Project. Colleen Vivaldi, a senior at American University and a production assistant for this project, is serving today as an assistant interviewer. A copy of this transcript, along with the video interview, will be available through the Special Collections Division of the Bender Library at American University.

Thank you, Betty, so much for being with us this morning and agreeing to sit down for this interview.

BR: You are very welcome.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

GI: Why don't we begin by having you tell us a little bit about your background and how that encouraged you to enter the Southern freedom movement?

BR: When I was age seven, we moved to Westchester County, to Pleasantville, New York. Both my mother and father came from working class backgrounds. They were the first people in their family to go to college. My father grew up on a farm in Pennsylvania in Lancaster County. He must have been pretty smart. He got a chance to go to Franklin and Marshall, got a college degree and then he went to NYU to get a Ph.D. in the sciences, in chemistry and physics. He met my mother, who grew up in New York and had gotten a degree, just a four-year degree at NYU. They got married and had me in 1939. They were

still living in New York City in the in the [Greenwich] Village. I don't know when my conscious awareness of the world began. When you're a kid, you're not aware of stuff around you. You kind of live your life or you feel you're surrounded by people who care about you and who guide you. That kind of thing.

My father was the head of a laboratory there. And there were a lot of kids there. They converted the Tommy Manville estate to apartments and houses. We lived in a house. They converted the stables into apartments for young engineers and their families. There were a lot of people around, some of whom were pretty liberal. I had a Mexican Godmother who lived in one of those apartments and we lived in a house just a stone's throw up the hill. I loved my Mexican godmother. That's probably the first awareness that I had of otherness, of difference. I loved Lucy and my mother was very anti-Lucy. I mean she – and I don't know if I remember how she put down my father's family, which was a farm family in rural Pennsylvania. She said they spoke broken English. Well, they were kind of half-German, half-English in their speaking. And they were they were low income. They probably would have been considered pretty poor. They had a little farm and they had chickens and stuff like that. We would visit them a couple times a year. And but my mother was always very disparaging toward anybody who was different. Anybody who was an "other." She talked about people she grew up on her block in Flushing. She was very anti-black.

I grew up loving my Godmother and not clear what this was all about. Why people were different. I was curious and I was very aware and alive. My mother would criticize these engineers and their families, and she always thought they were part of the Communist Party. They were probably Democrats. "Big D" Democrats! But she wasn't making a distinction there. I go to elementary school and high school in Pleasantville. And then I went to Skidmore College in upstate New York. I start there in the fall of 1956. I'm not sure that I was aware of the Montgomery Bus Boycott or *Brown v. Board of Education*.

I'm not sure what I remember from that time of those historical events. I do remember sitting in front of the TV when I was in high school and watching the Army-McCarthy hearings and hearing my mother vent against Communists and people infiltrating our country and all of that. She was in love with Senator McCarthy and thought he was he was "the bomb." My father, because his work was partly in the defense industry, he was also very anti-communist. It was like somebody was hiding under every bush. It wasn't my nature to be suspicious of people. It was more my nature to be curious and to be like, "What's this all about?"

COLLEGE ACTIVISM

I go to Skidmore. I was going to be a math major because my father, who was a scientist, kept saying, "Women in math. That's really important." I didn't like the professor. There was one professor, a woman, who I didn't like. When I was a sophomore, I switched my major to psychology. At the end of my sophomore year I ran for student body secretary. I lost. And this is probably the beginning of my political journey. I lost and a woman came up to me. Her name was Joan Marcus and she said, "Would you like to run for National Student Association Vice President, Vice Chairman?" And I said, "What's that?" I didn't know what

that was. And she said, "Oh, it's an organization of student body officials around the country. You get to go to a conference every year." I'm, "Oh, a conference. That's great."

I ran and I won. Then I went to Ohio Wesleyan in the summer of '58 to the National Student Congress. This is really the beginning of my political awareness and journey.

I found students who were there. Maybe Casey Hayden was there; maybe Connie Curry was there. I don't know if they were exactly at that one, but they were doing a Southern student [meeting]. I can't remember the name of it, but it was a meeting where black and white Southern students had a space where they could have conversation and they could dialogue about racial justice, although we didn't call it racial justice then. We called it desegregation or integration. I came back to Skidmore and changed my major to political science – or government, as it was called. I heard debates about apartheid in South Africa. [Allard] Lowenstein was there, and he had, I think, traveled to South Africa and talked about the abysmal conditions in the separate worlds and how that was connected also to the South of the U.S. There was all of that ferment. Then there were also the revolutionary movements in Africa that I was very attracted to. I'm like, "Wow, look at all this stuff that's happening in the world."

Like I said, I came back to Skidmore and changed my major to a government and then I had this network of National Student Association people. When issues came up that were important – this is fall of '58 now, '58, '59 school year – so when issues came up that were important to students there was a network. We didn't get phone calls because who had phones then [laughs]? You had a dormitory phone on your floor. But we had paper! There were mailings that were sent encouraging you to do different things. I don't know that there was any particular issue in '58; but '59, '60, then the summer of '59, I got to go to University of Illinois-Champaign Urbana for the National Student Congress. And that was just exciting and exhilarating. I'm meeting students from all over the country who cared about these issues, cared about revolutions, cared about democracy. That was another thing I had already figured out, that the United States was not really cracked up to be the democracy that I thought the Founding Fathers had imagined, which I didn't learn until later, maybe in graduate school. Even the contradictions in the Constitution and the fact that the white men with property were the first ones to be able to vote. Nobody else was allowed to. And that kind of thing.

Anyway, I was very imbued with this whole idea that we live in a democracy and people can be in charge of their own lives and people can vote. In the fall of 1959, one of the big issues was the National Defense Education Act Loyalty Oath. This is actually early spring of 1960. Those of us on campuses were encouraged to send postcards to our congressional representatives, so that was my first meeting of how you do advocacy. How do you fight for your principles through writing to your congressional representatives?

The spring of '59 I ran for student body president and I lost to the same woman that I lost Student Body Secretary to the year before. And then I ran for National Student Association chairman on campus and I won, so I went into the Champaign-Urbana conference and then came back to campus. I was kind of a dutiful person. If they said, "Do this. I was "Okay,

we've got to do this, right?" We set up a table, I remember, in the student union and had people sign cards to oppose this loyalty oath. And, of course, in a very, very rudimentary way, my attitude was, "Well if you're a Communist you're evil and you're gonna lie, so you're going to sign a loyalty oath. The only people who are not going to sign it are the "pure" democrats who believe in individual freedoms, who, on principle, would not sign a loyalty oath. So the "good people" are going to be the ones that lose the right to their scholarships, etc., not the "bad people." That's not the way we get the bad people. I'm laughing [now] at how simplistic our understandings were at that time.

