

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

Interview with Bob Moses

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

2018

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. Mr. Moses reviewed the transcript for accuracy.

Biographical Note for Bob Moses

Bob Moses [b. 1935], a native of New York City, graduated from Hamilton College in 1952 and later earned a M.A. degree in philosophy from Harvard University. He first made his way South in 1960, when he went to Atlanta to volunteer for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. By 1961, Moses had joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and quickly earned a reputation as a thoughtful, visionary leader and organizer. Moses later became the co-director of the Council of Federated Organizations in Mississippi, which focused on statewide voter registration. The violence and resistance to African American enfranchisement that civil rights workers encountered in Mississippi led Moses to develop the idea of Freedom Summer in 1964. Moses was also a pivotal force in establishing the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to challenge white dominance of Mississippi politics.

In 1982, Moses received a MacArthur “Genius Grant” Fellowship, which he used to develop the Algebra Project, a program designed to prepare minority students in under-performing schools for college-level math by the end of high school. Moses has also received grants and fellowships from the Fletcher Foundation and the National Science Foundation and held visiting appointments at Cornell and Princeton. He is the author, with Charles E. Cobb, Jr., of *Radical Equations: Civil Rights from Mississippi to the Algebra Project* (2001).

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American University**

**Bob Moses Interview (10-JBOHP)
November 28th, 2018
Cambridge, Massachusetts**

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

Code: Gregg Ivers [GI] Bob Moses [BM]

GI: Today is Tuesday, November 27th, 2018 and we are in Cambridge, Massachusetts to conduct an interview with Mr. Bob Moses 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. A copy of this transcript, along with a video interview, will be available through the Special Collections Division of the Bender Library at American University.

Bob, I am delighted and very honored to have this time with you. Thank you so much for taking time this afternoon and to join me for this conversation. Let's begin by having you tell us a bit about your background and how that led you into the Southern freedom movement.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

BM: Sure. So, when the sit-ins broke out in 1960. I was teaching at Horace Mann [High School in New York City] and in some sense I was free. I didn't have any real family responsibilities. My mother had passed away two years previously and I had left graduate school to be closer to my father. He had had been hospitalized after my mother's passing. He was now out and living and functioning on his own. I had been raised in Harlem in the projects, Harlem River Houses, which was at that time certainly for me a kind of ideal place to grow up. We had a community of people there. I could run outside any time during the day and play. They had taken three city blocks to make one part of the projects. The other part was over near the Harlem River. It was right across the river from the Yankee Stadium. We actually had the first youth black baseball team in the city. We used to travel around on the buses and trains, thirty of us in our uniforms. Mr. Plumber, who had been a pitcher in the Negro Leagues, had started this Harlem Athletics, is what we called ourselves. I went to P.S. 90. The projects were on 151st Street, and P.S. 90 was on 148th, so it was a short walk to elementary school.

When I graduated, which was 1947, I was a January baby and they were still taking kids in the

middle of the school year. It was right after World War II and the country had gone on a talent hunt. And as part of it they set up a program to complete junior school in two and a half years instead of three. They grabbed one or two students from every sixth-grade class in Harlem and the South Bronx and put us all together in one class at Stit Junior High School, which was up on the edge of Harlem on 164th street and Edgecombe Avenue, on the avenue that overlooked the Polo Grounds. The Harlem River Houses actually were between Yankee Stadium and the Polo Grounds. We got extra teaching and extra teachers in that class. I remember I had someone from Germany who taught us algebra.

My brother had gone to Stuyvesant. He was a year and a few months older than I. I had to do everything he did that age, and so I took the test and went to Stuyvesant. P.S. 90, of course, was all black. The Stit Junior High School was all black except for our class. I think the reason they put it up there on the edge of Harlem so that a couple of white kids -- there were two white girls and one white boy -- who were in our class. Then I go to Stuyvesant and it's all white. You can count on the fingers of two hands the black kids. At that time, I think Stuyvesant had about 3000 kids. Stuyvesant at that time was down on 14th Street and First Avenue [in Manhattan]. It's about an hour trip going each way from Harlem going down to school. And in the afternoon Stuyvesant was on a split shift, so the 10th graders went from one to five. I got a job working in the morning and then went to school and then played ball. I played basketball with the Harlem Y. I went up through the Harlem Y[MCA] from the time I was in elementary school right on into high school with what they called the Midgets and the Cubs and the Juniors, different age groups. Then in the morning I got a job in the afternoon working at NYU Medical Library. And that was a little complicated.

I would, in my senior year, go relieve Mrs. D'Armand for lunch at a branch of the medical library and then go to practice. Stuyvesant didn't have a gym that you could actually practice in, so we practiced at the armory 34th Street and Park Avenue. I would go from 14th to 23rd Street to Mrs. D'Armand and then go up to 34th Street to practice and then come back down to 28th Street and finish my four hours every day. Life was pretty full because after that then I was still playing at the Y. We practiced Monday and Wednesday and played Friday nights. So I was really busy during my high school years. I didn't want to go South. I didn't want to go to an HBCU. The South was segregated.

My father's uncle was teaching at Hampton. We had visited some towns down there and I wanted to play ball, so I picked a couple of small colleges to see whether I could get in and also play ball. I got into Hamilton [College] and spent four years at Hamilton, and then got a fellowship to study at Harvard in philosophy. I graduated high school 1952, college 1956. At Harvard, I was able to take the eight courses, and the preliminary exam for the Ph.D. I didn't pass it for the Ph.D. Apparently, I passed it enough so that I qualified to get an M.A. I had taken a lot of French in college -- and I took French in high school -- and I had spent some time in France with the Quakers while I was in college in the summers.

I took the language exam that first year at Harvard, and so at the end of '57 I got this M.A. Then the next year my mother passed, and I left. I was actually getting ready to go back and I got a phone call that my father had been hospitalized. I ended up at Horace Mann. I'd gotten a fellowship with the John Hay Whitney Foundation. They had Whitney Fellows. They were helping

minority students go to graduate school. Charles Jones was executive director of that fellowship. When I left and came back to New York, I asked him if he could help me find a job. The first job he found for me was tutoring Frankie Lymon. Frankie Lymon was a young, maybe about 14 years old at that time. This is 1958. And he wanted to go on tour with Alan Freed and "The Big Beat." And they were paying him a lot of money. I think he made four thousand dollars a week, which was big money in 1958.

GI: That's big money now.

BM: Yeah, right [laughs]. So, in order to go on tour, he had to have a tutor. They hadn't really done well by Frankie and he hadn't really done well by himself in terms of his whole life. He was reading at maybe a third or fourth grade level. And obviously really extremely bright. We went on tour. Chuck Berry was on that tour, a lot of the singers of those times. I had told Frankie's person, who kind of managed and owned his contract, who was the head of Roulette Records at that time. He had just opened up. I met him at a club he was opening up on the East Side called The Knights of the Round Table. I'm this young kid from Harvard and I say, "Well, if Frankie doesn't study for me, I'm not going just gonna stay on the tour. If he won't really work, I'm just going to be the babysitter.

