TRANSCRIPT: Jim Grant

Interviewee:	Jim Grant
Interviewer:	Josh Davis
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START OF INTERVIEW

Josh Davis: We can start.

Jim Grant: Okay.

Josh Davis: And I'm going to press—.

Jim Grant: Alright. Well—.

Josh Davis: Record right [camera beep?] here. Okay.

Jim Grant: Alright.

Josh Davis: I'm sitting down today with Mr. Jim Grant. We're here in Wilson, North Carolina. It is—I always forget the date.

Jim Grant: This the twenty-ninth, I believe.

Josh Davis: I think that's right, July twenty-ninth, 2014. And we're going to talk about Mr. Grant's career and just both your work as a journalist and an activist. That's really what our project is focused on, where those two came together, and you're a great example of that. Maybe we could just start with talking about your upbringing and where

you grew up and those kinds of things. I usually like to just ask folks a little bit about where they were before they were adults.

Jim Grant: Oh, okay. Well, I mean, I was actually several places because, [clears throat] of course, I started out in Beaufort County, South Carolina. And then—.

JD: Is that where you were born?

JG: That's where I was born.

JD: Oh.

JG: And we lived there, I guess, until—I guess I was about eight or nine, and then we moved. First we moved to Baltimore and we stayed maybe for about a year or two there, because that's where my dad, you know, was able to get work, you know. He worked with the federal government. And then, we moved from there to Connecticut. And I grew up in sort of a rural area in Connecticut, north of Hartford, really just to the north of Hartford, in a town called Wilson, [laughing] you know, which is, you know, kind of, you know, strange, because here I am in Wilson, North Carolina. But, I mean, that wasn't—you know, of course, we didn't, you know, foresee that, you know, all the way back then.

And we, you know, we just kind of grew up there. It was a lot different, of course, you know, coming from the segregated South to, you know, an area where there were very few black folks, you know, in the Wilson area at the time. Hartford is just to the south of us, and that's a fairly large city with a substantial black population, although it's not, you know, majority black by no stretch of the imagination. Actually, a lot of the folks that I grew up with, at least during my early teens and into my teen years, you

know, were white. So, you know, I kind of had a bringing up that was, you know, both segregated to some extent in the early years and, of course, you know, in the latter years, you know, I grew up, you know, in an integrated area. So, you know, and I think, you know, a lot of that probably—well, sort of pushed me in maybe a different direction than I might have gone had I been, you know, in the South where things were, you know, a lot different.

I mean, at the time I began becoming involved in things, [0:05:00] there were a couple of instances in which we—when I say "we", I'm talking about my cousins and myself, and there were about five of us that hung together. And we—I guess it was in 1949, there were a couple of department stores in Hartford which were still, you know, they still wouldn't serve blacks at the lunch counters, [laughs] believe it or not. I mean, you know, we're talking about 1949 in Connecticut. But, you know, I mean, it was still spotty in the North, as well as, you know, of course, down South it was—you know, I mean, you just didn't go certain places.

But, you know, it was true this way at this particular store: Brown, Thomson's. And we did a little demonstration there. You know, there were five of us, and we went in and we asked, you know, if we could get something to eat. And the people looked at us like, [laughs] like we had just come from Mars! And so, we sat down and we waited, and nobody came out to wait on us. And then, we got up and we went over to the counter and asked, you know, "Hey, you know, we're waiting here. How about waiting on us?"

And the guy went in the back, and then out comes the manager. And the manager tells us, "Well, you know, you fellows, we kind of have a policy. We don't—," and they

never said that they don't serve black folks there. But they said that, "Well, you know, you guys are—you're here, but, you know, you're not like our other customers," in so many words. And so, anyway, we said, "Well, what does that mean, 'like your other customers'?" And so, finally, what they ended up doing was they went ahead and they served us.

And, you know, other people in Hartford have said that, you know, well, that was the first time they ever heard of any black folks being served at Brown, Thomson's lunch counter. And, I mean, it was no big fanfare or anything like that. And, you know, no cops came, because we thought that might happen. And, you know, there was no newspaper—of course, TV at that time, there wasn't much TV in 1949. [Laughs]

JD: Um-hmm.