Then the sit ins happened, February 1st, 1960, and I'm shocked. I'm like, "What? Black students can't sit at lunch counters?" I mean, I've had some exposure through NSA to the segregation system in the South. But I don't think I really understood how it was impacting people because it was more theory, it was more conversation and that kind of thing. The sit ins happen. I'm shocked. This is not the country I thought I lived in, not the country I thought I was fighting to preserve. We start meeting at Skidmore and we had all these big debates and discussions. The other pieces, of course, were Skidmore being kind of a second-rate Ivy League "Girls College," right? We're very sensitive to the fact that Smith and [Mount] Holyoke and Wellesley and Vassar are having support demonstrations for the Southern students. We're like, "Oh my God, we've got to get into the action!" We organize a picket at the local Woolworths in downtown Saratoga Springs at the end of March. Between February 1st and March 20th or so, there are hundreds, literally hundreds of sit ins that have percolated across the South.

We organized this picket at Woolworth's. Well, first we had these big town hall meetings. Two or three hundred students show up to these meetings and everybody's debating and discussing issues. It's my first experience with anything like this. It's so fabulous and you're so alive. You're like, "Oh my gosh, what are the arguments pro and con?" And you're hearing things you've never heard. Well, I also started getting some hate mail in my dorm. I got these threatening notes. "Go home if you like niggers," that kind of thing. I got some letters from off campus from people who ascribe to the Klan, who said I was a "race-mixer, etc." I'm like, "Whoa! I'm learning all this stuff!"

We organized this picket of two hundred women out of a twelve hundred student body. We go on this march. We march from the campus downtown, march once around the shopping center and then we come back. Actually, in the Skidmore history books, there are pictures of the picket signs and that kind of thing. We come back to campus. I'm a senior this year and the other two women that helped me organize this are both seniors as well – the one black student on campus at the time and a Jewish student from Chicago, who was the editor of the newspaper. The three of us are kind of the lead people. Sophomores are gathered in the corner and they say, "We can't stop. We have to keep going." Then we agree – four students at a time will go downtown and picket the Woolworth's.

The first four students who go downtown are arrested by the Saratoga Springs police and they are arrested under an old union-busting statute that says you can't picket within certain feet of an establishment. You begin to learn about civil liberties and civil rights. You begin to learn all this stuff through your own experience. One of the young women was a

lawyer and she knew you didn't have to give your name until you were actually charged with a crime. She had them put their hands over their eyes like this [Ms. Robinson places her hands over her eyes] and refused to get their pictures taken. The headline in the newspaper was the four women with their hands over their eyes. The Saratoga Springs newspaper said, "Skiddies: more hand they bargained for."

GI: Were you one of them?

BR: No, I wasn't one of the four. No, it was four sophomores that went down. The police bring the four women the president's office and he reads us the riot act. Spring break is the next day, so then actually everything kind of cools down. But what we learned about our own rights, our own First Amendment freedoms through that right, is that you can't do X and Y and Z because we have laws against that. You begin to learn that in order to really live the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and democratic freedoms you have to fight to change things.

We go home for spring break. I'm going to make this kind of short because it's getting into a lot of detail. We go home for spring break and come back and graduate. Then I go for the summer to the International Student Relations Seminar [ISRS], which it turns out this is a whole other story which somebody should write about. Well, somebody did. There's a book about this, how the CIA runs this this operation and it's grooming young people to become CIA agents. But we don't know that. We are innocent because we think we're the National Student Association.¹ I go to this ISRS – one of two women who goes to the ISRIS – and then in the fall I go to California to sell tours to Europe for NSA, mainly because I had a boyfriend at that point who was at the University of California [at Berkeley]. Again, a lot of your decisions in this era as a young woman are made because of who you are connected to, who your boyfriend is, right? You're not very independent [laughs]. I go to Berkeley. There's an office in Oakland. I travel up and down the West Coast selling these tours to Europe.

I think in January, maybe, I get a call from Philadelphia that the president of NSA needs an assistant, and would I come back to Philadelphia and run the Student Congress, which is that summer at the University of Wisconsin. I agree. I moved to Philly in January or February of 1961. And then I run the Congress that's at Wisconsin. And Wisconsin is SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] and the Liberal Study Group, and all that.² Again debate, foment, discussion, very vibrant. There are international students that NSA brings to the U.S., Algerian students, who are making a revolution in Algeria. There's all this activity and foment. I go to California and enroll as a graduate student at Berkeley in the fall of 1961.

¹. The National Student Association was founded in 1947 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Beginning in the early 1950s and continuing through 1967, the CIA provided clandestine funding for the NSA, partly to monitor student activism and partly to recruit potential employees for the agency. The book to which Ms. Robinson refers is *Patriotic Betrayal: The Inside Story of the CIA's Secret Campaign to Enroll American Students in the Crusade Against Communism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

². By 1960, Students for a Democratic Society emerged as the leading organization of the New Left and had chapters on politically active, predominantly white college campuses. It originated as the Intercollegiate Socialist Society, which was founded in 1905. It went through several manifestations and names before settling on SDS.

JOINING SNCC

GI: How did you join SNCC and get to Atlanta?

BR: Okay. Well, first of all, this is the fall of '61 so McComb, Mississippi is happening.³ Paul Potter and Tom Hayden from SDS are traveling to Mississippi and they're writing these long missives. They're fabulous actually describing what's happening and so on. I'm on their mailing list. I'm in California. Another woman and I started an SDS chapter in Berkeley. But I take these long, written documents about McComb around to all these radicals. All these Socialists and Communists that are gathered at the University of California-Berkeley campus, right? And I go to them and I say, "Look, we've got to do something. We got to get involved. We've got to be part of this!" And they look at me like I'm friggin' crazy. I mean, they're like, "Well, we're too busy. You do something!" So that led to me starting a small group on the campus that was called the "Provisional Committee for Civil Rights," or something like that. It's in my *Hands* story.⁴ I think I resurrected the name of it. I'm not sure.

We start fund raising and publicizing, like letters to Congress, calls to Washington, whatever it is that SNCC is asking us to do. In the meantime, there's something called the "Southern Student Freedom Fund," and I don't think anybody's written about this either. This is something that is a coalition or it's a conglomerate of SNCC, Northern Student Movement, SDS, Young Christian Students, which is another national group of young religious students, I think Catholic. Yeah, I think those were the four groups. SDS, YCS, NSM and SNCC. All over the country campuses are being organized to support the work that SNCC is doing in the South. We're raising money, we're sending clothes, we're sending books, we're doing all kinds of political things, we're having demonstrations at FBI offices.

One thing I can remember. We had a demonstration at the Berkeley FBI office. Chico Neblett was there, and his brother had just been arrested.⁵ The Freedom Singers came to sing. That was another thing that we did. The Freedom Singers and field workers traveled the country meeting with audiences, both wealthy people, who could write bigger checks and then student audiences to share the story of what was happening in the South. At one point we had the Freedom Singers come. I think that was in October of '63 maybe. Then we went and demonstrated at the Berkeley FBI office. And I have pictures, still, of Chuck with his sign saying, "My Brother Was Arrested and the FBI Just Stood By," or something like that.

