

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

**Interview with Larry Rubin**

**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. Rubin reviewed the transcript for accuracy.

### **Biographical Note for Larry Rubin**

Larry Rubin (b. 1942) grew up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Mr. Rubin's father was a welder and his mother a hairdresser, and both instilled in him the idea that the "essence of being Jewish is the responsibility to fight for justice." In 1961, while a student at Antioch College, Mr. Rubin joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and later spent time in Southwest Georgia and Northern Mississippi working to organize communities and support voter registration work. He also helped establish Freedom Schools and Freedom Libraries during the 1964 Freedom Summer project in Mississippi. After leaving SNCC in 1965, Mr. Rubin went to work for Anne and Carl Braden organizing poor white communities in rural Kentucky. He later returned to the Washington, D.C.-area to begin a career in union organizing and communications. Mr. Rubin served four terms on the Takoma Park, Maryland city council. He currently serves as Treasurer for the SNCC Legacy Project.

**Julian Bond Oral History Project  
"The Making of Julian Bond, 1960-68"  
American University**

**Larry Rubin Interview (09-JBOHP)  
November 24th, 2018  
Bethesda, Maryland**

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

**Code: Gregg Ivers [GI] Larry Rubin [LR]**

GI: Today is Saturday, November 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018 and we are at the home of Mr. Larry Rubin in Bethesda, Maryland to conduct an interview for the Julian Bond Oral History Project, sponsored in part by the School of Public Affairs at American University. My name is Gregg Ivers. I am 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.

Larry Rubin was a student at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio when, in 1961, he decided to go South to join the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC]. Mr. Rubin served as a field secretary and organizer for SNCC on and off until 1965, working in Southwest Georgia and later in Holly Springs, Mississippi, where he helped organize a local labor union at a brick-making plant, one that included black and white members. Rubin will talk about his time in the Southern freedom movement, including Freedom Summer in 1964 and offer his memories and observations of Julian Bond, who he knew as a friend and colleague for fifty years. Larry, thank you so much for taking time this afternoon to speak with us. Let's begin by having you tell us a bit about your background and how that led you into the Southern freedom movement.

LR: Well, first of all since it's Saturday, I want to wish everybody a Shabbat Shalom, y'all! In the South they say, "Shalom, y'all."

GI: Yes, they do.

**ENTERING THE SOUTHERN FREEDOM MOVEMENT**

LR: There's actually two ways to answer that question. What happened was I was sitting in the cafeteria having lunch at Antioch College when I looked up and I saw Chuck McDew, who was chair of SNCC at that time. He had been there to visit his girlfriend, Marjorie House, and I joined them for lunch. The next thing I knew I was in Southwest Georgia getting arrested. I was in

Terrell County, Georgia, Dawson [Georgia], in jail. No, I mean it wasn't quite like that! I had driven South to be at some SNCC meetings when SNCC was getting itself together, being organized. I can't remember the exact locations. I never said anything, but I went down with a few other people. I knew Chuck. I knew to go over to sit at his table. But the other way, and I think the more profound way to answer your question is, I went South because I had no choice. This is what people like me do. I was brought up to believe that to be a full human being, that one of the marks of being a full human being is to be a *mensch*, is to fight for justice and fight for freedom.<sup>1</sup> And it was just natural for me to go South. It was also based upon a political analysis which was very common at the time. A few years later if you were to ask most white SNCC volunteers – I was not a volunteer – another answer was I went down there for the money. It was \$9.65 a week! That's ten dollars after taxes!

But if you were to ask most white volunteers why they went South they would say something like, "We were taught in school that in America everyone was equal. This is a land of freedom. And then I was shocked to see on television Bull Connor turning the fire hoses on people in Birmingham just trying to register to vote, and just trying to use public accommodations in Birmingham and I was so shocked I went South because I wanted to make America the way it is supposed to be." In my case, I was not shocked. I was brought up to believe that capitalism sucks and that what was happening in the South was just part of the way America was. I wasn't shocked, but I was also brought up, as I said, to believe that as a mensch you fight to make things better. I wasn't shocked that America was the way it was. But it was part of my DNA to make it better.

Another part of that was a political analysis. This was in the early '60s, and at that time the American government, the federal government, was being run by racist white Southerners. They were the chairs of most of the committees in the House and Senate. And the reason they were the chairs was because of seniority. They were elected again and again and again. As chairs of these various committees they were taking apart the New Deal that our parents fought for, and they were taking away rights and benefits that our parents fought for. The reason they were able to do this, and to be elected again and again, was because many of their constituents, in some cases the majority of their constituents, couldn't vote because they were black.

We felt – and when I say we, I mean people like me, and also what SNCC was saying to the rest of the country to encourage people to come South – if blacks were able to exercise their right to vote, they would vote out of office these white racists. That would be good for everybody, for the whole country. I went South not help black people. Black people were doing very well without me. I went South to support, as best as I could and to do whatever I could, to help people who were risking their lives for the right to vote. But I did it to help myself and to help the whole country.

## **JOINING SNCC**

GI: So how and when did you decide to join SNCC?

---

<sup>1</sup>. *Mensch* is a Yiddish word that means, loosely translated, a person of exemplary quality who puts others first.

LR: Well, now we get back to that lunch. This was late '61. I actually didn't go South until early '62, I think. I'm getting on and mix up some dates, but I believe was really '62! And as I said it was just natural to do this. Also, I know a lot of people wanted me to run for Community Manager at Antioch College, which was just like student government but to do that I had to write a paper. And I was having an awful lot of trouble right that paper, so I got out of that by going South. I figured, if I go South, I didn't have to finish that paper. And that was a fact. I flew to Atlanta. Most people come from the North to work for SNCC went to Atlanta first, where the headquarters were. We stayed there in Atlanta just long enough to meet the requirement to get a Georgia license driver's license and license plates, figuring that when we went South if we had Ohio plates or Pennsylvania plates or New York plates it would be more dangerous than if we had Georgia plates. That was true but it was not true that anybody mistook me for a Georgian. No matter what I did people knew some kind of way I was from the North.

GI: How many people from Antioch went South and got involved in the freedom movement?