So, true enough, Frankie, he really couldn't concentrate and study on this bus tour. We were taking the bus all around to the different parts, different little towns and cities. He had a manager who was responsible for him. So, anyway I told his manager, "Frankie's not studying. I have to leave." So, of course, if I left, Frankie had to leave, so everyone's very upset. But then the tour hit Boston and there was a riot, so I went from the bad guy to the good guy because they were just so happy that Frankie wasn't caught up in the riot. And so they hired me back.

We made a couple of trips around Central Park with the horses and buggies. But Frankie, still, I couldn't get him to study. I went back to Charles Jones and it happened that an opening had been passed to him or talked about at the Horace Mann School for teaching math. Dr. [Mitchell] Gratwick was the [headmaster] and he knew Dr. Gratwick, so he set up an appointment. I went, I got the job, so I had a three-year contract. I started in '58 and it was over in '61. So there I was. I had spent the first, what, twelve years of my life completely immersed in the black community and in the black schools. And then the next ten years or so, maybe the next eight years, in schools that were all-white. Stuyvesant High School, Hamilton College, Harvard University, kind of walking the line between these two different lives and two different cultures that I was immersed in and thinking a lot. One example is when I turned eighteen. I turned eighteen in January of 1953. We still had the draft. Growing up, the other black student at Stuyvesant that graduated in the same class I did was Alvin Poussaint. Poussaint became later a psychiatrist and actually came down to Mississippi. I recruited him to come down and work with us. His father ran a printing press. But the only people who were giving him work were the Communists in New York City, so Al ended up going to what we call "Red Diaper Baby" summer camps. I got to one once and I didn't like it, but my brother and Al kept going and they became junior counselors and counselors.

In the winter they would have gatherings and what they called "hootenannies," people singing down in the [Greenwich] Village. Pete Seeger would talk about lynching and sing songs and

things, so I got politicized because I would hang out with them in the winter. When it came time to fill out my draft notice, and I had taken a test, I said, "Well, I don't think I want to serve in the nation's up and coming wars." I wrote that, and my draft board just said, "Well, you're a student. We won't judge that one way or the other. You passed your test. You just get a student deferment." I got student deferments through the rest of my college days and then at Harvard, another student deferment. And then Sputnik happened. The Russians sent that monkey up into space in 1957. So, when I left and got a job teaching math, the country had decided that it needed mathematicians and teachers of mathematics and so forth, so they expanded who could get deferments. While I was teaching at Horace Mann, I got another deferment.

ENTERING THE SOUTHERN FREEDOM MOVEMENT

Then 1960 happens and I'm thinking about my relationship to the country. For the first time I see black faces, young kids on the front page of *The New York Times*. The sit-in movement had spread like wildfire. I don't know if I caught the first one or they made *The New York Times*, the first ones that sat in. But as it spread, they began to put these pictures up and so I felt like I needed to actually look at this really close up, firsthand. So I wrote Uncle Bill at Hampton [University] and said I wanted to come down and see what was going on at Hampton on my spring break. I did, and the students at Hampton were sitting in at Newport News [Virginia] and we marched over – I marched with them and I marched on the picket line while they were sitting in.

Then I went to the mass meeting. Wyatt T. Walker came down from Petersburg [Virginia]. He was still a minister in Petersburg. He announced as part of his talk that [Martin Luther] King, [Jr.] was going to set up an office in Harlem. I went up afterwards, I got the information and actually made it to the organizing meeting for that office. Bayard Rustin ran that meeting. The rest of that spring I just left Horace Mann and went down and worked in the office as a volunteer. Then I asked Bayard if I could go down for the summer and work with King in Alabama. I thought he was still down there. He said, "No, King's left Alabama," and he sent me to Ella Baker in Atlanta. Ella was running the SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference] operation. I had I checked in and got a room at the YMCA and began working in the office as a volunteer for SCLC. This office had three people. Ella had her own office. Jane Stenbridge was working as the first SNCC secretary. And there was another young lady who was working for SCLC . . . the name begins with a "D" . . .

GI: Dora.

BM: Do you know her last name?

GI: McDonald.

BM: She was getting out a fundraising letter for King. I was licking envelopes and talking to Jane. Jane and I hit it off. Jane had left Union Theological Seminary. And while I was at Harvard, I think it was my first year at Harvard, [Paul] Tillich, the renowned German theologian, had just spent a semester lecturing. Those of us in the philosophy department went over to listen to Tillich, so Jane and I talked a lot about different things dealing with philosophy and theology and so forth. That summer, a group that had been associated with Anne and Carl Braden, a group of white Southerners, primarily Jim Dombroski, SCEF, the Southern Conference Educational Fund. There

had been a HUAC meeting in Atlanta that summer and Carl Braden had been called up. And then a group affiliated with SCEF or SCEF itself was picketing Rich's [Department Store]. I went down and participated in the picket line. They didn't arrest me, but they picked me up to ask me who I was. I told them what I was doing. It appeared in the paper that I was working for SCLC.

That occasioned King to call me and that was how I got to meet King. He wasn't really that concerned about the left-wing sort of communist affiliation of this group. But he was also not really looking for that kind of publicity for SCLC. But, in any case, I did ask him if we could – I had been trying to convince Dora to let me take all these letters and take them over to the Y and get them all stuffed and ready to be mailed in a couple of days. She had resisted. I asked King and he gave us permission to do that. That was my big job with SCLC. I did do that. I took them over and got them out.

This is the time when I was meeting the leaders from the Atlanta student movement who would kind of pop in and out of the SCLC office. They had their own office someplace and they had students who were coming down. There were white students coming down from the North, spending time. They had announced that they were going to shut down the A&P, which is right around the corner from the Y where I was staying.

GI: Was this the Butler Street Y?

BM: Butler Street Y, right. I agreed. I learned about it and said, "Well, I'll join the picket line." Once we got all the mailing out, I was free. There wasn't really any other work to be done. And so that was a kind of a disappointment. I had anticipated there was work on the ground, so to speak, that I would be part of. There was one other kid, a high school kid I think, who walked with me on the picket line. But the Atlanta student movement had their own ideas about running stuff and running a picket line, so they organized the concept of the picket line, but they didn't walk the picket line. I don't remember any of them actually walking on the picket line.

GI: Did you ever meet any of the leaders of the Atlanta student movement? Did you ever meet Lonnie King or Marian Wright or Julian and some of the others?

BM: Yes. Julian came in and out and his sister also came in and out of the office, and so there was time to talk to them. But the rep was that I was maybe a Communist and so they actually organized the meeting. I don't think Julian was at the meeting. It was Lonnie King and Ruby Doris who called me into a meeting and asked me questions to find out if I was a Communist or not. What saved me was Uncle Bill, because Carl Holman, who was . . . a professor at Clark [University], and he was actually running the Atlanta movement newspaper out of his basement. I'd forgotten what it was called . . .