³. In early 1961, several student activists from Southern Mississippi began to organize direct action and voter registration campaigns. Bob Moses (10-JBOHP) and Hollis Watkins (11-JBOHP) discuss the early McComb campaign in their interviews for this project.

⁴. Ms. Robinson is referring to her essay, "Working in the Eye of the Social Movement Storm," in *Hands Across the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC*, Faith S. Holsaert, Martha Prescod Norman Noonan, Judy Richardson, Betty Garman Robinson, Jean Smith Young and Dorothy Zellner, eds. (Urbana, Chicago, Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010), for which she served as an editor.

⁵. Ms. Robinson is referring to Charles (Chuck) Neblett, a SNCC field secretary who was also an original member of The Freedom Singers.

So again, you're learning about the institutions by your involvement with the students who you've met and who you care about. In the meantime, I'm in touch because I'm fundraising and I'm sending money – we are fundraising, not just me. We're sending money to Atlanta. I'm in touch with both Casey Hayden, who is in Atlanta at the time and Jim Forman.⁶ We're up talking on the phone sometimes, we're corresponding, we have letters back and forth. At one point, Jim says to me, "I want you to come to the Howard Conference in November of '63." I'm like, "That would be great! I'm coming East to see my parents for Thanksgiving." I have a plane ticket from them, so I come home. And then I go to D.C. to be part of the SNCC meeting in D.C. in November of '63. Actually, the Library of Congress has a fabulous tape that a friend of mine sent me of Jim Forman welcoming everybody to them to the meeting. And I don't remember being in the room when he welcomed us.

He was a master of finding people and instilling a passion for action. He's calling out people's names, he's saying, "This person is here! Betty Garman is here! She's from the West Coast! She's been doing all this fund raising! And Dottie Zellner is here, and she's been doing this and that! Janet Moses is here, Janet Jemmot!"⁷ But it's a fabulous tape. You get the flavor of Jim's amazing organizational ability and of his commitment and also of his appreciation of people's energies. What they're about to contribute. I go to the meeting in November of '63. I fall in love with the [civil rights] movement. Meantime, back in Berkeley, graduate students in political science and I have done a study, an intellectual study of social movements in the U.S.

We looked at the farmer labor parties. We looked at the muckrakers. We looked at we looked at everything. The abolition movement. We looked at the women's suffrage movement. We looked at everything. We looked at the Garvey-ites. I don't remember all the movements we looked at, but we read something and then we would discuss it. One of the conclusions we came to is that the African American community was the only community that had not achieved the gains that it was demanding and insisting on, but it was the only community that maintained a passion for freedom and justice, whereas the other movements, even including the labor movement, had kind of sold out, that white workers had gotten their due, they'd gotten their money and then they went back into the woodwork.

But black people had continued. I think that says something, in reflecting now about what we know about white supremacy and what we know about the insistence of the black community. Going back to things like the colored conventions in the in the 1820s and '30s, looking at the abolition movement and looking at the fight against Jim Crow and all of the things that have marked the passion and persistence of the black community for real justice.

⁶. James Forman served as Executive Secretary of SNCC from 1961-1966. He is widely credited by people within SNCC as the organizational mastermind of the group.

⁷. In 1966, Janet Jemmot, a South Bronx, New York City native, came to Mississippi to work as a SNCC field secretary. In 1968, she married Bob Moses.

To me, this was kind of like what we were touching on as graduate students. But it was pretty darn superficial. The other thing that was happening there was this whole idea that you had to leave the ivory tower, you had to leave the university in order to really experience as a political scientist the real world. I left before I got my Master's [degree]. I'd done all the coursework. I was trying to figure out whether to get a Ph.D. or masters or whatever. But Jim and others said, "Come South and join us." I think they probably knew that they were going to need people for the Freedom Summer, which is probably just percolating at the time. Maybe or maybe not. He also had seen the commitment that those of us who he recruited in our local work to raise money and to be active. He said, "Why don't you come South and join us?"

I went back to school and finished the semester, and then I travelled across the country on a train in March of '64 to join the SNCC staff in Atlanta.

GI: When you got to Atlanta who was the first person you met?

BR: Probably Jim Forman, I imagine it was Jim. I don't remember exactly. I mean, I remember people like William Porter and Willie McRae and all the people who were the "worker bees." I was more in the "worker bee" group. I was very much "a take-that-assignment-and-do-it-the-best-way-you-know-how-to-do-it" person. If somebody said, "do this," I didn't really question it. I would do it.

GI: Let me rephrase it. What was your reaction upon arriving in Atlanta and walking into the SNCC office?

BR: I don't remember, honestly. I know Judy has a great story that she tells every time we do a presentation for *Hands* about seeing Jim at the top of the steps and I won't recount it because she probably has it in her interview.⁸ But I don't remember. I know I somehow got from the train station to an apartment that was kind of like a "Freedom House" that was way out on Hunter St. [SW], like way, way, way out on Hunter Street. I don't remember much about that. There's a lot of details I don't remember. I remember more when I came back from Mississippi in the fall of '64. I remember more what my living situation was. But I remember the office. I remember the steps and walking up the steps and seeing kind of tables around the office and different sections. There was a printing operation that Mark Suckle ran that Julian oversees because he was the communications person. Then there was Mark Suckle, John Ellis and William Porter and William McRae and all of those folks that were part of that operation. And then we had the northern coordinators, which was Dinky at the time, Dinky Romilly, who was then married to Forman. So Dinky and myself were the northern coordinators.

And then when she left, I took over. What happened is I went to Greenwood for the summer. I believe Dinky stayed in Atlanta. When I came back from the summer she had gone to New York and so I took over the northern coordinator role.

⁸. Judy Richardson does indeed tell this story in her interview for this project (03-JBOHP).

WORKING WITH JULIAN BOND

GI: Do you remember your first impression of Julian Bond?

BR: I was in awe of Julian. My recollections are he was always talking to a reporter. We would gather around in the office and there would be a reporter like Claude Sitton who would come. Julian would always be explaining and elaborating on the conditions in this particular county or this particular organizing drive or whatever it was. I think I was in awe of Julian. I knew him in the sense that we had a collegial relationship, but I don't remember ever feeling close to him or feeling like we were good buddies. We all had tremendous respect for each other, and we worked eighteen, twenty hours a day. We worked hard, and we were so committed. But I don't remember specifically.

CV: Can you speak to how SNCC built a relationship with the news media?

BR: Yes. I think the key thing was that we built relationships with everybody external to SNCC. In other words, we built relationships with people on campuses; we built relationships with donors; we built relationships with people in the community, the shopkeepers, the restaurant owners. Julian built relationships with these media people and TV personalities too. I remember the coverage was intense of the sit ins, of the Freedom Days in Greenwood, of the of the marches, of all of the events. So there had to be, one, a connection [with] the media people. They had to know that something was going on to be invited. You had to have their names and their numbers, and you had to have somebody intentionally call them and reach out to them and say, "Hey, come on!" And then once they had your number or knew where you were, then they could come and say, "Hey, we'd like to interview you. How about talking to us about X or Y?"