LR: Well, Antioch was a very small college. There was a total of two thousand people; only one thousand were on campus at any one time. I am proud to say, and I will betcha' that, percentage wise, literally Antioch had more people there than any other place. Joni Rabinowitz went. Terry Shaw, Stanley Boyd, several others went for various periods of time. Joni, like myself, dropped out of Antioch and was in Southwest Georgia. We were all lucky in a sense in that Antioch was a work-study school. We spent six months on campus and six months off. That's why I said before there were only one thousand students on campus at any one time although the student body was two thousand. So, while I went South, part of the time I was actually on a co-op job. And part of the time I dropped out just to do this. But Antioch was very sympathetic and very supportive.

Matter of fact, when I went back to Antioch – well, I'm jumping ahead a little bit, but my lung collapsed after about six seven months in southwest Georgia. I had a spontaneous pneumothorax. My lung collapsed, I learned later, just from the nervous tension and the fear. I stayed afraid for five years. There's this tight feeling in your stomach. You learned to live with it. But I was never *not* afraid. Well, one of the results was that my lung collapsed. I went back to Antioch to see doctors rather than to go home to Philadelphia. I felt more comfortable and, plus medical care was free, since I was somehow connected with Antioch. And I was I was at Antioch for about three months, I believe, having my lung re-inflate itself. I found out later I could have had an operation but the doctors there were homeopathic doctors, who just said, "Why don't you lie on your side and your lung will re-inflate itself."

While I was back at Antioch my lung healed. First, I went to Washington as a community organizer at Berry Farms public housing development, where I met Sharlene Kranz, who at that time was a high school student. She had organized her high school. "Students Against Discrimination" was her organization. I was a community organizer there. And then I guess I went back to Antioch because I went from Antioch in August of '63 to the March on Washington. It must have been right after that I went back South to Mississippi.

But to go back to when I first came, I flew to Atlanta. Now I'm jumping back several years. I hung out there for as long as it took to get my license. I hung out with SNCC, and with a guy named Jake Rosen. I don't know if you have ever run into him. He was with the Progressive Labor Party and I

guess their Southern organizer. And he was close to SNCC. I might have even stayed at his house for as long as it took me to get the driver's license, that's where I first met Julian Bond. As a matter of fact, I met Julian the first day I get off the plane in Atlanta. Somebody drove me to the office. I think it was Auburn Avenue. I think Raymond [Street] was later. Or I might have that mixed up. Maybe it was the other way around. I believe it was Auburn Avenue.

GI: SNCC's first offices were on Auburn Avenue.

LR: Yes, that's where it was.

GI: And then they moved over to Raymond Street, which was right off Hunter Street, and that was literally around the corner from Paschal's and Frazier's and that was the hub of student life because all the black colleges were around corner. Morehouse and Spelman, Clark, from where many activists had come for the Atlanta Student Movement and SNCC settled in there around 1963.

LR: This was the Auburn office. And if I remember correctly you had to walk upstairs to get to the office. The office was like a shotgun house, a bunch of rooms all connected. And it was very crowded. Everybody was there. At the end of the hall, which was running through offices, there was Julian Bond at a mimeograph machine. That's what it was my first image of him, cranking stuff out on a mimeograph.

## **MEETING JULIAN BOND**

GI: This is the first time you meet Julian?

LR: Yes, my first day working for SNCC. Here's the difference. I met Bob Zellner on that day, too, and he shook my hand and there was a buzzer in his palm, one of those trick things. That was Bob. He was big and all over the place, very ebullient.

GI: The buzzer was a sixth-grade phenomenon when we used them.

LR: Yes, exactly. You just put your finger on something, too [smiles].

Julian was cranking something out. I went up and introduced myself and he introduced himself. You know, "Welcome to SNCC." He said the exact right things. And I felt accepted somehow automatically. I think it was because – and this was this was my lasting impression of Julian – Julian accepted himself so much, so well. He was so self-possessed then that when he was with you, you knew it was him saying hello to you. It wasn't that he was, what's the word, effusive. Just the way he said, "Hi, welcome to SNCC," you felt absolutely accepted because here was this real person. Quiet but real. And that was always my impression of him. That was always my *feeling* with him, even when he became head of the NAACP, after he was host of "Saturday Night Live." I mean, he became a big shot. But wherever he would see you, you just felt totally comfortable because he was comfortable with himself.

GI: When you are back in Atlanta and after you meet Julian for the first time, you then go down to southwest Georgia for a second round. Or is this your first?

LR: This is my first. I forget exactly how long I stayed but you can look it up. Whatever the law was about getting a Georgia license, that's how long I was in Atlanta.

GI: And then from Atlanta you go down to Southwest Georgia.

LR: Yes. I was assigned to Southwest Georgia by Jim Forman. I had no idea where I was going to go when I first went to Atlanta.

GI: So almost like being inducted?

LR: Yes.

GI: You show up and they give you your orders.

LR: Exactly!

#### **WORKING WITH THE SNCC COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE**

GI: What kind of relationship did you have or the SNCC people down in Southwest Georgia have with the communications office in Atlanta?

LR: Well, at that time, we saw the Atlanta office mostly as a safety thing because we had to contact them every day and we knew if they didn't hear from us, they would send help.

GI: And that was protocol?

LR: Yes.

GI: Can you describe how that worked when you say you had to contact them every day at a certain time?

LR: Later on, in Mississippi, I definitely remember, yes, it was twice a day. Somebody had to call at a certain time and they had the WATS line, the Wide Area Telephone Service. I don't know that they had that in Atlanta that early or not. They must have had the WATS line because it was just a cheaper way because of using a telephone instead of paying for all these calls. It wasn't that I called in every day but somebody from the project had to call in every day. And also, they were our communications with the outside world. For example, the first time I was arrested was in Terrell County, Georgia. "Terrible Terrell" [laughs]!