GI: *The Atlanta Inquirer*.

BM: Okay. Carl was running *The Atlanta Inquirer* out of his basement and he was a real force in the movement. And he had taught at Hampton, so he knew my uncle. My uncle had sent him a letter saying that his nephew was going to be in Atlanta and to keep an eye out for him. Carl heard all these stories about this guy from New York being a Communist, put two and two

together and had me come over. I spent the rest of my time actually living with Carl and his family, and that squelched the whole issue of whether I was a Communist or not. During that summer the coordinating committee – SNCC was organized as a coordinating committee – met. Marion Barry was the chairperson and they sent him to both conventions, to the Republican convention and the Democratic convention to the platform committees. Part of the work then was getting some policy statements in the platform committees of these two conventions. They also decided that they would hold their first South-wide meeting in October of 1960.

After that Jane was all flustered because she said, "we're going to have a meeting for the whole South and we don't have any real contacts for Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana," because a lot of the sit-in SNCC people who first organized were in schools in the Upper South. She asked me if I would be willing to go on a tour to sort of scout, see if there were sit-in activities. She talked to Ella and Ella agreed to help put this together, so Ella gave her a list of names, all her contacts in these three states.

They put me on a Greyhound bus. I made my way through Talladega, Birmingham to Clarksdale [Mississippi] to Cleveland [Mississippi]. When I hit Cleveland, that's where everything kind of opened up. Amzie Moore was the head of the NAACP Cleveland, and Amzie said to me what the students should do. There was no need to come to the Delta to do sit-ins. What they needed to do was to work on a voter registration campaign. Amzie had contacts in Mound Bayou, which was an all-black town about ten miles up the road on Highway 61. Father [John] LaBauve. He was an African American Catholic priest, maybe in his early 40s. He was actually running voter registration classes out of his parish. He had mimeographed copies of the Mississippi state constitution and people were coming in from the surrounding counties. They were taking lessons. They were going down to register.

I told Amzie, while I have a year to go on my contract, I want to come back and I want to work with your program for SNCC. Amzie actually went to the meeting in October and talked to the people within SNCC who became the kind of the voter registration cadre, Chuck McDew, Charlie Jones, Charles Sherrod, Tim Jenkins, and explain to them about doing this voter registration. Unfortunately, Jane decided that she needed to vacate her job, her work, because of the politics that were involved in the October meeting. It had to do with Bayard Rustin, Walter Reuther and Adam Clayton Powell. During that summer, there were kind of politics going on within SNCC and SCLC.

The SCLC that summer replaced Ella as the executive director and Wyatt T. Walker came down and took that job. I don't know if he actually moved in that summer, but he became executive director of SCLC that summer. Adam Clayton Powell went on a tirade against Bayard about his sexuality and they closed down the New York office or severely limited it. And then that got mixed up with the fall meeting, so SNCC decided not to invite Bayard to speak because of, I think, funding from Walter Reuther and the labor union people. So Jane left.

My actual contact with SNCC had been really pretty exclusively through Jane at that point. So even though I had agreed, and I had prepared myself to come back, I didn't have any contact across that school year, my last school year. This is '60, '61. I had gone to the South in the summer, made that tour. I was back at Horace Mann. They had that meeting in October. Amzie

went. I had contact with Amzie, of course, telling him I was coming and helping with little resources. I had saved up my money so I could make the trip down myself and make it over to Mississippi by myself. As I went through Atlanta, Ed King was the new secretary for SNCC, I talked with him and I think I talked briefly with Wyatt. Wyatt Walker was, by this time, situated in Atlanta, running the SCLC operation. I pretty much thought of myself as a SNCC field secretary. But there was no, at that time, formal structure to say, "Okay, this is what makes you a SNCC field secretary." So then began the work. But Father LaBauve had been moved. They had moved him down to the Gulf Coast.

VOTER REGISTRATION WORK IN MISSISSIPPI

In the meantime, the Freedom Riders penetrated Mississippi, the sit in movement really penetrated Mississippi with the Freedom Riders. That happened before I got back because I didn't get back until summer. The Freedom Riders were in the spring of '61 and Father LaBauve had been moved to the Gulf Coast. So when I got back they were piling the Freedom Riders in Parchman Prison, which was just a stone's throw from where Amzie was. He couldn't shake loose a church or a building to actually run voter registration workshops out of. I was just sitting, doing whatever Amzie asked me to do. And then he got a letter from C.C. Bryant. Ed King had put a notice in *Jet* that SNCC was going to start this voter registration campaign. C.C. was an avid reader and collector of *Jet*. He ran a barber shop in his front lawn, and he had stacks of *Jet* magazines in his barber shop and he just read everything that *Jet* wrote that had anything to do with race.

He saw it and he wrote Amzie a letter asking Amzie to send him some of his voter registration work. So Amzie said, "Well, I think we'd better go down. We need to go down and work with C.C. in McComb." He put me on a bus. I went down to McComb and we actually started in McComb sometime in July 1961. Webb Owens was the treasurer for McComb. They called him "Super Cool Daddy." He had a fish eye, one eye where the eye lid was weak, so he held it up with his glasses, which had a little gizmo on his glasses, so he would be staring at you out of this eye. Both C.C. and Webb had worked with the railroads because the Illinois Central ran through McComb on its way back and forth between Chicago and New Orleans. McComb was the last stop in Mississippi and it was a kind of a railroad town.

Webb had retired. C.C. was still working. Webb would come over in a local taxi every morning. The black population of McComb was spread out in three different areas. Bearstown, where C.C. lived, and Summit, which was the main area, and then Whitestown was another area. He would pick me up and for two weeks, we made the rounds of everyone who owned or did some kind of business with the black community. I would say what we were trying to do, which was raise enough money for two SNCC field secretaries to come down to do voter registration.

We needed money to house them and feed them for the rest of the summer. Then Webb would take whatever five or ten dollars people would give. Webb, his back pocket was the NAACP bank, because they couldn't put the money anywhere, so he was a person that people trusted. If he said that he had collected five dollars, then he actually had collected five dollars. And if he said this it was going to be used for, then people trusted that that was what it got used for. Webb was kind of indispensable in terms of being able to get this project off the ground.

But when we had gotten the funds together, there was another group that Webb was talking to, which was young high school students and he had been talking to them for a little while. The other people who joined us were Curtis and Hollis, Curtis Hayes and Hollis Watkins. They had gone North for the summer following the crops picking. They got all excited and heard that the civil rights movement come to their hometown, McComb, because they lived just outside of McComb, in little towns next to McComb. They came and they started working as we started really canvassing, knocking door to door.