But the relationship in organizing, in building those relationships, whether it's supporters and allies; whether it's donors; whether it's people that you want to turn out for an event or whether it's the media, you build those relationships. You keep a Rolodex. We had Rolodexes in the day. I don't know whether Julian had a Rolodex, but that's what we used to call them. You keep those numbers. You're able to say, "Oh my gosh, I have to go and call Claude Sitton and fill him in or I have to go and call Jack Nelson and fill him in or I have to call NBC or ABC."⁹ Or just the same way that SNCC people built relationships with Burke Marshall and John Doar and people in the Justice Department, so that those people could be

⁹. Claude Sitton was the Southern correspondent for the New York Times during the heyday of the civil rights movement, the first full-time reporter from a paper outside the South to cover this story. Jack Nelson was a reporter for the Atlanta Constitution from 1952-1964 before becoming the Southern correspondent for the Los Angeles Times. Both men were native born Southerners, Sitton born in Atlanta and grew up on a farm in Rockdale County, just outside the city. Nelson was born in Talladega, Alabama and got his start in Biloxi, Mississippi. Sitton and Nelson are widely credited with bringing the story of the civil rights movement outside the South and were revered by civil rights activists for their honesty, objectivity and willingness to go against the social norms of the South. For more about Sitton, Nelson and other reporters during this period, see Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (2006).

called. Those people offered their numbers up.¹⁰

You knew how to reach them. It wasn't a mystery. You built a personal relationship and a friendship on some level. And also a political relationship, in that the people that you talked to "got" the issue. Like with the donors. We built this Friends of SNCC network around the country, some on campuses and some were offices in Northern cities staffed by SNCC staff members. Some were just places where people rose up and they said, "Oh, we want to do this. We'll form a committee, we'll start raising money for you, we'll have the Freedom Singers come, we'll plan a party for fieldworker, we'll go to the to the federal building and we'll picket, or we'll go to the FBI office and picket."

The movement was so intense in that period that you could mount a national response to something basically overnight. Similar to the Black Lives Matter movement, post-Ferguson in August of 2014. There were people popping up in cities across the country who "got" the issue, who saw the need to organize, who stepped forward, who did it. The same with the media and the people who wanted to support this new movement, and who were attracted to the bravery of the SNCC field workers. For example, the fact that SNCC was actually organizing in communities with grass-roots people and not with ministers, preachers and that kind of thing. So that was attractive as well because ordinary people were engaged and involved. Imagine Claude Sitton interviewing Fannie Lou Hamer, and how he must have felt to get to know Fannie Lou Hamer because she had relationships also with those media folks. That was also part of Julian's doing. It wasn't like he was the center. The organizing work was the center of the stories that were offered to them to the media for coverage.

GI: Whose idea was the Friends of SNCC program and how important was it to sustain the organization in building support for the movement within the South and nationwide?

BR: The Friends of SNCC was probably Jim Forman's brainchild. I don't remember when it first came into being with that name, but I think we think we did have Berkeley Friends of SNCC in '62, '62 and '63. The concept was certainly there before I got to Atlanta. The concept was that there were all these incredible people who wanted to support the movement, who had a role to play and that we didn't see them as separate and not as important. Forman's vision was to nurture these organizations and these connections. I think he is the one. On some level, he got connected early on and I'm not quite sure through what process. Nobody's actually written about this whole fundraising arm of SNCC.

There's little bits and pieces in different books and different people, like myself or Casey or others who played a role in Friends of SNCC. Or people who were Northern supporters who were either in the Detroit office or the New York office or the Chicago office or the San Francisco office. But again, I believe it was Forman's understanding that what we were

¹⁰. Burke Marshall served as Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division from 1961-1964. He is widely credited with pushing the Justice Department into the civil rights movement by filing dozens of lawsuits aimed at lifting restrictions on voting rights in the South. John Doar served as First Assistant from 1961-1964 in the Civil Rights Division and then headed the Civil Rights Division after Marshall left public service. Both men were widely respected by civil rights activists for their accessibility and willingness to use the powers of their office when many others in the Kennedy Administration wanted as little to do with the civil rights movement as possible.

about was really a radical transformation of the country and that in order to do that we had to have money.

I think in any organizing [work], relationships are kind of key. You don't necessarily build a relationship of total unanimity. You believe in conversation, you believe in a back and forth, you believe in people asking you tough questions, but you build a relationship that goes beyond just the strict "Julian Bond is the communications director and Claude Sitton is the *New York Times* reporter." You build a relationship that goes deeper than that.

FROM ATLANTA TO GREENWOOD, MISSISSIPPI: FREEDOM SUMMER 1964

GI: Let's talk about some of the differences between working in Atlanta and working in Greenwood during the summer of 1964.

BR: All right. I take a train across the country in March of '64. I'm in Atlanta. I participate in a number of the staff meetings and big debates about whether we should be in Mississippi and whether we should bring all these students down. I was kind of feeling my way to understand what the tensions were and what their anger was, to see the fear and concern about bringing all these white students into Mississippi. I go to Oxford in June from Atlanta. Oxford, Ohio. The Western College of Women that is hosting us is in Oxford, Ohio.

There are two weeks of training. Some of the volunteers come the first week. More volunteers come a second week. My role there is to build relationships with these folks who we've – and again Dorothy Zellner can talk about this because she was in the Boston office figuring out who would be accepted as a volunteer and who wouldn't be.¹¹ One of the things we did was we had people fill out their hometown newspaper, their hometown connections, their congressional representatives and their state legislative people. We had this idea that we could build around the people coming to Mississippi, bringing, in other words, the country to Mississippi. We could then have that volunteer be the person who then translates the conditions in Mississippi back to their hometown. That was a very conscious part of the process. The Greenwood office was established as a way to be connected with all of the volunteers coming from the North. After two weeks in Oxford, we all take a bus to Mississippi and we set up the national office in Greenwood at 708 Avenue N. Each of us lives with a family in the community.

The deepest memory I have of that is that I was given the only bedroom in the house. I'm this guest from the North and I'm given, for the summer, the couple's bedroom and they're sleeping in the living room. One of the things I carried with me for many years was, "Was I appreciative enough? Did I thank the family enough? Did I understand their sacrifice? How did I act? Was I just in my own little bubble, going back and forth to the office, since it was [just] two blocks away?" We would work into the night. We had different shifts. The office was very rudimentary. It was a bunch of desks – we probably scarfed up some desks from somewhere – around a big open space. Luckily, it was a brick building, so when the Klan shot into it in the summer of '64 there was a brick wall that separated [rooms]. Then there

¹¹. Dorothy Zellner was interviewed for this project (07-JBOHP).

was a kind of a foyer area, and then another brick wall, so when the Klan shot into it, the bullets never reached us in the interior of the office.