JG: But anyway, we got that taken care of, and apparently people started, you know, taking advantage of that, you know, once that was done. So, I mean, sometimes, you know, you can do things, you know, in a kind of quiet way and still get something done.

JD: Um-hmm.

JG: And so, you know, we did that, and that was 1949.

JD: Wow. I'm going to pause it just for a second.

JG: Sure. [Camera beeps?]

JD: Because I want—alright. [Camera beeps?] So, if that protest was in 1949, you were just thirteen years old.

JG: Yeah.

JD: Was that just kids in that protest? I mean, you seem—.

JG: Well, teenagers. [0:10:00] I mean, you know, I was the youngest. My cousins were older. I mean, they were like seventeen and eighteen.

JD: That's still very, very young. Were—did you talk about things like race relations with your parents? Was that something that they talked to you about, that you had a—?

JG: Well, I mean, we discussed things. I mean, we didn't really get into it too deeply, but, I mean, you know, it was, you know, obvious that there were differences, you know. And, you know, there were other kinds of things, you know, up there in the North that you would run into sometimes. Even, you know, if we would go out in certain restaurants, you know, people would look at you kind of funny, but, you know, they would serve you. But, I mean, you know, it was clear that, you know, not everything was peachy-keen, as they say, up there in the North. And so, I mean, you know, there was work that had to be done up there, too.

But, I mean, at the time, of course, I wasn't—I was getting into it, but, I mean, I wasn't into it like, of course, I got into it later on, you know, as I got more mature and realized, you know, that we're dealing with a system. I mean, it's not just, you know, a thing that happens here, there, and a few other places, but that it's part of a whole system that's designed to really, you know, oppress folks, not just black folks but all folks, I mean, working people, in particular, to keep them, you know, fighting each other, basically. But, I mean, I didn't realize that until later, obviously.

JD: Um-hmm. You said your dad worked for the federal government. What did he do?

JG: He carried mail.

JD: He was a mail carrier? Okay.

JG: Yeah, um-hmm.

JD: And was he involved with the union?

JG: Yeah.

JD: Okay;

JG: Yeah, he was a—at the time, let's see. Well, the letter carriers had their own union. The clerks had a separate union from the letter carriers. But the letter carriers had their own union, and that was—it wasn't segregated like some of the unions were, you know. Particularly down here in the South, they were segregated to a large extent. I mean, even the federal unions were segregated.

JD: So, had he been involved in a union in South Carolina?

JG: No, uh-uh. No, he hadn't, [laughs] definitely not. I mean, you weren't involved if you were black, you know, in any kind of union activities as such. But, you know, of course, up there it wasn't no problem, and so he was a member of the union. He wasn't a steward or anything like that. But, you know, he had a union consciousness. And, I mean, he admired people like Paul Robeson, for instance, who, I mean, a lot of even black folks kind of stayed away from Paul Robeson, you know, because of the, you know, of the political label that they put on him at the time.

But, you know, Paul Robeson had a home in Enfield, Connecticut, which wasn't that far from where we were living. You know, because we were in Wilson, and Enfield was maybe like fifteen miles or so on the other side of the Connecticut River. And [0:15:00] I remember my dad saying that Robeson had a home up there, and he told us that he would take us by sometime so that we could look at it. And, you know, he admired Robeson for speaking out at the time, which was not easy for him. In fact, Robeson really got in trouble a couple of places. I think he was mobbed at one spot in upstate New York when he came to perform.

But, so, I mean, that was kind of an atmosphere of—well, I mean, these are things that are happening. And maybe these are not the things that most people are talking about that are happening, but these are things that are happening that are important, you know, for you to know. And, you know, and, of course, my sisters, all of us came up in that type of atmosphere. Mom was—she worked with the NAACP up there in Connecticut. And so, you know, we had that, you know, to kind of steer us in the right direction.

JD: Yeah. That's good context. That helps a lot, because your family's roots—I mean, hearing that your mom was in the NAACP and that your dad was involved with a union, I think, helps to set the stage for some of the other stuff we'll be talking about—.