There was "Dirty Dougherty," which is where Albany was. There was "Bad Baker," which is where I was assigned. When I was assigned to Baker County . . . well, first we were in Albany, which was the big city. This was the beginning of what we called the Southwest Georgia Project. Myself, Jack Chatfield and John O'Neill, who later founded the Southern Free Theater or the Free

Southern Theater were all assigned to live with "Mama Dolly" [Raines] in Baker County. One day we were canvassing in Dawson, in nearby Terrell County. Canvassing meant walking from tumbledown shack to tumbledown shack and really talking to folks about anything, really. You didn't pop up and say, "We want you to register to vote." Mostly, what I did was stand there because my main job in Southwest Georgia and in Mississippi basically was to be white and not be in charge. And to show both the black and white community that blacks and whites could work together, and whites not be in charge.

We were walking down the road – first we were driving down this red clay road in Terrell and we pulled in at a general store, which we thought was owned by a black guy. Pulled our car in and we went to the general store, and ironically on the wall of this little general store was a picture of Julian Bond advertising, I think it was RC Cola or Pepsi or something, holding a bottle. They had a campaign of all the good-looking kids in Atlanta. I had several friends who were good looking that were in this ad campaign and there was Julian Bond on a soft drink ad, I think it was RC or whatever it was.

The owner told us to get the hell out. He was scared of us being there. We did, but we left our car in his parking lot. We go canvassing. Deputy sheriff drives up and arrests us for trespassing because our car was on the property of what turned out to be a general store owned by a leading white racist in the community. There was little article in the paper about us being arrested and it said that the Negro, and they gave his name, called the police to have us arrested. The burden of the article was the black community didn't want us there. So I was in jail in Dawson, Georgia. Zeke Matthews was the sheriff. First time I was arrested. Handcuffed in the back, scared out of my mind, thrown in jail. We knew the scariest part of being in jail is that you are at the arbitrary control of the jailer. You had no say about anything.

That's what's scary about jail. But we had a phone call. And one of us called Atlanta. That was our safety line. And once that phone call was made and we knew that Julian, in particular, because that's who we spoke to. I didn't speak to him. One of the other two guys spoke. We knew that somebody knew where we were and that took the edge off of being afraid of being under the arbitrary control of somebody who would kill you as well as look at you.

GI: So someone talks to Julian Bond . . .

LR: Yes.

GI: What was Julian's next step? What would he do to kind of help move things to a place where you felt a little bit scared, a little bit less uncertain of what the next day would bring?

LR: To us, it was just that we knew he was doing something. He and other folks. What he was doing come to find out was call Zeke Matthews and say, "Listen, you got our people there. What's the deal?" He would find out that we were arrested for trespassing and there was a certain bail set or fine or bond, depending upon the situation. And I forget exactly what it was in Southwest Georgia, in Dawson. Mostly they would arrange to pay it just to get us out of jail. We were not there as a witness. Some people [came] from the North to the South to bear witness. So being in jail was their witness to blacks being persecuted. We were there to organize. We were there to be



out on the roads, so being in jail was a hindrance to our work. So, we knew some kind of way, we didn't know the details, knew some kind of way, Atlanta was trying to get us out of there. And, depending on the situation, Julian would call the press. I believe he called my home paper. He knew where I was from and called *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and say, "Hey, one of your home boys is in jail in Dawson, Georgia."

GI: And then someone from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* . . .

LR: Would call Zeke Matthews . . .

GI: And say, "What's the deal with Larry Rubin, who is a Philadelphian sitting in your jail . . .".

LR: Yeah, exactly. They would call Zeke Matthews.

GI: So public pressure would sometimes . . .

LR: Well, I wouldn't say public pressure had much to with the thinking of Zeke Matthews. But . . . I'll tell the story. As I said, we had one phone call each. The phone call to the Atlanta office was made, which was the main call. I had a phone call to make. I definitely didn't want my parents to know that I was in jail because I knew that they would freak out.

GI: When was first time your parents found out you were in jail?

LR: I'm about to tell you the story. All right, so I called my girlfriend in Chicago, a fellow "Antiochian," who must have been on her co-op job because she was home in Chicago. Vicky Levine. "Hey, Vicky. I'm in jail." And that was it! Well, Vicky, just by coincidence, spoke to another friend of ours, Lois Rivitch, who is also from Antioch and also went South herself. Lois was in Philadelphia. Vicky calls Lois. Talks about whatever they talked about, plus Larry's in jail. Lois's parents were playing bridge with my parents that night and the Rivitchs tell the Rubins, "Hey, isn't this terrible what happened to Larry?" And my parents said, "What? What happened to Larry?" "Oh, he's in jail!" Well, old Zeke didn't know what it was like to deal with a Jewish mother because my mother called him and gave him holy hell, plus she called our congressman, who was Robert N.C. Nix. She called our senator, who was Senator [Lowell] Schweiker at the time, a Republican. And they all called Zeke Matthews.

That I think had an effect. There is old Zeke and he's getting calls from Congress and from the Senate from this lady. He could barely understand what she was saying. My mother definitely couldn't understand what he was saying. In fact, it was kind of embarrassing because there we were in jail and I was just trying to stay alive with the other with the other prisoners and trying to act a little tough to fit in there in the cell. We were in jail for three or four days. Zeke yells down the hall, "Hey, Larry. Hey, Rubin, your mommy is on the phone." That did not help me very much!

## GOING TO MISSISSIPPI

GI: So, your next stop is Mississippi. How did you get there?

LR: Well, first, there were long discussions within SNCC about whether whites should work in Mississippi. In southwest Georgia, the project was run by Reverend Charles Sherrod and he was very, very dedicated to the idea of the "beloved community." And he insisted that the staff always be integrated, as I said, to show both white and black communities that whites could work with blacks and not be in charge. In Mississippi, the feeling was different. The feeling there, and in fact, throughout the South, except for Southwest Georgia, was that whites and blacks working together was too dangerous. That there was safety in African-American staff members being able to ride in and out of towns – and particularly at night – and not be noticed. But if you had a white and black person in a car riding into town, particularly at night, they could be killed. So, there was a policy change and the decision was made that whites could work, at least a few could work, in Mississippi. This became a big issue a little bit later about Freedom Summer. That issue was discussed on steroids.