We had a WATS line – a WATS line was a "Wide Area Telephone" service, kind of like 800 numbers today. Those didn't exist at the time. The way the WATS worked is you had to make the call from the origination place. The field would call us, and they would say, "This is a person to person call, it's for Betty Garman." Then we would say – whoever answered the phone or even if I answered the phone – "Well, she's not here. Can I take a number and call you back, have her call you back?" Then we would write that number down and then we would dial the WATS line number into the into the field office. We did that every morning. We called every office around the state. All of us did that. Dottie [Zellner] did it. Judy [Richardson] did it. Julian did it when he was in Greenwood, although he was mostly in Atlanta, if I remember.

We would compile a WATS report and that's been printed in some of the audits and some of the archives. It says we called Inna Bena. We called Greenville. We called Hattiesburg. We called McComb. We called wherever it was, and then we would document what had happened overnight, whether anybody was arrested, whether they were planning a Freedom Day, whether they were carrying people down to register to vote that that day. All of those kinds of things. Whether they needed bail money, that was another thing we needed to raise money for was bail money because there were so many people arrested and we had to post bail.

That was another piece of it. You built relationships with the local black lawyers. Sometimes white lawyers would step up. But mostly it was local black lawyers and you had local black ministers, too. Sometimes you had to really spend time talking with them to get them to step out of their comfort zone and to take some risks with allowing us to use their church for mass meetings because the retaliation was so intense. You had to build those relationships and build that "trusting sense" with everybody. In Mississippi, I can remember the restaurant was named Bloods and we would eat there. Mr. Blood generally treated us. As I remember, I had \$9.64, and I remember using that for cupcakes and cigarettes and snacks. I don't remember, although I'm sure that whatever money I had left over I gave over to Mr. Blood when we ate there. But we ate our share of fabulous greens, smothered pork chops, fried chicken, all of that. Maybe only once a day. Maybe that was all we ate? Those are the details you don't remember. You remember calling the projects and calling the North and encouraging people to demonstrate or to send money or to call the Justice Department in D.C. or to rail against the FBI because they were so in bed with the local officials, the local white supremacist officials.

The rhythm was different in the summer of '64, one, because the work was so much more intense. There was something happening every single day, every moment. There were a lot of people coming to Mississippi. Not only Northern lawyers but the Medical Committee for Human Rights People. Harry Belafonte and Sidney Poitier came at one point to Greenwood. I can remember them shaking in their boots and Jim Forman meeting them and bringing them into Greenwood and having a conversation with them. I don't remember exactly, but I think they stayed overnight [and] they were terrified. They were really worried that

something untoward was going to happen to them. So you had that. The pace and the momentum were just enormous. And then we were preparing for the Democratic Party challenge in Atlantic City. So again, you were working around the clock.

There were a couple differences for me. One was that I wanted to be in the field. It was the first time that I was close enough to the fieldwork that I felt I'd wanted to be out there canvassing or talking to people. Often, the whites in SNCC were not the people, the main people who went to that field. With the white summer volunteers, yes, many of them did go into the field or they worked alongside the black field project staff, which would be a combination of local people and maybe a college student, maybe a Frank Smith,¹² maybe somebody from Nashville or somebody from Fisk [University] or somebody from Howard [University]. Certainly, there were a lot of Howard students there, Charlie Cobb, Courtland Cox, Stokely [Carmichael]. They were all pretty much project directors.¹³ They would be the lead people in a local area. Stokely was the project director in Greenwood.

And then there were white volunteers. I can remember saying, "I want to go out to canvas. I want to get people talked into going to vote to register to vote." I went out a couple times to do that in the city of Greenwood. I never went out there into the country. That was another thing. There were some white people who felt limited by the fact that they couldn't play a dominant role and I always felt, "Well, wait. I'm not from here. Number one, I don't know the terrain. I don't really know the people and the culture. And it's also not safe for black and white people to be seen together in a prominent way." I can remember times when we rode in cars across the South and either the black people sit in the back and the whites in front or vice versa. If you were going through a tough area, you would have a blanket if you were the white people in the back and there were black drivers you would have a blanket over you or you'd be on the floor in the back or vice versa.

Those were the differences. In Atlanta, you didn't have to hide. You didn't have to claim that you were "race-mixers." But you still had to be cautious. You had to be careful. But it wasn't the same thing as in rural Mississippi or rural Alabama, where you had to be clear about what you were doing out. There were times where people were stopped in the middle of the night. The danger level was just much higher in the summer of '64. I remember driving Elizabeth Sutherland, who is now Fertitta Martinez. She was working in New York. She had done this book called, "The Movement," which is a beautiful photography book that Danny Lyon and others have pictures in. She had compiled this book called, "Letters from Mississippi," which has the letters that many of the volunteers sent home. She called me from New York, and she said, "I'm coming to Mississippi." This was when Goodman, Cheney and Schwerner's grave had been found in Nashoba County and she wanted to go there. And I'm thinking, "Oh, my, she wants to go there?" I actually I did have access to a car, so I met her at the Jackson airport, and we drove to Nashoba County when they were digging up the grave.

Basically, we couldn't get very close but, again, you were right in there in the heat of the

¹². Frank Smith (14-JBOHP) was interviewed for this project.

¹³. Courtland Cox (04-JBOHP) and Charlie Cobb (15-JBOHP) were interviewed for this project.

struggle. You were right up against death and an intense white supremacy and racism and everything else. You were feeling this every single day.

THE CLASH OF CULTURES

GI: Can you talk about the culture clash between the white volunteers from the North coming down to Mississippi and the African American field workers and students established in the community?

BR: Yes. One of the things I think, for me, going from Atlanta to Mississippi – I've only been in the South three months myself – is that I think there is a level on which we must have absorbed the messages from the field staff about the cautionary feelings they had about white students flooding into their projects. I can remember an incident in the Greenwood office where the white volunteers were writing the pamphlets or the leaflet for encouraging people to come out. I can remember irritation from some of the black field staff and/or black community people who were, "Well, let us do that. Why are they taking over?" That type of thing. I think early on I had this sense that, because I was a very dutiful, kind of conservative, on some level, person, I was very aware I didn't want to do anything that would put myself in the center or put myself in conflict with the black community and the black fieldworkers that had welcomed me with open arms. They believed that I could be trusted and that I would be respectful.

One of the geniuses of SNCC was that we had this incredible organizational structure. Jim Forman was the political mastermind or the organizational mastermind. There were these big debates about what we called "Freedom High" versus "Structure." I was in the "structure faction." My view was you had to have structure in order to have program. The "Freedom High" folks, and I'm simplifying this terribly, the "Freedom High" folks were mostly you have to let people do what they want to do and that the program will evolve in that way. I thought, "No, you need some structure." I had seen the lack of fairness. I had seen what we see today: the community that yells the loudest gets the most resources. The community that has the most privilege is deferred to more.