It's hot, it's kind of tedious work because you have to get the person to imagine that they're at the registrar's office. You have to talk to them in a way that gets their mind to thinking, "Well, here I am at the registrar's office. This is what I have to do." It was the Masons that had a little two-story brick building. On the bottom floor was a butcher shop. On the second floor was a meeting room. We could use that for people to go with the registration form and so we began taking people down to register in McComb.

The Freedom Riders get out of jail. They start coming out of jail in the summer of 1961. And the coordinating committee meets down in McComb and I'm trying to think whether Julian was at that meeting. He may not have been with that group that came down to McComb. Diane Nash was really taking the lead in trying to structure SNCC. She had recruited James Forman and he had agreed to be the CEO of SNCC. He came down with them to McComb. At that time, there was this demonstration that was going on in North Carolina. Robert Williams, they were marching with guns around a courthouse or something, and they left McComb to go over to North Carolina.

Jim¹ then actually began to set up the structure for SNCC and its office. At that point Julian became the editor and producer and reporter for *The Student Voice*. During those years, when I went to Atlanta, I would often stay at his parents' house on campus. I would spend a lot of time in the office talking with Julian. Julian was sometimes the only one in that office. But he was pretty much always in the office and so we got to spend, whenever I got to go to Atlanta, some time together, just talking. He would also catch up on what was happening for his reporting that he was doing for *The Student Voice*.

The stuff in Southwest Mississippi turned violent. You went through different layers of resistance. I think the first layer was state-assisted resistance through the highway patrol. When we took people over to Amite County and Liberty was the county seat when, on our way back, we were pulled over by the highway patrol. Well, let me back up just a little. Remember, I told you I had applied for conscientious objection. As soon as I moved to Mississippi, I had to change my address and the draft board called me up for a hearing. I went up and did the hearing. While I was up there, the group there, Chuck McDew, Charles Sherrod and Tim Jenkins, were kind of traveling together, working on the concept of the SNCC voter registration worker, a full-time state voter registration worker who was going to work in the black belt.² I met with them in Philadelphia [Mississippi] on my way back.

¹. Mr. Moses is referring to James Forman, who went by Jim.

². The "black belt" refers to the rural counties throughout the South where the black population was roughly equal or in some cases more than the white population. The "black belt" also refers to the color of the soil in the places in the rural South.

In part of the meeting I was told that if I got into any difficulty, I should call collect to the Justice Department asked for John Doar. The first time when we went into Amite and I was pulled over and they took me to Magnolia to the Justice of Peace and charged me with interfering with an officer in the discharge of his duties. I asked them if I could make a call and they said yes, so I call collect [laughs] to the Justice Department. John Doar actually picked up the phone [laughs]. He actually accepted the collect call [laughs]. They got kind of flustered there and decided to drop the charges. I was supposed to pay a cost of court [fee], but I said, "No way, I can't do that [laughs]." So I spent a couple of nights in jail and they sent one of the lawyers down from the NAACP. They had three lawyers in Mississippi. Jack Young came down and bailed me out. So that was kind of the first line of defense.

The second time was when I got beat up. That turned out to be more local. It was the nephew of the sheriff who did that. So you're going from the state and the highway patrol down to the sheriff and his people. I became kind of local around the barnyard, so to speak, through this incident with the collect call because the local papers also try to call the Justice Department collect and they were refused and so they wrote about it. They were talking about it on the local radio. Steptoe, who was the head of the NAACP in Amite, heard all this chatter and got in touch with C.C. and said he would like somebody to come out to work with him.

By that time, Reginald Robinson had come down from Baltimore, so he stayed in McComb. And John Hardy had come from Nashville and we send him out to Walthall. I went to Amite and lived with Steptoe. Steptoe was in a rural part of Amite, close to the Louisiana border. He had raised eight children, the two youngest were still there, Charlie and Shirley Jean. They were about twelve, Charlie's about twelve; Shirley Jean was about ten years old, and his wife, Sing. He was on a little patch of land where they had three houses, he and his two brothers. They had been in charge of the NAACP during the time when the sheriff had come and raided their books.

And that kind of busted [things] up. This is what's happening across the state after *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 and starting the White Citizens Councils and cracking down on the NAACP. I went to live with Steptoe. They had a church, a little church up the road that a pastor came to once a month. But it was a place where we could do voter registration. Dawson and Preacher Knox, Curtis Dawson and Alfred "Preacher" Knox would come along with a couple of others. After a couple of weeks Dawson and Knox said they were ready to go down. Things were, I think tightening up because there was a lot of traffic after midnight at Steptoe's. Pick-up trucks coming and people sitting around talking about what was going on. The white folks were meeting, and they knew that we were doing this voter registration, so Dawson swung by early in the morning, crack of dawn, and then we went on the way to pick up Preacher Knox. He had the most amazing driveway. It took you a half hour to go [laughs] so many yards because of the potholes. I mean it's just so bad.

But he wasn't home. His wife said, "Well, he's gone to the courthouse." We go to the courthouse and he's not there. Dawson parks his car and we walk over, and they say, "Well, he's over at the cotton gin." We go over to the cotton gin. We are actually walking down through the main street. On our way back, there's a funeral that's happening and the cars are going down Main Street. They're going the same way we're walking. Then three white guys come up and they start

attacking me. When it stops, I get up and we all keep walking. At the corner down at the crosswalk, there's the Highway Patrol. I stop him and point back up and I said, "I just got beat up back there." My shirt is bloody now. We go on up to the courthouse. As we go to the courthouse the registrar comes out and slams the door shut. We get back in Dawson's car and go back to Steptoe's. And Charlie, the twelve-year old, is rummaging through my head looking for where this blood is coming from [laughs]. He finds some gashes and said, "Well, we have to go get them sewn up." There's just one black doctor in the whole three county or more area of Southwest Mississippi who had just started practice, Dr. James Anderson.

He's maybe a little younger than I am. He's just finished. And it turned out that Dr. Anderson was precocious. He had gone to Lanier High School and was sixteen when he went to Morehouse. He then went on to Meharry and then was down practicing.³ I started calling. I called the Justice Department. I called the lawyer, Jack Young, again [laughs] and he told me, "Look, I'm not coming down. What you need to do is go to the county prosecuting attorney and you need to tell him what happened." And so I did. I went back over to Amite and I went into the attorney's office and he told me what happened. He said, "Well, that was Billy Jack Kasten and he did it. He had a knife in his hand, but it wasn't open. And that's what caused your gashes and everything." He said he would take my case. The next day he arranged for a justice of the peace jury. We went back in and they let us in one at a time. The courtroom was filled with these white men with their guns. We testified and then the sheriff came and told us, "Look, you need to leave before the jury makes its decision." He escorted us to the county line and we left. So that was the next level of violence.