But I was in Ohio and I forget exactly but I must have spoken to Forman on the phone saying, "You know, I want to go back to work." My lung had by then healed. It was right after the March on Washington. And the March on Washington had an effect on me. It was the first time that I saw so many white people in such a crowd and they were going to shoot at me. I felt that this was really America. Remember I said before that I thought America sucked.? Well, the March on Washington showed me that there were many, many people that wanted a better country. And I was inspired. I called Forman and said I want to go back to work. I was assigned to Marshall County, which is in the northern part of Mississippi, and my job was to prepare for what became called Freedom Summer. I don't think we were 100 percent positive at that time that it was going to be a lot of white volunteers coming down. I think we were still discussing it, I believe, or maybe that decision had been made. I forget.

But in any case, my job was to prepare to try to rent a house to get to know who the leaders in the community were. I was taking the place of Frank Smith, who actually I had met in southwest Georgia and who is now the director of the African-American Civil War Museum here [in D.C.], and who incidentally I worked for when he was a member of the D.C. City Council. But now I'm talking ten years or so before that he had been in Marshall County in Holly Springs by himself and getting to know the natural leaders, the folks that were already working on voter registration and other things.

And this was true in most communities. Mostly, they were World War II vets. They came back from the war and they were not going to put up with the shit that they had put up with before they left. They became the natural leaders. I tried to take over from where Frank left off. Frank had been there for a long time. I stayed at Rust College. Now, that in itself, shows how courageous the president of Rust College was just to let me stay there. Frank was black. This was an all-black college. The president of Rust, his name was Eddie Smith, could say that he was a student there. But with me it was very difficult to say I was a student there, being white. It would have been illegal, against the law for me to be there.

But they let me stay. So, from living at Rust, I was preparing the area as best I could for Freedom Summer. I'm not saying I did a good job at that. But that was my assignment. I fell down a lot!

My other assignment there was to work to set up Freedom Libraries, which were going to be with Freedom Schools. These were the libraries. Like I said, I'm not sure that they had decided even to have them. Maybe they did, the Freedom Schools. But they did decide to have Freedom Libraries and that job consisted mostly of getting books from the North or driving up there to get books, bringing them to Rust, putting them in a huge pile in the basement of one of the Rust buildings and sorting through them and preparing them to go to various places for Freedom Libraries. At Rust College today they still have some of those books that are marked "Freedom Libraries" that are on display. The other person that was really in charge of it was Staughton Lynd. He's a very well-known, very courageous professor and writer.

## **PREPARING FOR FREEDOM SUMMER**

GI: When you say you were "preparing the area" for Freedom Summer, what does that mean?

LR: Well, first of all, at this point we didn't call it Freedom Summer. It was the SNCC Summer Project. Actually, it was the COFO Summer Project. In Mississippi, all the various civil rights organizations -- SNCC, CORE and the NAACP, probably others -- formed the Council of Federated Organizations. Technically, that's who we were working for. Their office was in Jackson. There was tremendous debate within SNCC in particular because SNCC really led COFO. That was the most active part of it. In fact, CORE didn't want any part of it except Dave Dennis, who was the organizer for CORE, dragged CORE kicking and screaming into the project.

Preparing for the summer project involved two categories of things. One, physical things, like I said, renting a house for us to use when people came down. The Freedom Library, in my case. The second category was preparing leaders for a bunch of white kids coming to so-called "help." And that was the hardest part. There was tremendous controversy as to whether to have such a thing. And Sam Block, Hollis Watkins . . . as a matter of fact most of the Mississippi organizers were against it because they felt two things.<sup>2</sup> Number one, that it would be very dangerous to have whites and blacks work together and number two, and probably more profound, was that they were just getting some local organizations off the ground in various places.

Remember, it took tremendous courage to fight for the right to exercise your right to vote. And they were just making some breakthroughs and they were worried that all these white kids coming down would take resources away from organizing and that the white kids would substitute themselves for the local people. The way Hollis said it is that we finally got communities up out of their chairs to work and now, all these white kids would come, and the black kids would just sit back down again and look at the whites.

The argument that won the day, though, was that far from being more dangerous having whites there would be the safety factor. That, particularly, if you had upper-class whites, upper-middle class whites, that people in the North, particularly decision-makers -- there was a congressman's

---

<sup>2</sup>. Hollis Watkins (0-11 JBOHP) is interviewed in this project.

son there and other leading folks' kids were there – if they knew that their own kids were in danger, they would do something to help stop the danger. Remember, eight people were killed, six at the time that we're talking about, just doing voter registration work. Hardly anybody knew about it because, you know, they were just black people getting killed. And the big push was to try to get the federal government to send protection to voter rights workers, which they should because we were protecting people exercising their federal right to vote. And the Kennedy administration should have sent people as protection and they were not. The feeling was if white kids were in danger that, number one, they would get publicity and that, number two, the administration would send down protection. So that argument won.

In the meantime, though, preparing the local leaders, explaining that a bunch of white people coming down and somehow to reinforce the fact that they were still the leaders of the project. And that even though we were asking them one of the things we've tried to do is to get places for white kids to live. Although in Marshall County most of them we didn't live with folks. It wasn't like Southwest Georgia, where I lived with "Mama Dolly." In Marshall County, on the project led by Ivanhoe Donaldson, most of the people lived in the office or at the Freedom House, one for women and one for men. But the idea was to prepare the people that you are still in charge and these people are just there to help you, not to take over from you, and you need to understand that. That was "preparing."

## **COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN MISSISSIPPI AND ATLANTA**

GI: How did the communications offices in Atlanta and Mississippi work together to keep families, media outlets and others aware of what was happening in Mississippi?

LR: Well, it was Bob Moses, Dave Dennis, Aaron Henry, who was a pharmacist, I think, and was with the NAACP in Clarksdale. Of course, there were a few others. They were mapping out strategies. Once a decision was made to have the summer project, to try to enlist lots of white kids, like I said, particularly upper middle-class white kids, to come to Mississippi, there were a lot of questions raised. Now, preceding this decision was a decision in Mississippi to have all the organizations come together under COFO and then to have Freedom Summer. In a way, it was part of the same decision, in a way not. I don't know the details of exactly who made what decision and where. As a matter of fact, just as a general statement, I was a foot soldier. I wasn't involved in the decision-making. I went where Jim Forman told me to go and basically did what I was told to do. I didn't really bother myself too much about the big picture. As a matter of fact, this is part of why I didn't bother myself.