I had seen that and certainly, when I got back to Atlanta in the fall of '64, the Alabama field staff and the Georgia field staff and the Arkansas field staff were very jealous of the Mississippi staff because they felt the Mississippi staff got everything. They would call me, I'm the Northern coordinator, I'm the "big fundraising guru," right? I didn't have control of the funds. That was the executive committee. But, by the same token, they would call me, and they would say, "We need this, or we need that. What can you do to help us?" I would be able to carry their message of what they needed.

After Freedom Summer is over and ninety-nine percent of the volunteers go North, there's a big debate, first of all, about adding white volunteers to the staff in the fall. There's lots of debate about that. Then some people say that the organization became more white than black. That's not true. That was never the case. If you look at the lists of staff and you count black versus white, white people never dominated [SNCC], and definitely white people never dominated in the core leadership. Never. In the fall, it was Jim's idea to have

something called a "Freedom Force." He wanted to have a "Black Belt" Summer Project that would be Arkansas, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Georgia. That was his idea for the next summer, for '65 summer. He was turned down by the rest of the staff or the executive committee. That was just too wild, too enormous.

Another thing: SNCC had a research department. Jack Minnis, who Judy always describes as this crusty old guy who could get information from the stove [laughs] [headed it up]. I guess he used libraries because we did not have the Internet [laughs]. We did not have anything like that, so you had to go to the library and pull out these old dusty volumes of population statistics or registration statistics [and hope] that they were accurate. Jim's idea for this Blackbelt Project: I can remember the maps showing where the communities would be in each of the states and what the population data was and what the voter registration data was.

The idea was that there would be these white volunteers who had returned to the North and they would adopt a project, and they would then raise money and they would send things South. That was a very good idea in general because it took advantage of the passion and the relationships that the volunteers had with their Mississippi communities. But I can remember writing a memo – and I'll try and dig this up and send it – to a guy in Iowa who was going to bring a car down. He wasn't going to turn the car over to the project. He was going to be the sole driver. He was going to bring the supplies down so he would be the center.

What was repugnant to me was that he would be the center, he would be the giver of all these gifts, and he would be the center. He was centering himself. He was a white Iowan. He was a guy who had no concept of being respectful, of having boundaries of not putting his ego out there as the dominant force. I remember writing to him about how – and I didn't call it "white privilege" at the time because I don't think we used those terms – but that is what it was. It was a critique of his whiteness and his privilege, his ideas of privilege and what he could do. I argued very hard for him to turn over all of those resources to the project. For him to get that car, yes, that was important; but to turn it over, not to be the giver and therefore the holder of all these gifts.

White privilege was rampant and white supremacy was rampant, and we did use the term "white supremacy." But I think we thought about it in terms of the White Citizens Councils and the Klan. I don't think we understood the implications of structure and how deeply embedded white supremacy and privilege are in the structures that the country operates under or operated under at the time, and even now continues to operate under.

WOMEN IN SNCC

CV: What was it like to be a woman involved in SNCC? What were the perceptions like and how did you navigate that part of your journey?

BR: Again, I was like a worker bee. I was very friendly. I built relationships and friendships with people. I was very loyal. I did my work. There were guys that tried to hit on me. I can

think of some examples. There were some guys that I really loved in a way that I was very hesitant to get into sexual relationships because I saw the complications, I saw some of the drama that happened when somebody ditched somebody or somebody who had two relationships.

For me, it was just the political impact of what I was doing. I didn't understand what being part of history really meant. But Forman used to tell us, "Write it down. You're part of history." We understood we were part of history on some level and we were breaking new ground. We were cutting edge on a lot of levels. SNCC was the radical force. I kind of knew that on some level. But I believed in what I was doing so much that it wasn't the forefront. It wasn't like, "Oh, my gosh, I'm a part of history." I didn't keep notes. Actually, I kept some notes, which I still have of staff meetings but very little because Judy Richardson was our secretarial person. She did shorthand and she kept all these fabulous minutes. She's got what people said at every meeting and that kind of thing. And those are in the www.crmvet.org archive.¹⁴

In the SNCC Digital [Project] you'll see a lot of those documents. Actually, I think [it was] Forman's genius of keep[ing] records, making sure that the field secretaries don't get their paycheck until they turn in a field report. Some of those field reports are incredibly rich! We wouldn't have that if Forman hadn't had that organizational vision and understood that we were in a historical period that was unmatched. I mean we wouldn't have the scholarship that we have for people.

All those archives are much more accessible. Whether it's how much Jim's genius of keeping records, "write it down, write field reports" contributed to that, which I'm sure wasn't a small part of it; the genius of somebody like a Julian Bond and Dottie [Zellner] and others who built relationships with the media who therefore enabled them to see inside of a movement process that normally you cover from the street of the demonstration but you don't necessarily get the depth of the passion and the background that goes into, "How did you do this? How did you do this? How did you get three hundred people to come to the to the courthouse in Greenwood Mississippi in July 1964, when there was a big Freedom Day in Greenwood?" That was the time where I was determined to get arrested because I hadn't been arrested yet [laughs]. I was determined to get arrested and I told everybody I was going to be arrested. I went to the Freedom Day and then I chickened out and went back to the office. I covered it from the office and helped with bailing people out. That kind of thing.

AFTER FREEDOM SUMMER

GI: What happens next for you after Freedom Summer?

After the summer in Greenwood, we closed the national office prior to the Mississippi challenge, and we all go to Atlantic City to support the Mississippi Freedom Democrats. We stay in a motel. We were out on the boardwalk every day or were producing documents or

¹⁴. The www.crmvet.org website provides information on how to locate veterans of the civil rights movement and links to other resources documenting the Southern civil rights movement.

we're helping to go and lobby delegates or [doing] whatever it is that were assigned. There was a Mississippi challenge staff in D.C. that leads the work in Atlantic City. So those of us who come from the South, who come from the SNCC staff, we do the legwork for them, whatever it is. We used to have those big mimeograph machines where you type a blue stencil and you put it on a drum. The corrections were impossible, but you would stand for hours cranking the mimeograph machine or duplicating the purple print on the white slick paper! So you would be doing that. Whatever it was, you did it.

You gathered to see the speeches that were made that to the credentials committee. We heard Mrs. [Fannie Lou] Hamer. I was in the room when the compromise, the so-called compromise, was offered up to the Mississippi Freedom Democrats. I can remember Mrs. Hamer standing up and saying, "We didn't come to Mississippi for no two seats." People were visibly angry and very disappointed because they believed that the government [and] the country would support them, and the country did not. They went home to Mississippi pretty angry, pretty upset. We go back to Atlanta after Atlantic City and re-open. We go back to Atlanta and we reconfigure our work.