And then in Walthall Country, Hardy takes two people in their 60s, a man and a woman, to Tylertown to register and the registrar is so furious that when he's leaving, he picks his gun up and wops John on the side his head with his gun. John is reeling out into the street and he's looking for the sheriff and the sheriff is looking for him. And the sheriff arrests him for causing whatever and puts him in jail. So that triggered a response from the Justice Department. The idea that the registrar actually attacked someone who is helping people go to register to vote and then the sheriff arrests him. Burke Marshall, he is the assistant attorney general for civil rights under Bobby Kennedy's Justice Department, decides to try something that has never happened before and has only happened under a court order that's already been set up. He decides to go into federal court and seek an injunction against the prosecution of Hardy and sends John Doar down to investigate.

So, I had been beaten. I'm at Steptoe's. Doar comes down to investigate Hardy's case. When he sees my head with bandages, he says, "We didn't know you'd gotten [beat up] . . . what happened with the FBI report?" I guess this is Investigation 101. You take a picture. What had happened was the FBI agent had come over and started to tell the story. I knew he was just making up a story, so I wrote my own story to Burke, and then Burke sent both stories over to [J. Edgar] Hoover [the FBI Director] and his people. Then they asked that they come back and get these stories straightened out. Mississippi, at that time, was the only state in the nation that didn't have an FBI office. This is because of the politics of Mississippi. They wanted to control all the information. They had resident agents who were born and bred in Mississippi, and this resident

³. Meharry Medical College, established in 1876 and located in Nashville, Tennessee, is the oldest private medical school for African Americans in the South.

agent from Natchez had come over to interview me. When he came back, they had sent the request to re-interview me through the New Orleans office, which had jurisdiction over the southern half of the state. Memphis had jurisdiction over northern half. But the guy from New Orleans stayed in the car, and the guy from Natchez came back in, and he started to tell me that, "Well, you know, I would kill anybody that I thought was interfering with my job." I wrote back to Burke, "Your FBI agent says he will kill somebody." All of this is happening and John [Doar] comes through investigating, sees the patches on my head, takes his own pictures and sends later someone to get their own story.

This battle between the FBI and the Justice Department is going on underneath all of this, so it's not just the state. It's also a battle that's going on within the federal government and how it deploys itself in Mississippi. So anyway, this trial is held in the chambers of federal district judge [W. Harold] Cox. Cox is a Kennedy appointee, a rigid segregationist. Doar is representing Hardy. I'm there with John [Hardy] and Jess Brown, his lawyer. Jess is one of the other three lawyers. And Cox says no. He denies relief. And then John [Doar] calls Burke and Burke instructs him to fly to Montgomery and present to Judge [Richard Taylor] Rives that night, because it's late in the afternoon, early evening, and get a stay from Judge Rives.

John [Doar] comes over. Judge Rives asked him to get the attorney general from Mississippi to fly with him, so they rent a plane to fly. John [Doar] comes over and tells us that that's what they're going to do [laughs]. And so Jess Brown, John Hardy's lawyer, says no way I'm going down to Tylertown because John was due in court the next morning at nine o'clock. But Jess refused, his lawyer refused to go down, so John [Hardy] and I went down and spent the night with C.C. [Bryant]. Then we got up early in the morning before anybody else and got to the courthouse before anybody and went up to the "buzzard's roost," they have a little shelf in the back [for African Americans]. They don't want to see you so you can hide in the back.

We watched the courthouse fill up with these white men and then at nine o'clock sharp the county prosecuting attorney comes in and announces that there's been a stay. We're not going to hear this case today. John [Doar] and them had woken up Judge Rives at midnight the night before and he had issued a stay, pending a three-judge panel from the Fifth Circuit [Court of Appeals] to hear this case. The thing is, of course, the argument that Burke made in the case was he wasn't trying to protect Hardy. Hardy would get his day in court, as it should be. But he was protecting the African American population of Walthall County because the very act of arresting Hardy was an act which impeded the effort of black people in the county. They actually won that case. It went up through the courts. But while John [Doar] was there at Steptoe's he asked Steptoe to give the names of people who he thought were threatened.

Steptoe wrote down a list of names. That was a Sunday. John [Doar] flew back. And the very next day, Eugene Hurst murdered Herbert Lee at the cotton gin. When John got the news there was Herbert Lee's name on Steptoe's list. I'm in McComb. I had gone back to McComb and Dr. Anderson, who had sewn me up, came and got me and said, "I just got a call from a funeral home here in McComb and they went and picked up a body at the cotton gin in Liberty and they want me to come down and look at it." He had come to contact me because he had figured that the body had been laying on the ground there for several hours, so he figured that this thing was connected to the civil rights movement. We went and there was Herbert Lee and he had some

bullet wounds in his head. The violence now had penetrated down to the individual, in this case, Herbert Lee and his [white] neighbor, Eugene Hurst, who's actually a member of the Mississippi state legislature. Just shot in him cold blood right there.

Amzie, then, got in his old Packard and came down. He and I hit the road every night trying to find witnesses about the killing. So, this picture here . . .

GI: Would you mind holding that picture up? Why don't you tell us about that picture?

BM: Here's Amzie he's second from the right with his hat on and his long coat. Standing on the end next to him is Steptoe, and we're at Steptoe's place down in Amite. Hollis Watkins is standing next to Amzie. And Julian had come over -- I'm not sure when he came over -- Curtis is talking to talking to Julian, talking him up. I'm on the other end, with my glasses. And Julian and Curtis are talking to each other. Julian is right next to me. Curtis is talking him up. Curtis was the one with the itch in his mind. He never stopped thinking and talking about what was going on. And we never have been able to identify the man in the middle with his hat on.

GI: How did Julian end up there?

BM: So, yeah, that's a good question. I'm not sure. There's two possible times when this picture was taken. One would be around the time when there was the funeral for Herbert Lee. Or when Amzie had come down. It would have been before the funeral. I don't think Amzie stayed for the funeral. The other was the time a little later when again a Communist filmmaker came down and made a documentary.

GI: Harvey Richards.

BM: Harvey Richards, yes. That's it. That would have been a little later, I think.

GI: I think that's 1963.

BM: By '63 we were really up in the Delta. I don't know. You'll have to find out.⁴ So anyway, the fallout from all of this was that the SNCC leaders in response to McComb and all this violence, and the young people who had come out to do voter registration work really decided they wanted to take the bit in their mouth and started to sit in. And so you got a series of sit-ins in McComb. One of them was involved Brenda Travis, who was just sixteen and they transported her to a juvenile detention home up the road from McComb. That upset the students and the SNCC leaders planned, with the students, a walk out from the high school. I think about a hundred and twenty students walked out, walked all the way downtown and swung back around and were coming up through the main section of town passing the police office and everything.

⁴. Harvey Richards, a documentary filmmaker, made two short films about the civil rights struggle in Mississippi, *We'll Never Turn Back* (1963) and *Dream Deferred* (1964). *We'll Never Turn Back* highlights the struggle of sharecroppers and the voting rights activists working on their behalf. Amzie Moore, Bob Moses, Julian Bond, Hollis Watkins and Fannie Lou Hamer are all interviewed in the film. For more, visit the Harvey Richards Media Archive Website by clicking [here](#).