When I first came South, as I said earlier, I came for this political reason that we were going to help black people to exercise their right to vote just by giving them a little support and that would make the whole country greater. The general idea that it was my role to make the country greater from birth. I came to find out though, that might have been the goal, but the job was making sure Mrs. Jones had a way to get from her farm to the mass meeting. It was just very, very gritty boring stuff and walking from walking from shack to shack. And just being white, and letting the black organizer do all the talking so that the people we're speaking to could say that this was a black run organization.

Because this was such a traumatic, epiphany for me, to understand that my job was just little things, that the freedom movement was just a series of little things, in a way I went the opposite direction. I didn't ask too much about the picture. It was all I could do to keep myself together and not throw up every day out of fear and just do the little things. When I went to Mississippi it was the same thing. I concentrated on trying to get a place for Freedom School, trying to get the books at Rust College. Just trying to live at Rust College. I was the only white person within miles. Actually, that's not quite true. There were some professors. But as a kid, what was I, eighteen, twenty-one, twenty-two? Just to keep myself together day to day, I didn't bother myself too much with what was happening in Atlanta or Jackson.

To answer your question about the communications department, I did know that now there were two WATS lines. There was COFO in Jackson and SNCC in Atlanta. And remember there was more going on for SNCC than just Freedom Summer in Mississippi. There was still the southwest Georgia project and we had some projects in Arkansas and Texas and elsewhere in the South. Alabama. They were starting even then to create the Lowndes County freedom movement. So the SNCC office in Atlanta was doing a much broader job than the COFO office in Jackson. But we were officially COFO. But we dealt with both and we felt good. Now there were two places that knew where we were. This is also how we knew right away that the three civil rights workers were killed. Because they didn't call in.

GI: Can you talk about the protocol the communications office established to "call in" and how you all you knew that perhaps something wasn't quite right?

LR: Well, we would know that something wasn't quite right in Marshall County but the COFO office would and we had to call in, I believe it was twice a day at certain times. If we didn't then the assumption was either in jail or dead. And then the Jackson and Atlanta the office would put into effect everything we had. By now we had Lawyers for Human Rights were there, the Medical Committee for Human Rights, the Delta Ministry. There were a lot of networks that existed at the time that I'm talking about now that did not exist when I was in southwest Georgia. If somebody didn't call in Jackson and Atlanta knew to call this group of lawyers to make phone calls to the authorities. And most important – although the Kennedy administration still was not sending protection – there was John Doar, who was [an assistant attorney general in] the Civil Rights Division at the Justice Department.

GI and LR: [cross-talk on Doar's official position]

LR: That's right. Yes, he was the assistant to Burke Marshall. He was, in fact, the only person from Washington to really help us do anything whatsoever. And that was true even after the Kennedy assassination.

GI: So even when the Kennedy administration becomes the Johnson administration for the last year, John Doar was still the person that you felt you could count on?

LR: We *knew* we could on him! We used to say there's a department in Washington called Justice and there's a town in Mississippi called Liberty. That said well how we felt about the Justice

Department. But there was John Doar. So, these offices needed to call him if anybody had disappeared. And they, just as a matter of routine, called Burke Marshall and the Kennedy administration, the Civil Rights Department. The Justice Department, I should say, Bobby Kennedy was Attorney General. Just to get the record. So that made us feel good. More importantly, it helped build the morale of African-Americans who were trying to get registered to vote. We could not offer them too much when we were canvassing and trying to convince people to register, to try to register to vote. They knew that they would get beat up or they knew the danger of getting beat up I should say, the danger of having their house burned down, having their mortgage called. Any loans they had called. If they were sharecroppers, being put off the land. They knew there was a danger of being killed. And what could we offer them? Well, if you're harassed, we'll tell Washington. That's about it.

### **RUN-INS WITH LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT**

GI: Did you have a run-in with law enforcement while you were in Holly Springs?

LR: All the time! From almost the minute I got there, I kept getting arrested on suspicion of this and suspicion of that! Stealing the shirt that I was wearing because it looked like something that was stolen from a clothing store. Where was my bill of sale? Suspicion of stealing my car. The owner's permit wasn't enough. Where's the bill of sale? And that was just local. The sheriff was named John Ash – we called him "Flick" Ash – kept arresting me, especially when I was there by myself. But then something happened to accelerate all this. I was delivering a load of books. This was in April, I believe, well before Freedom Summer was happening. I was driving a load of books from Greenville, Mississippi to Rust [College]. I had done this several times. And we were arrested in Oxford [Mississippi]. I was arrested, a group of us were arrested on suspicion of carrying literature, advocating the overthrow of the government of the state of Mississippi. That's literally the charge.

In order to go into our U-Haul, we insisted on and the sheriff got a search warrant and that's what the search warrant says. I have the search warrant. You are sitting next to my files where the search warrant is with those words. We were arrested on suspicion of carrying literature, advocating the overthrow of the government of the state of Mississippi. I explained to the sheriff that if I was going to overthrow something I wasn't going to start with no government of the state of Mississippi. That didn't work. When we were arrested, they let us go after a while. Then we went north to Holly Springs, we were arrested again in Holly Springs on something to do with not having proper license to drive a truck. Except we weren't driving a truck. I was stupidly driving a Studebaker Lark, which is a teeny little tin car hauling a U-Haul, which was dumb in itself. But it was not a truck. I noticed that somewhere between the two places I had a address stolen. But I let it go at the time because we were just lucky to be alive. And there's five that were arrested time.

Now fast forward to July, and Mickey Schwerner and Andy Goodman and J.C – Jim Chaney – have been killed. We knew they had been killed because they didn't call in to Jackson. Dave Dennis knew that they were killed because they were working for CORE, they weren't working for SNCC. Andy Goodman, as a matter of fact, he had just arrived. What was happening was that there was the training session for the white volunteers in Oxford, Ohio that was going on. Mickey Schwerner got a call that a church had been burned down in Neshoba County, so he left the

training and he brought with him, Andy Goodman, who he knew, and I think Cheney. I forgot whether he was that training, or he met them met them down there. He was from Neshoba [County]. We knew that they had been killed because they didn't call in.