JG: Right.

JD: That you got involved with. So, when you turned eighteen—I don't want to skip ahead too far but—what did you do? I don't know much about—.

JG: Well, I went to school at the University of Connecticut.

JD: Okay.

JG: And graduated. And then, you know, I went on and ended up going to Penn State.

JD: For grad school?

JG: For grad school. And that's basically where things really started—you know, that's when I really started getting involved in the bigger picture, so to speak, you know, rather than just, you know, local stuff. And, you know, we had—there was, let's see, in terms of groups at Penn State, they—well, let's see. I'm trying to remember exactly. Well, there was a—and, of course, this was, you know, now we're talking about 1960, [19]58, [19]59, and [19]60.

And, of course, during that time, that was before the Civil Rights Movement really started blossoming. But, you know, people were concerned about the war. And there was a group, a student group, that had just gotten started at Penn State, which was called Students for Peace, and it was called SENSE, S-E-N-S-E, Students for Peace. And, you know, there were people in there, some of whom were Quakers, because, you know, you're in Pennsylvania so you're going to have that. And then, also, there were some political folks, people who were basically members because of, you know, their previous upbringing, probably as—[0:20:00] you know, some of which who were on the left and some of whom weren't, were sort of in the middle of things. But, you know, all of us kind of united around that one particular issue. And, of course, I was involved with that.

There was—I guess this was the first year that I went to Penn State. I guess it was [19]59. There was an activity that took place there involving the barbershop. And one of the barbershops—in fact, well, this was the only barbershop that cut people's hair.

JD: African American?

JG: No. This was white.

JD: Okay.

JG: I mean, these people were white. I mean, they wouldn't serve black folks. You know, African Americans had to go to Altoona, Pennsylvania, which was twenty-two miles away, to get our hair cut. And, you know, of course, you know, some of the brothers and sisters from Philadelphia, you know, they weren't going to tolerate, you know, [laughs] this kind of foolishness. And so, you know, we—when I say "we", I was involved, too—we decided that we would have a demonstration.

And we went and we took over the chairs in the man's barbershop and just sat in the chairs. And he called the police, and the police came. And, of course, we didn't leave but we weren't arrested. I mean, this was a college town, and they were trying to keep bad publicity from leaking out. I mean, you know, you have this—this is State College, Pennsylvania, up in the middle of the State of Pennsylvania, up in the mountains.

And, you know, so what finally ended up happening was that a black man from Tyrone, Pennsylvania, which is a small town between Altoona and State College, decided he would open up a shop that would cut everybody's hair, and his name was Bob. Now, Bob actually could pass for white, [laughs] so it wasn't, you know, obvious when you come into Bob's shop that this was a black shop. But, I mean, you know, we were able to get our hair cut there, and that kind of solved the problem, in terms of the students anyway.

JD: So, were there other black grad students at the time?

JG: Yeah.

JD: So, you weren't alone?

JG: No, uh-uh. No, in fact, there were a lot of black grad students from the South that came to Penn State, you know, because at the time they weren't allowed to go to grad school down here. And so, the state would pay for them to go to school in a place like Penn State and the University of Pennsylvania and other places in the North, you know, pay tuition and everything. I mean, you know, [laughs] anything to keep them from going to school down here.

JD: Yeah. That's a—.

JG: It was crazy! I mean, financially—.

JD: That is a lot of money and extra effort to—.

JG: Yeah! I mean, financially, I mean, it was stupid!

JD: Yeah, which, you know, like you said, just goes to show how important segregation was to maintain, that they were willing to spend extra.

JG: Right, [0:25:00] right, right.

JD: Well, um—.

JG: But, I mean, you know, I mean, that—and I probably, you know, stayed on that point, you know, pretty long, but that was a key issue at the time. And it kind of propelled me in terms of what my—I mean, my final determination, in terms of my career, was sort of step-by-step, I was being pulled into a different realm than a chemist.

JD: That's interesting you went to get a PhD in chemistry.

JG: Right.