Bob Zellner had been hired through funds that Anne Braden and Carl Braden and SCEF had provided to be the first white SNCC field secretary. Bob was Alabama. They had arranged for him to come down and participate in this demonstration. He was the only white person on . . . a demonstration. He got arrested. They bailed them out right away. And then we bailed Chuck McDew, who was the president of SNCC, out because he needed to go raise money for everybody's bail. What happened between the time of the first arrest and the time where we were convicted and sent to jail, the students decided that they would not sign something that the school required in order for them to go back to school. We set up our first real "Freedom School," if you like, in a church. Myself and some other SNCC people came in. I think Dion Diamond came down. And we were teaching.

Finally, our little classes hit the national news. They were only, remember, three TV stations, so one of them picked up our little classes. The AME church school in Jackson – there was a college right across from Jackson State, was an AME-based college, said they would take all the students. We bussed them all up here and they spent the rest of their high school years in this little college. Then we had our trial and we were sentenced to a couple of years and thirty-nine days and then thirty-nine days to collect bail [laughs], forty days, I think. Chuck McDew was out, and it's interesting. Many, many years later – this would have been in the 1990s – we were working with the Algebra Project in Tallahatchie County [Mississippi] and that got the attention of Gara LaMarche, who was just in the process of setting up an outreach for the [George] Soros Foundation. We were meeting with people at the board and people at the Soros Foundation around this Algebra Project effort.

Aryeh Neier, who was head of his Human Rights Watch, was in the meeting and he told me, "I was the one who sent, who wired the money down to get you guys out of jail. I was working with the ACLU in 1961." And he said, "It was the only time in my life I went into a bank after was closed because we had just one day. We had to get that money down that day or else we're facing two years in jail or whatever." There was a family foundation that decided they would post our bail. Aryeh Neier went with them. They got the money. He wired it to Dr. Anderson, and Anderson came and gave them money over and got us out. That was the end of his career as a doctor in Southwest Mississippi. A couple weeks later he got a notice to report to the army and so they shipped him to Syracuse. He finished training. He did his Army stint in Syracuse and then came back and set up practice in Jackson, Mississippi.

GI: And that was direct punishment?

BM: Yes.

GI: A lot of students who will be watching this, it's hard for them to comprehend the draft boards would fill up with people . . .

BM: I mean, they weren't drafting medical doctors [smiles]. He's the only one serving the African American community. What you're dealing with is really a state-run caste system, a state-run apartheid system that's looking at any way it can, no matter how trivial, no matter how evil, to maintain this status quo. So you think about the president, the current president [Donald Trump] going back down there just Monday night . . .

GI: Last night.

BM: Last night. The lady running for Senate. It's a measure of the shift because, in some sense, what the movement was able to do in Mississippi was to break the stranglehold that the state had on all of its people. But certainly, as we saw last night, it was not able to break the consciousness and the will to white supremacy. That's another really important thing that happened in the Mississippi theatre because "states rights" in this country means, part of what it means is local control. On the big-ticket issue of voting, local control meant the registrar. The Justice Department was filing suits against individual registrars. The big suit in the state was against Theron Lynd, who was the registrar in Hattiesburg. Eventually, a three-judge panel, which is unheard of, came and actually sat from the Fifth Circuit to oversee Theron Lynd and his registration processes.

But the action that we just talked about, the murder of Herbert Lee, the beatings, the violence, this was a little beyond the pale for the Justice Department in the sense that they were really reluctant to file suit in cases that would end up with the possibility of a demand for federal protection because of violence. They never did file cases in those. But what they did was change their strategy. Somewhere between 1961 and 1963, the Justice Department decided to go after the state of Mississippi as a whole.

The Justice Department filed suit against the state of Mississippi and the state of Louisiana. In this suit against the state of Mississippi, the state has these interrogatories that they asked the Justice Department to file. And one has to do with education. What they did was they went back to 1896 straight up to 1963 and put into the record all of the expenditures that were made in the state for white children to go to school versus blacks. And this relates to an issue that arose in a court case in 1963. After the walk out and everything, Amzie came down . . . well, first, the people who come out of the Freedom Rides and settled in Jackson have decided to enter into the politics of the state and run candidates for office, so they asked me to be the road manager for R.L.T. Smith, who ran as a Democrat for the first time. He was a lifelong "Black and Tan Republican."⁵ R.L.T. Smith actually was a mixture of African-American and Chinese and he ran a grocery store. In Jackson, they got Dr. A.B. Britton to be his campaign manager and Britton was a member of the Mississippi Commission on Civil Rights, which was part of the National Commission on Civil Rights.

We spent the rest of that winter, this is '61, '62, I would take our R.L.T. around the district which covers all the areas that we have been working in, but expanded it went it went down to Fort Gibson and Natchez and all that area. We would just go around campaigning for him and using that as an effort to urge people to think about voting and imagining that one day there's going to be a black person to vote for. We did that and then Amzie came down and told us that he was ready for us to come up to the Delta, so we shifted and went up into the Delta and it was in the Delta that on this tour – this is now '62 – that Fannie Lou Hamer emerges. It was August 31st.

⁵. "Black and Tan Republican" refers to the inter-racial faction within the Republican Party that emerged during Reconstruction and remained in place for decades before African Americans moved to the Democratic Party in significant numbers during the early 1960s, particularly after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Amzie had gotten someone who drove a school bus to take people from Ruleville to Indianola and Sunflower County to register. I was sitting on the bus. There was a lady sitting up front who faced the rest of the bus and started singing as soon as the bus started moving and she sang until the bus stopped. It's like she she just to them through every song they had ever sung in a black church. That was my first real encounter with Fannie Lou Hamer, and they arrested us.

I think the important thing is to understand how my thinking about the movement as it happened in Mississippi evolved. I began to think of it as a low-grade, guerilla warfare kind of operation, reflecting back on it. In a guerrilla operation you have a base, and you have to be able to slide in and out of it. You were safe in your base, so to speak. These people here like Amzie and Steptoe, they were part of this base that was spread out. These are mostly, if not exclusively, NAACP local chapter heads, people who have been identified in black community as what they call "race men."⁶

But our job was to earn, in some sense, the right to work and ask people to do things which were threatening. Physically threatening, economically threatening and even life threatening. You had to earn that right. Basically, I think the SNCC field secretaries earned it by getting back up. You kept getting knocked down, one way or another, and if you got knocked down enough and stood back up enough, then people came to the idea that you were serious about what you were trying to do. You weren't going to talk your way into seriousness. People had been talked to forever.