Senator Eastland, James O. Eastland and the entire power structure of the state of Mississippi put out that they hadn't been killed probably. Their bodies were discovered yet. Eastland ran around saying they were "voluntarily disappeared" and were probably laughing it up "on Moscow gold in a New York hotel room." This was saying to any white Mississippian, "They're a bunch of Jewish Communists." New York meant Jewish; Moscow Gold spoke for itself. In order to prove his point that the three volunteers, that this was a hoax, that they weren't killed – you had to be there for this to make logical sense– in order to help prove that it was a hoax, Senator Eastland gave a speech on the floor of the Senate naming myself and Joni Rabinowitz, who I mentioned before, and a few others, mostly Jewish, as being Communists and we were running the civil rights movement in the state of Mississippi.

Part of his evidence was he said that they had discovered an address book with the names of a bunch of Communists in it. And he was talking about my address book that had been stolen when I was arrested in these places. When that speech was made and it was July 29th [1964], this paper came out. This is the local Marshall County paper [holds paper up to the camera], July 30th, 1964. It says, "Local civil rights worker has Communist Background." That's me. There's my picture. There is a caption that reads I'm leading a demonstration at the courthouse and I'm looking angry about something. Well, there's two things wrong with that. Number one, I wasn't leading a demonstration. I was there. Number two, I was angry because they were taking my picture. Then there was another article on the front page, "No room here for Communism." Here it is, "Reckless driving arrest by sheriff led to the discovery of 'Little Black Book' and Communist exposure."

That was the arrest in Holly Springs. I was saying something about not having the proper license for driving a truck. Now the reason that little black book is in quotes was in fact they were lying. My address was not a little black book; it was a little reddish-brown book. But they called it the "Little Brown Black Book Led to Communist Exposure." There's a picture of me – this was taken in Oxford when we were arrested several months earlier – and the fellow in the picture with me is named John Papworth. He was from England. And he was a nonviolent activist in England who later became actually a leading Episcopal Vicar and still was a leading Episcopal Vicar in England. So, when that happened . . . actually, two things happened. Number one, I was, as I said, never so scared in my life because before at least I could go from town to town and people didn't know who I was. Here, my picture is in the paper [holds up picture for the camera].

And the same articles, similar articles, were throughout the South in *The Jackson Clarion Ledger*, in the Memphis Daily Disappointment, whatever it was called [*The Commercial Appeal*] [laughs]. I was scared. And number two I was worried that the black community wouldn't have anything to do with me. That was one of the reasons that Eastland made the speech. He made a speech in order to say that it was a hoax. He made the speech in order to tell the white community that white organizers like myself are fair game. We weren't there for "no equal rights." We were a bunch of Communists. We were there to overthrow the country, to change the American way of life. And number three it was a signal to the black community to ignore us.

I was so afraid I stayed in the Freedom House. I was afraid to go outside. I didn't know what to do until a preacher, a black preacher came to the Freedom House. He asked me, "Are you a Communist?" Well, I wasn't but I didn't want to say no because I didn't want to feed into "red baiting," to the idea that everybody helping equal rights was a bunch of Communists out to overthrow the government. I didn't want to say yes because I wasn't. I don't know, I mumbled something, you know, "Oh, I don't know it depends on what you mean by Communist?" So, he said, "Well, that's too bad because I was hoping you were a Communist because I had some questions I wanted to ask you." And then he said, "You know if it would get me my freedom, I would paint my ass red." This is from a preacher. So that I knew I was okay with the black community. I was still afraid of getting killed by whites, but I knew the black community wouldn't marginalize me. But what happened after that was these arrests that I was mentioning on little things they stepped up the pace of these arrests.

I was arrested for, I forget what, bumping into another car. I was arrested for this and that. I was arrested for not having the proper button on the floor of the car to have my bright [lights] go on. According to "Flick" Ash, the sheriff who arrested me, when you mashed that button, your brights were supposed to go – I'm making this up because I don't remember exactly – in five seconds. It took me thirty seconds. Except I was arrested in the middle of the afternoon and I didn't need my brights on. But I was arrested during the day on the vote for the Agricultural Stabilization Committees. These were committees where every farmer was allowed to vote. Everybody that worked the land, you didn't have to register to vote, sharecropper, anybody could vote. And they were very important because they decided who would get what for planting or not planting crops. Cotton allotments because the main crop was cotton.

Up until that year, 1964, not a single black person was allowed to vote. They were just chased away. When I say not allowed, I mean they were shooed away by gunpoint. They were scared to vote. One of the main things we did was that year and the next year some seventy people, seventy African-Americans were elected to these committees. I was arrested making the rounds of voting places of the Agricultural Stabilization committee votes. And that's why old Flick wanted me off the road. That's why arrested me on this charge of not having the proper thing with my bright lights.

We get arrested for not having the proper button to have my brights on and the fine was \$200. There I was in jail. And it occurred to me, looking back at all these arrests, that they knew the fine right away for suspicion of stealing my shirt. Things with the car. It occurred to me, and I had always given the fine to get out of jail. As I said earlier, we didn't want to be in jail, myself or SNCC. We're giving all these fines to "Flick" Ash. It occurred to me that I had become a cottage industry in the city of Holly Springs.

There was more than civil rights working here. They were making money off of me! I would just pay the fine and get out. And that thought made me mad [laughs]. For me it wasn't just that they stopped the work with the Agricultural Stabilization Committee elections, but I was giving money to the police department of Holly Springs. I refused to pay the fine. I said, "Flick, you gotta' come up with something better than mashing the button for the brights.



So, he says, "Well, how about \$150? He started to negotiate with me. And I said, "Flick, I have given you "X" amount of money" – I remembered it at the time – "in the past three months and that's it." Not a penny more. I will not pay this fine. It's ridiculous. And then I started to negotiate with him. "How about \$50?" he said. "No!" I was sitting in jail two or three days, I forget exactly. He brought in the county prosecutor, I think this is who it was, from Tupelo to reason with me. I think "Flick" figured this guy was from the North and maybe he could talk sense to me. And the guy said, "How about \$5 and get out of here?" I said no. And I told him the story. I think I convinced him that it was ridiculous, and I was paying all his money to "Flick" [laughs]. But, in any case, they let me go. That was the last time I got arrested on one of these stupid charges and paying all this money.