Dinky Romilly, who had been the Northern coordinator, moves to New York. I take over as the lead Northern coordinator. There's a new staff. There's a woman named Cynthia Washington who comes. Esther Heifetz, she comes. Margaret Herring, then Margaret Lauren, they come. We work on the staff. We write all the thank you notes. We hand-write thank you notes to people who send us money. We send out "Friends of SNCC" newsletters as often as we can detailing what's been happening in the South. But we are always talking politics. We're not saying, "Oh, these poor, poor people in Mississippi or these poor Alabama people . . . guess what happened? Somebody got beaten up. Oh, isn't your heart just bleeding for them?"

No. We were about, "We have to change the country. We have to change the structure. We have to convert the Senate. We have to get these Southern Democrats out of office!" So that they actually [have] a really interesting perspective to look back on. We thought that the country was really going to change if we got rid of the Southern Democrats. Of course, they became Southern Republicans, right? We thought that we thought if black people got the right . . . many of us thought, let's put it this way, because certainly I became much more of a revolutionary. I've worked in the anti-[Vietnam] war movement. And then I came to Baltimore to work in a factory in the 70s, thinking that if we got the working class committed to transforming the country that would be the way to go. Of course, that's all history.

We really thought the country was going to change as a result because we were looking at the right to vote as the premier symbol of, "How do you participate in American democracy understanding that it ain't just about the vote? It's much, much bigger than that. Not only is it about the vote, not only is it about electing people to office but it's about changing the structures and changing people's thinking. What's ethical, what's fair?"

Going back to the young man that I wrote to in Iowa. That was another thing that was making me think what we have to be. And the personnel committee, the structures . . . that's

next up. How do we bring fairness and justice into these structures? How do we make sure that one project doesn't get something that another doesn't? How do we make sure that somebody who asks to be transferred gets listened to and heard? How do we make sure that somebody who wants to go off and do some special work gets to do it? And it's not just the white people, but it's African-Americans staff members, it's the local people. How do we honor and respect our bigger family and make sure that the resources are distributed equitably and fairly so? Part of what we were imagining is that the right to vote would bring freedom to the country. Then also there was a disappointment in the fall of '64 because the Democratic Party did not honor their commitment to the Mississippi Freedom Democrats. Certainly, later on, they put language in their convention statutes that the delegations had to be representative. But they didn't do it right there in '64.

So we come back from Atlantic City and we're like, "Okay, so what's the SNCC direction now? What do we do?" We did this congressional challenge. I did not until '65. But I did a lot in the fall of '65, a lot of research into federal programs that were being administered in a discriminatory way. The ASCS – the Agricultural Stabilization Conservation Service – was about crop allotments. Black farmers didn't get the same crop allotments that white farmers got. Certainly, black young people didn't get the same school access that white kids got. Food stamp access. All of the federal programs that were administered in the South were done in a very discriminatory way. So that all of those structures had to be up-ended and critiqued and then legislation "slow processed" to get everything aligned. Now here we are sixty years later, [and] not everything is aligned and not everything is structurally transformed. I don't think we understood the intensity of the need for the struggle to continue either.

PURSUING SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK AFTER SNCC

CV: How did your involvement in the movement carry you to where you are now, staying involved in so many different things?

BR: That's a really good question. I move to D.C. after SNCC. I live in D.C. and I work in the anti-war movement. One of the things in this movement work is that you meet lots and lots of people and you become friends with them and close to them. You travel and you get to stay with them and that's kind of amazing and powerful. I actually did move to Boston for a year and one of my friends from Boston went to Cuba. She came back and she had met all these young people around the country who were going to go work in factories. Well, what's the reason to go work in a factory? Well, during the Vietnam War experience, unions and factory workers were very supportive of the war because they were making many of the products that the war needed in their industries. [A friend] comes back from Cuba and she says, "We have to go work in factories. That's where the next challenge to really restructuring the country is." I come to Baltimore to work in a factory and I start in 1972 in a metal products plant.

I worked there for eight years. I marry a factory worker, a black factory worker. I have two daughters. One daughter has some health challenges so I leave, and I go into public health because I need to have a job where I can take off some time and attend to my daughter's

doctor appointments. I go into public health and I'm doing research around worker exposure to chemicals and that kind of thing. I end up at [Johns] Hopkins at the School of Public Health. I'm doing research, I'm raising my daughters. I'm separated from my ex-husband. I'm a single mom. I have to keep food on the table and rent paid and that kind of thing. But all of that organizing that I was connected to in SNCC lives inside of me.

In 1988, at Hopkins at the School of Public Health, there is a group of people who start talking about racial justice at the School of Public Health and about the fact that we have lots and lots of international students of color. We have very few black American students. We have a number of faculty members of color and most of them are international. But those local faculty members of color, they are asked to be the spokespeople for the entire race of African-Americans in the country. That doesn't seem equitable or fair. They're frustrated because they're on every committee and they can't do the things that the white faculty have the privilege to do in terms of their publications and their promotions and so on. There's a group of people that get together, staff, students and faculty. We're called, "SPARCC," the school-wide proponents on racial and cross-cultural concerns. And that touches something inside of me. I say, "Oh, my gosh, there's this this whole part of my life that I've buried to be part of the mainstream, to get married, raise my kids, buy a house, all of that stuff. I have to get reengaged."

I get re-engaged in the East Baltimore community. I get re-engaged with organizing. I get a job as a lead organizer. I supervise organizers around the country in what I now refer to as "The Wire" neighborhoods, just because non-Baltimoreans only know "The Wire" as the depiction of the incredible increase in the drug trade here.¹⁵ So I get involved in "The Wire" neighborhoods but supervising people. Then I have a side fellowship and I try to connect organizers across issues and constituencies, like education organizers and housing organizers and union organizers and peace organizers and youth organizers because people are in their silos. They don't know each other. They don't understand how the systemic connections of all these issues coalesces.

So then fast forward to Black Lives Matter. The Freddie Gray uprising. Well, first of all you have Ferguson, [actually] you have Trayvon Martin first. I'm very focused on all of these – the Jenna Six in Louisiana, which precedes Trayvon Martin's death. All of that. I'm aware of all of that. I'm reading all of that. [With] the Freddie Gray uprising, these friends called me, these women that I knew from the National Organizers Alliance, which I'd been part of in the early 2000s. They call me and say, "Betty, we're going to have a national phone call about the Baltimore uprising, and we want to get some people to talk about Baltimore's history." I find two women of color. We go on this phone call. There are seven hundred people on the phone call. I'm thinking, "Whoa! This technology is new to me!" This is Move On, The Color of Change, all these big national phone calls where everybody is muted. But you can listen in and you can hear the political discussion and then sometimes you can ask

¹⁵. "The Wire" was a critically acclaimed television series that ran for five seasons (2002-2008) on the cable network, HBO. Developed and written by former *Baltimore Sun* police reporter David Simon, the series was praised for its unsparing look at the relationship between various communities and institutions in Baltimore and their relationship to law enforcement.

a question.