The other part of earning the insurgency dealt with the Justice Department. As soon as the McComb walkout finished and SNCC decided that it really couldn't afford to do direct action, that it needed to focus its work on voter registration, then we became eligible to earn the insurgency with the Justice Department in terms of the civil rights bills. The two civil rights bills '57 and '60. The '57 bill was Eisenhower, a Republican as president. Lyndon Baines Johnson is Senate majority leader, a Democrat and they put together this bipartisan bill, really which is saying that Tuskegee professors should be able to vote. They didn't have SNCC in mind. But they put in there anybody trying to vote or helping somebody try to vote, the state couldn't arrest them for that. Once we had really kind of aligned what we were doing so that it was just voter registration, then every time we got arrested the presumption was that we were arrested for voting.

When we took the bus down to Indianola and we started canvassing and passing out leaflets we were arrested, the Justice Department came and got us out. That was the second level of what I think of in this guerrilla warfare. Discipline. You have to discipline yourself. You're just doing this. As tempting as it might be to have a fling over here and sit-in some place, you're not going to do that. That allowed us what I came to think of as our legal crawl space to actually do the work. The people who wanted to do direct action, they we're facing long term jail sentences. It turned out that nobody was ready for that. There was no black base that was ready to support kids who were going to do long-term jail sentences. And the kids themselves weren't ready for that. Voter registration insurgency was earning its right to be an insurgency, first with the people themselves and then with the Justice Department. Mississippi could lock us up, but they didn't hold the jailhouse key. The Justice Department did in this case.

⁶. "Race man" is a colloquial term for African Americans who worked for professional civil rights organizations or were dedicated to the cause of advancing African American civil rights.

Mrs. Hamer, when she went back to the Marlow plantation, she was confronted and confronted Marlow and finally left. She became a SNCC field secretary. We had moved up into the Delta, this is '62 and then in the winter of '62, '63, we had begun to get funds through . . . well, we have to back up a little because, as we came out of McComb, we formed what we called COFO. Part of the inspiration for me that was Webb Owens, who reminded me every day [laughs], religiously, that we needed to all be working together. He would say to me, "Every day I'm in NAACP, I'm in SNCC, I'm in SCLC, I'm in CORE, I'm in anything is gonna get this monkey off my back." He was telling us that you "just can't be separate people out here. You gotta be working on this one goal." We were actually able to form this COFO – Council of Federated Organizations – because Medgar [Evers] was the state rep for the NAACP. He was willing, and he was actually had movement consciousness. And then Dave Dennis for CORE, myself for SNCC and Aaron Henry up there in Clarksdale was wearing a lot of hats, one of which was SCLC rep for the state.⁷

We had this umbrella organization, this COFO, and that enabled us to get some money. One way of thinking about the movement is that it's an alliance at the bottom and the top. At the top, there's the Justice Department, the Civil Rights Division, Burke Marshall and John Doar, Bobby Kennedy and a little handful of lawyers. But there's also a philanthropic arm. Kennedy had recruited Stephen Currier, who had married [Audrey Bruce] one of the Mellon granddaughters, so they both had money, Currier and Mellon, his wife, to set up the Taconic Foundation. The Taconic Foundation sort of rounded up all of the people who are trying to put money, in it, and began to funnel money in through the Southern Regional Council and the Voter Education Project that they set up. They wouldn't give that money to SNCC, but they gave it to COFO because we had this umbrella organization.

We actually began to spread out across the Delta in the '62-'63 year. We were having a meeting. Randolph Blackwell had come over from Atlanta. This was a meeting about voter registration. We were taking him to Greenville from Greenwood, we were leaving Greenwood, and we got "greased-gunned" [ambushed by gunshots from a pump rifle] on the highway, just before you hit Valley, Mississippi Valley, the state school. There were three of us up front, Jimmy Travis, myself and Randolph Brockwell. I was in the middle. Jimmy cries out. He's hit and I reach over and hit the brakes and we go in the ditch and stop. He's caught a bullet.

The next couple of days, first we get Jimmy to emergency room in Greenwood and then he gets down to Jackson. Then I come back we are going to a meet in Greenville. We decide to focus to respond by bringing all of our people on voter registration to focus on Greenwood, so the whole SNCC staff comes to Greenwood. And it happened that they had cut out the commodities, federal commodities, in Leflore County. They didn't have any food. We organized food to come down. Dick Gregory flew plane loads of food down.⁸ We told people straight up, "Well, you don't have this food because of the politics. If you want something you've got to go register." We got

⁷. Aaron Henry, a Clarksdale pharmacist, also served as the NAACP representative for much of the Delta. He later became the "presidential nominee" on the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party ticket and gave a speech at the 1964 Democratic Convention for the MFDP's inclusion in the Mississippi state delegation.

⁸. Dick Gregory was a nationally well-known African American comedian who became a major fundraiser for civil rights causes during the 1960s. He spearheaded the food drive in 1963-64 for black Mississippians and other poor, rural African Americans throughout the South during the 1960s and remained active in the civil rights causes until his death in 2017.

hundreds of people to go down to register.

In the process, they arrested about seven or eight of us, SNCC field secretaries. Then Burke Marshall filed suit against the city and had our cases removed to the federal district court. I'm sitting on the witness stand, and Judge Clayton – we had bussed in sharecroppers from Greenwood into the district court in Greenville. Burke had sent John Doar to be my lawyer – has just one question. He wants to know why is SNCC taking illiterates down to register to vote. Sharecropper illiteracy was the subtext of the right to vote. Basically, we said, "Well, it's not fair. You can't deny a whole people access to literacy through your political arrangements and then turn around and say, 'Well, you can't do politics because your illiterate.'" The issue of education and sharecropper illiteracy was the subtext of the right to vote. A part of what spurred the Justice Department to make this interrogatory, this thick [record] of what had been going on, you're talking about almost three quarters of a century in the education of black people versus white people in the state of Mississippi.

They lost that case. They got a good dissent from Judge Brown, who was from the Fifth Circuit on a three-judge panel. The suit against Louisiana they won. And Judge Wisdom gave the decision on that suit and he gave it about a month after Kennedy was assassinated, in December 1963. And one of the things he said in there, he went to the whole history of Louisiana and used it as the reason for saying that the state really can't be allowed to be in charge of registering people to vote. It needs to be moved to the federal courts or at least there has to be some pre-clearance or something. Something has to happen. As part of his history, he documents what happens in Louisiana, where the Democratic Party and the Southern Democratic Party in the country and as a whole becomes what he calls the manifestation of the will to white supremacy.

This issue of white supremacy is what lingers. The state itself no longer functions as the instrument of white supremacy per se. But it's filtered through all of the different arrangements that are still in place. Part of what happened when we were in jail -- Medgar comes up to do the mass meetings while we're in jail and he's inspired by the people in Greenwood to begin direct action in Jackson. In the meantime, Birmingham has taken off. And then Medgar is assassinated in June ['63]. [Byron de la] Beckwith, who lives in Greenwood, comes down to murder Medgar in Jackson.