GI: What kind of leverage did you have? Why would he negotiate with you? You're under arrest! Is this like a game to him? I'm really fascinated by this where it's almost like you two have developed a relationship, and now he's negotiating with you to pay a fine that you're not required to negotiate.

LR: Well, that's actually a very good point. I've never thought of that. Later, though, I learned that "Flick" Ash, there was more to him than met the eye. Right then, at that period of time, he was just a white Southern sheriff like any other. He'd smack you with a billy-club upside the head for no reason. He arrested me and Ivanhoe Donaldson. He threatened to hit Ivanhoe Donaldson, and don't threaten Ivanhoe Donaldson because you got hit back. He was just an ordinary cracker. Later, I found out that he had real political ambitions and he saw which way the wind was blowing as far as voter registration stuff was. And his political ambition was he wanted to run for state legislature, which he did, and he wanted to run for the clerk of this court or whatever.

Mississippi has fifteen different kind of courts and he wanted to run for them. He also wanted to make some money in Marshall County. He ended up, there was Flick's Lumber Yard and Flick's Restaurant. At that time, though, he knew which way the wind was blowing. And I suspect he was trying to build a record of not being so hard on civil rights workers. Later on, fifteen years later, he told me, "You know, I just arrested y'all to keep you safe from the Klan. The Klan was gonna come down to kill you. That's why I arrested you all the time."

GI: Did you believe him?

LR: No, because he also beat us up. He had, at that time, this is fifteen years later, in his office a picture of [Senator] Eastland and Aaron Henry, and he said, "I brought these two people together." I came to find out actually he did, later on. So, I think part of the answer to your question is he had his eye on the future. By the way, as a white person, he never became a Republican. He always stayed a Democrat, even after the Democratic Party in Mississippi was and is majority black. All whites were members of the Republican Party. He never did that. It's interesting.

Fifteen, twenty years later – and I went back to Holly Springs pretty often – "Flick" just died two years ago. Flick would say things like [President Donald] Trump says today, "You know, I'm the most unprejudiced person in the world." Which is bunch of crap. He once told me, he said that he was different from most Southern sheriffs. He said, of course, they were not educated. He was

educated. He had been in the Army. He had fought in Korea and he said because he was in the Army, he learned a certain disciplined way of doing things. Most Southern sheriffs were not. He always claimed that he kept the Klan out of Marshall County. I don't know if that's true or not.

GI: Did he?

LR: I have no idea [laughs].

## **THE LEGACY OF JULIAN BOND**

GI: How do you see Julian Bond's legacy from the 1960-68 period?

LR: Well, I'll tell you how I experienced him. When I went through this stuff of being red baited, Communists running the civil rights movement in Marshall County or Mississippi, most of the people in SNCC didn't quite get what that was about. SNCC have been red baited from the minute it got organized in 1960. As a matter of fact, there's a famous story [involving] Marion Barry, who was the first chair actually of the "temporary" Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, went to speak at the Democratic convention 1960. He was asked about are Communists in your organization and he said what SNCC always said. "We don't care who they are, what they're doing, if they're willing to put their body on the line, we don't want to ask what your political beliefs are."

Having said that, there was a period within SNCC it was building up, and it was there in Freedom Summer. Frankly, a lot of it came from Allard Lowenstein, which was red baiting. For a while there, Anne Braden, who was a left-wing leader, a white leader, was not allowed on SNCC projects. So here I am, red baited. And there's confusion, basically, among a lot of people. Not among my boss or former boss, Ivanhoe Donaldson, because he was much more savvy about politics than I was. But Julian Bond was the major exception to what I'm saying within SNCC workers. Now, Jim Forman was, too. But, at this time, I was not relating to Jim Forman. He was working in Mississippi. But I did run into Julian a lot, and Julian understood what this red baiting was all about. The things that I said earlier putting a target on our back. Alienating us from the black community. I could talk to him about my feelings. Now, I didn't know this at the time, but later on, I learned that his father, Horace Bond, the president of Lincoln University, they were friends with Paul Robeson and W.E.B. DuBois, that Julian grew up in a very progressive, very sophisticated household. So being called a Communist was not new to him.

Oh yes, I wrote this obituary for Julian and here's Julian Bond, this cute little kid who grew up to be a handsome young man, with Paul Robeson at his house. Here's the full picture, you can't see it here. This is just the cut [holds the picture up to the camera]. But the full picture, Paul Robeson is kneeling in order to get at the same height as Julian. So that's one thing. And the other, talking about this period, SNCC was falling apart. There was growing tension between white and black workers, which, by the way, in 1962, I wrote about and in fact had a radio show [at Antioch] I mentioned that the future of SNCC is going to be, I forget the term I used, but "Black Power." I might have said "Negro chauvinism."

But what I meant by that was that . . . I meant this and Julian's fits into this picture, in that he understood what I'm saying, and he made it clear to me that he understood it very early on. When SNCC first started, it was a civil rights organization. It was talking about the right to have a hamburger, but shortly after that the right to vote.

As an American, blacks had the right to vote because they were American. It was part of the rubric at the time of being a melting pot. America was a melting pot. And so African Americans had a right to vote because they were American. Well, that was true but that's not the way African Americans really experienced segregation and Jim Crow. They did not experience it as deprived Americans. They experienced it as black people. They didn't want to become part of the melting pot. They didn't want to melt. They wanted to be black and have their rights. Part of this, at the time, was nascent period of growing the black culture movement and black identity. This was not new. There was the was Marcus Garvey movement. Forever, there were these movements, but I saw this growing in the South and also the idea of having whites organize blacks just didn't work. Because of Jim Crow, it wasn't enough that I was staying there being silent and letting the black organizers do the talking. The people that we were speaking to looked at me anyway as the white guy.