There are [actually] seven hundred and five people on this phone call. And the phone call is organized by Showing Up for Racial Justice or SURJ. I'm thinking, "Whoa! Here is this organization that is talking about working in the white community to undermine white supremacy and the need for white people to be organizing in the white community, not to flood into the black community, and do whatever the political or social work or whatever things are that white people can do." Even though I certainly have continued to support legislative reform and local programs that work with kids. But this whole concept of working in the white community really resonated with me because in '66 SNCC said, "White people go into the white community." We're like, "Huh? *That* white community, not *that* racist, cracker backward, rural [community]?"

Of course, we had all the stereotypes, too, right? We assumed a monolithic [community]. We didn't really know necessarily that there were fabulous white southerners. Well, we did. We knew some of them. We knew Bob Zellner, certainly, and Sam Shirah and Ed Hamlett, who had been part of SSOC, the Southern Student Organizing Committee. To me this really resonated, going into the white community. In the fall of 2015, I helped to start a SURJ chapter in Baltimore. There's about one hundred and fifty chapters around the country and people do various work, either education and history, support for legislation, support for actions to transform the police, whatever it is. To me, the fact that the SNCC experience had all of that kindling inside of me, it was there all the time and so when I took this job with Citizens Planning and Housing Association in Baltimore as their lead organizer it brought all of that organizing back into the forefront and the rest is history.

I've been doing that for twenty years. Non-public. I haven't been at Hopkins since 1997 when I was doing of public health research. Part of it was I was doing research. I was running a research project on women and HIV. So again, you get to the connection of how come black women are at such high risk for HIV or the black community in general? What's up with that? What are the connections to poverty? What are the connections to race? What are the connections to white supremacy? To the public health system serving certain people better than others? So that's the connection from here to now.

GI: Am I correct in understanding you volunteer with the Algebra Project? Is that because of your link to the movement period?

BR: I did. Of course, of course! I mean in the mid-90s Bob was coming to Baltimore to try to get the Baltimore school system . . .

GI: Who is Bob?

BR: Oh, Bob Moses. Sorry [laughs]. In the mid-90s a man by the name of Bob Moses, who had been the one of the lead people in the Mississippi Summer Project, who had then gone to . . . Tanzania.¹⁶ He raised his children there and then came to Boston again. He was a

¹⁶. Bob Moses was interviewed for this project (10-JBOHP).

math teacher. This is the key thing. He was a math teacher in Harlem before he quit his job and came South. He was the person that Miss Baker took to meet all the older black men who couldn't vote, who had been in the U.S. Army or the military, came back and couldn't vote. They wanted to vote. That was so part of that organizing process was you go where the people are. You do what the people encourage you to work on.

Bob would come to SNCC meetings and, of course, all these college students are like, "We're going up against 'The Man', we're doing sit ins, we're doing the Freedom Rides, we're battling the Klan, we're going up against the police." Bob says the local people say, "We want to vote." Young people are like, "Oh, registering to vote. That's what the government wants us to do." Also, the funding was pouring in, [not for] the demonstrations but in favor of what was considered to be much more mainstream or much more acceptable, which was this right to vote. Miss Baker steps forward at the SNCC meeting and – this is I think is fall '61 or '62 – and says, "Well, let's try both. Let's do voter registration and let's continue the direct action."

Within three months voter registration becomes direct action. Then the challenge to the white supremacist structure is, "Oh, my God. These black people, who have more people in our counties, who had eighty percent of the population [in some places], they're going to be voting and, hey, we're not going to be able to keep control." Bob, when he comes back from Africa, he learns that his children are not getting algebra in middle school and he believes it's very important to have algebra in middle school to have a technological career in the future. He begins this Algebra Project where he uses a lot of curriculum materials that are based on people's experience and the way that kids in middle school are social. He constructs these experiences where you go out and you observe a subway line or a bus line and then you come back, and you talk about it. He comes to Baltimore in the mid-90s. I have a friend who is actually a social worker in the Baltimore city schools and she's trying to work with . . . Bob to get the Algebra Project into the into city schools. I get connected. I support them. I bring people to meetings and so on.

Then in 2003 when I get an OSI [Open Society Institute] fellowship to connect organizers across issues and constituencies, I start being a very active part of the Baltimore Algebra Project, and so there's a lot of young people who are who are involved and active who are doing organizing, who are trying to get money. The initial issue was they were tutoring young people in math and the school system was funding the tutoring. It was a way to have young high school students get some after-school money where they didn't have to flip burgers. They could tutor in math and so that was elevating their intellectual abilities to promote a career pathway for them. Then the school system cuts the money. The young people start to organize, and they develop a slogan, "No Education, No Life." They do a lot of different actions. I was there supporting them all during that period of time. They still exist. They're doing advocacy for increasing funding for Baltimore city schools. They're doing some work around math. They're actually doing a neat project now about imagining your ideal school. What it would look like? Getting students engaged in having those conversations.

I think it's hard, if you've been through an experience like SNCC, it's hard to put that on the

side and completely compromise your principles or your knowledge or your learning or your passion with the system. I'm sure some people do it, but I think the power of the experience is so enormous that many people are still committed and in different ways.

THE LEGACY OF JULIAN BOND

GI: Let's finish by talking about your impression of working with Julian Bond during your SNCC years.

BR: Okay. Julian was always somebody that you looked up to, that you idolized, that I was always very flattered that I knew him. That he would recognize me. Same with John Lewis. He would see me in a room, and he would say, "Hi, Betty." And Julian the same way. "How are you doing? What's up? Where are you living now?" That kind of thing. It always was fabulous that people like Julian and John Lewis and others became national figures and were catapulted onto the national stage. They could talk about their passion for racial justice and how they came through their process. That kind of thing.

At one point, when he was the NAACP chair, I participated in some of their national meetings and that was always great. I went to lecture in his class at the University of Virginia. So that was another piece of respect – how Julian was really communicating the information about the movement, the Black Freedom Movement to younger people. He was very creative in his curriculum development. It was thrilling to me that he lived in D.C., that he taught at UVA [University of Virginia] and he taught at AU [American University].

And he lived in D.C., so I saw him often at SNCC reunion meetings or SNCC events, like the event that we just had, the SNCC Legacy Project just had an event honoring Jim Forman. As people have passed away, there have been, of course, moments in history where you've had to come together to come to mourn someone's passing but also to lift up the fabulousness of their life and the contribution that they made. I know my daughter and I, after Julian passed in August 2015, one of the things people were encouraged to do was to put flowers in water. My daughter and I, who knew him also, we went down to the Baltimore Harbor and we released flowers on whatever that day was. I think it was two or three days later. We went and we released flowers in Julian's memory. We talked about how we knew him and our connection and sadness at his loss. But at the same time the fabulous contributions he made as well. Thank you.