PREPARING FOR FREEDOM SUMMER

The movement shifts after that. There's this famous picture, I don't know if you have it, of John Doar stopping the people [from violence]. At the head of that is Dorie Ladner and "Cat," Endesha Mae Holland. They are the two SNCC field secretaries leading that march. And I'm watching this on the sidelines. It's clear that we have to change our strategies or something. We got burned on the case in Greenwood, where the Justice Department cut a deal with the state and said, "Basically, the state will let us out and the department won't pursue the voter registration there." We had come to a dead end, in some sense, in this line of attack, trying to get the vote, which is through registration and work with the Justice Department to get suits filed. That will eventually lead to the states agreeing to allow African-Americans to vote.

We went back to the politics that we had kind of touched on in '61, '62. We ran Mrs. Hamer for

Congress, Victoria Gray for Senate, Aaron Henry and Ed Kane for Governor and Lt. Governor, kind of parallel politics. We set up these freedom registration boxes so people could actually register with us. This is coming into 1963. Of course, in the meantime, there's the March on Washington and the backlash from the March on Washington, the bombing of the church and murdering those little girls in Sunday school.

But two things. Two people moved after Medgar was assassinated. We moved after Medgar was assassinated with this shift in our line of attack. A couple other people moved. One was Robert Spike, who is the head of the outreach for the National Council of Churches, and the church decided that after Medgar is assassinated that the church has to get involved in the civil rights movement. And then he comes up to me at the March on Washington and says now that they have decided that they are going to focus on Mississippi because of COFO, because it's the one place where they can say they're working with all four major civil rights organizations. They start to send in people who are older, black men maybe in the early 40s or so who are full-time workers for the National Council of Churches dealing with what they call the Delta Ministry.

Then the other person who moves is Allard Lowenstein. Lowenstein is a kind of operative on the Hubert Humphrey wing of the Democratic Party. And he comes towards the state after Medgar is assassinated. And then we have our "Freedom Vote" around Aaron Henry and Ed King in the fall, he brings students from Yale and Stanford. He had been Dean of Freshmen at Stanford and moved to Yale. He had all these contacts and students came down. And so that opened up the issue of should we have a summer project in which we invite students to come down.

At the same time, Kennedy, after the March on Washington has announced that he's going to introduce legislation for civil rights. The National Council of Churches gets involved in the lobbying effort. They have a "Freedom Day" in Hattiesburg. They have fifty ministers come down from the Midwest. We walked the picket line. I get arrested. And the church ministers go back home and then the National Council of Churches helps organize them to go to Washington to lobby. The idea is to target key Republicans that you can switch to support this pending bill. So all that's going on. And while it's going on, we're in Hattiesburg and we get a notice that Lewis Allen has been murdered.

When Amzie went around, we found one person who said he was there and was willing to be a witness. And that was Lewis Allen. So that was 1961. He was going through a lot. He first testified – they made him, they wanted him to say that Herbert Lee had a tire iron or something in his hand, and that's caused him to be shot, for Eugene Hurst to shoot him, so he did. And then he recanted and said, "No, that's not what happened." He went back and he testified again. And so they arrested him, they broke his jaw, they arrested and hounded him for a couple of years. This is '61. Finally, in January of '64, they just murdered him on the cattle gap leading to his house.

And so that was it for me in terms of having a summer project because the staff itself was split. The people we were working with all wanted to have it, basically the idea that any help they could get they wanted. The staff split about whether we should do it or not. But it was like we were sitting ducks. We were the collateral damage of the effort to say we're going to have a civil rights act. There was nothing in place to protect people. They're fighting over whether they should be a law or not and you don't know whether you'll get it. So we went with having a

summer project to invite the students in and that sort of what I think of as the third level of earning this insurgency, which was earning the right in some sense to call on the country through its young college students to actually come and take a close look at itself in Mississippi. That gets into '64 and the Freedom Democratic Party because part of the political process that we've put in motion after Medgar was assassinated involved setting up the basis for the Freedom Democratic Party. That led to the revelation that we could and should go to the '64 [Democratic presidential] convention and actually challenge the regular Mississippi party. So that's what we did. And that's that famous talk that Fannie Lou Hamer gave.

WORKING WITH JULIAN BOND

GI: Can you talk about Julian Bond's role in SNCC and your interaction with him?

BM: During all this period my main contact at the SNCC office [in Atlanta] was, of course, with Julian. And it wasn't so much on the phone. We did have what you called a "WATS Line," a wide-area telephone that operated across Mississippi, but we didn't have one that reached into Atlanta. In and out as all of this is happening, I would be periodically going to Atlanta. As part of those I would always have some time where I sat down and talked to Julian. It was amazing to me the kind of mindset Julian had about actually doing reporting. And making sure that the actual news about what the students were doing in different theaters in the South got out. Some of what you did, of course, was in *The Student Voice*, which was really his creation and the voice of the movement.

Julian was on the phone with reporters from all across the nation and became a respected source of news. If you have the kind of integrity that he had about really telling, without embellishing, what happened, then you became a person that had some authenticity as a reporter in a time when the country was really not geared up to report about the South. There's Claude Sitton for *The New York Times* and I've forgotten his name there was a guy writing for *Newsweek* who traveled with Claude across the South.⁹ But their beat was kind of the whole South, so how could they cover that? So it was Julian's beat. I would go and talk to Julian on a regular basis whenever I was in Atlanta. Julian was, for me, he was kind of a steady beat, steady component, steady dimension of SNCC. Because there were always a lot of ins and outs with SNCC people, agreeing, disagreeing about this or that. But Julian was really steady as she goes in terms of staying on what actually happened and how does that take us where we were trying to get to. Because he was so smart and his mind was also so agile, he could keep track of everything. And not only keep track of it but get to get to the nitty gritty and the essence of it. Julian, I don't remember his sense of humor in terms of what he actually said, but Julian had a great sense of humor. He was in position to hear and see a lot.

GI: Julian once described you as a "mythical figure" within SNCC? How would you describe him?

BM: [smiles]. There were a couple of Julians. I was surprised when Julian decided to step out from behind the scenes and actually enter into politics. And, of course, he did so, and it was such a

⁹. Karl Fleming. Fleming, like Claude Sitton, was born and raised in the Jim Crow South. He emerged as one of the most respected reporters by civil rights activists for his courage and forthright coverage of the civil rights movement.

dramatic time and a dramatic move. He became, in some sense, for a while, a media person. So here is Julian [laughs] who was your ultimate reporter, behind the scenes, low-key, all of a sudden at the center of attention right around the Vietnam War and the entry of black people into politics. Julian had several dimensions to him. Because there's that and then there's also his family life. Julian is doing all this and running a family and growing kids. Most of us are not doing that.

I think that kind of speaks to the multi-faceted dimensions of Julian. He had surprises. Julian was a beautiful writer. Julian really had a command of words. Very, very exquisite in some cases. So that poem that he wrote [laughs], "Look at that girl shake that thing/We can't all be Martin Luther King." To think that and put those two things together [smiles]. Yeah.