Julian understood this dynamic. He understood what was happening. But he did not understand it in the sense of being an angry black person. He understood it at a higher level. He understood in terms of the big picture. And frankly that's how I understood it. A lot of whites said that they felt insulted and felt horrible about "getting kicked out" of SNCC. But whites weren't exactly kicked out of SNCC. In '64, '65, the people who were leading SNCC, Stokely Carmichael at the time and others, came to the conclusion that blacks should organize blacks and whites could organize whites. That, in fact, the problem was in the white community. That's where racism came from. And whites should go to the white community to organize.

Julian understood this and part of his legacy in the South – and I want to talk more about his legacy as a national figure later – but I'm talking right now about his legacy as part of SNCC. He acted as a moderating force when all this was going on. There's a story – and I was not at the Waveland Conference where they made these decisions to separate. I knew a lot of people there. In fact, my attitude by that time was, "I can leave the South? You mean, I'm dismissed? I don't have to get shot at anymore? I'm relieved. Thank you!" But most whites – and by the way I went to work for Anne Braden because I took literally whites should organize whites – but a lot of a lot of whites were going through a horribly traumatic emotional period at this time. Julian took a bunch of white people out to dinner during the Waveland Conference.

GI: What year would this be?

LR: 1965. And explain to them what I'm saying because he understood it. Basically, he said don't take this personally. If you want to stick with the progressive movement for change in this country, this is where it's at. Black people are always, really always have been, the major force for progressive change in America. They brought America from the rubric of the melting pot to the rubric of diversity because of "Black Power." They're saying we want our rights not as deprived Americans because that was not a wrong statement.

But they had not experienced deprivation as Americans, people that had the right to be white. And most people that use the melting pot, that's what they meant by it. Everybody has a right to be white. Black people didn't want a part of that. They wanted their rights as black people in America. We're not just Americans; we're black people.

Julian understood that. Julian understood that that had been true from the beginning, and that the reason black people had always been in the forefront of every fight to advance America was because it was to the self-interest of the black community to advance America even in a way more so than even the labor movement. He understood that. He understood that not through reading it but through living it, being the son of the people that he was the son of. Later, when he became a national figure, probably mostly because of his good looks and great voice, he did some acting in this area [Washington, D.C.] and invited us all to some theater groups that he was acting. He knew that he was taking advantage of that, about his person. He was using it politically for good purpose to advance really the progressive movement.

He helped start the Southern Poverty Law Center. He was also on the board of directors of every progressive organization you can think of and much broader than just black rights. He was on the board of directors of everything. And he would do everything that people asked him to do. I had asked him to be the moderator for a folksong concert that I was putting on of labor and civil rights songs in Lake Worth, Florida. And he said yes because he understood the role the labor movement as well. I think his real legacy, if you wanted to sum it up, he was a bridge, in his person, [to] what we would call the freedom movement. As I said, SNCC started out as a civil rights movement, a civil rights organization. But it ended up as a freedom organization [that] went from civil rights as Americans to diversity rights as black people. He was a bridge for all of this. He understood it. And he brought the freedom movement into the movement for women's rights to the movement against the Klan, against hatred. He brought those movements into the freedom movement.

GI: Some younger people watching this and reading your remarks may not understand the difference between the "civil rights movement" and the "freedom movement." Would you mind clarifying that for some of the younger people watching and reading this?

LR: The civil rights movement was talking about formal legal rights of people. There were civil rights guaranteed by the Constitution, "civil" meaning society. What are your rights in law? Well, you have the right to vote. You have the right to equality. These were all court decisions. You can point to a court decision that says you have the right to vote. And laws – civil rights. And why do you have these rights? Because you are an American citizen. These are legal rights. But black people for 400 years didn't feel themselves to be Americans. They were only three-fifths of an American for hundreds of years. Well, ever since the Constitution came to be. Before that they were nothing. They were chattel, property. They weren't people. And it's not that they felt themselves not to be people, but they knew that this is how America was treating them.

They did not feel part of America. They knew America considered them property. Nobody considered themselves property. And then they knew America considered themselves three-fifths of a person. This is a great overgeneralization. There's people, a lot of pretty courageous people who say, "I'm black. I've always considered myself an American." That's true. But, by and

large, the average black person did not feel themselves part of America the way they saw America being portrayed on television. They wanted freedom for black people. Freedom meaning, as black people, they wanted to be as free in America as white people. Not because it said so in the Constitution, but because they were black people and had been here before most

white people, before the ancestors of those white people living in America. They built America. Black people built America. This is what it was in their mind. This is what they meant by freedom.

GI: Do you have any final thoughts on Julian Bond's legacy?

LR: When Julian died, his wish – and by the way part of his legacy is, really this is hardly ever spoken about – was to make the movement more than just a religious movement. He was not religious. And he never pretended to be. Most of us sort of used religion, just went along with it. Julian didn't fight it. He wasn't against religion. But that was not part of him. He never pretended it was. And that's something else that he helped broaden the freedom movement and he helped bring non-religious movements closer to religious ones. When he died, there were no religious funeral services. There were memorial services later on.

What there was, and I believe this was his wish, was that at a certain time on a certain day, people across the country would put flames or put candles in leaves and paper that would float on water. And that's what happened. At a certain time, people across the country did this in memory of Julian. And that was Julian in a couple of ways. First of all, bringing people together across the country. Across the environmental movement that he was also active in. The freedom movement, the women's movement, the union movement. People that were fighting on all fronts for progressive causes that weren't speaking to each other – didn't have occasion to speak to each other, not necessarily opposed with each other – were doing the same thing at the same time in memory of Julian. Putting this light when things were floating in the water. That's one thing. And then when you float in the water you eventually get to the ocean where you're spreading. You are part of a movement that is spreading worldwide. And that was Julian, too. Part of bringing people together in a movement that was spreading. I think that sums up his legacy.

I want to say one more thing. Julian died very suddenly. He was on vacation. I'd seen him very shortly before he left and he was at the 50th anniversary of Freedom Summer, which I had helped to organize. You could see he wasn't as vigorous as he was. This was on the Tougaloo [College in Jackson, Mississippi] campus. He had to ride on carts instead of hiking all over the place. But he was still vibrant. When he died, it hit me so hard. It's hard to describe. I can't say that we were close. But he meant so much to me that I felt that something was lost in me something that I had depended on as an activist. I depended on the existence of Julian Bond. And now he was gone.