JD: I was just thinking of another black activist of that era who went to go get a PhD in chemistry, and that was Marion Barry.

JG: Yeah.

JD: And that's just a coincidence, but I think—.

JG: Yeah, well, Marion—in fact, Marion—I met Marion when he was with SNCC at the time. He was in Tennessee. He was a Tennessee traveler, you know, with SNCC. And I met him and I met Ivanhoe Donaldson and I met—you know, there was a whole bunch of guys that came in around that timeframe. Julian Bond was another. And Don Scott, he was in Alabama. And, I mean, you know, you just got in contact with these folks because, you know, I mean, these were the people who were involved in doing the same types of things that you were interested in doing and, you know, getting things done, you know, in the South, in particular.

JD: So, tell me, you know, what else was going on with you? I mean, you said you were being pulled away from your original career plans.

JG: From chemistry, yeah, um-hmm.

JD: Yeah, so how did that continue? How did you continue to get more involved in activism?

JG: Well, I mean, this was during the antiwar period. And so, you know, the war was a big issue, at least, you know, when they started drafting folks, which they did in those days. And, you know, people were concerned about their own personal well-being, you know, because, you know, I guess it was after—when was it, [19]62, I guess—that's when it really kicked in because that's when, you know, the Vietnam stuff began really,

you know—I guess, was it [19]62 or [19]63? I'm not sure exactly when it was, but, you know, this was the time when people were concerned about their deferments. And a lot of the students at Penn State were becoming quite concerned about maintaining their, you know, their student deferments and that sort of thing. And, of course, you know, we had—more people were showing interest in the peace issue.

And also, during that time, I guess it was the Students for Democratic Society began developing on a national level, and they had a—they actually were able to get a chapter going at Penn State. And, you know, I was involved in that.

JD: You were involved with SDS?

JG: Right.

JD: Well, that's interesting. When I think of SDS, I usually think of almost entirely white chapters.

JG: Right, right. But, I mean, you know, there were some chapters in [0:30:00] the northern areas, in the northern states, that had black members. And again, as I'm saying, I mean, you know, I'm sure that my upbringing in the North was probably what made it easier for me, you know, to get involved in what, you know, might be considered to be an all-white situation. I mean, I wasn't—you know, that wasn't a big thing with me, because, I mean, that's—I mean, when you live in Wilson, Connecticut, [laughs] and went to school in Windsor, I mean, you know, you didn't—I mean, that wasn't a big thing, you know, being involved with white folks.

JD: You had been surrounded by white folks.

JG: Yeah, I mean, I was raised up around them.

JD: Yeah. That's interesting.

JG: Yeah. So, I mean, you know, like I say, I mean, my upbringing probably, you know, pushed me, you know, into the war effort probably more so than the straight civil rights kind of thing, although, you know, I was involved in civil rights, too. I mean, it was just—you know, it was just part of how we, you know, how we were raised, and who we were around, and that sort of thing.

But, yeah, I was involved with the SDS chapter there. And we did a lot of things there, you know, including having a big demonstration in front of the, um, what they call the Old Main. That's where all the administrators had their offices. And, you know, in terms of the whole thing—what did they call it—*in loco parentis*, where the administrators were acting more like the parents, you know, of the students, you know, in terms of not allowing us, you know, sort of a free—not so much free run of the place, but at least, you know—I mean where you didn't have to answer to a housemother, you know, if you lived in the dormitories. I mean, you had to sign in and you couldn't come in past a certain—I mean, it was like you had a curfew.

JD: And those protests were about those rules?

JG: About those rules there, along with what was happening, you know, in terms of the war.

JD: Oh, that was the same protest?

JG: Um-hmm.

JD: Okay, so you kind of combined—yeah.

JG: Combined. We combined stuff, you know. I mean, you know, I mean, the connections were obvious. [Laughing] I mean, you know, that, you know, you had one issue where, you know, people were being in danger of actually being taken and sent to war at the time. I mean, this was a very real thing that people could understand. I mean, it wasn't—you know, you didn't have to have a degree in political science or be on the leftwing of the communist party to see that this was something that was, that needed taking care of.

JD: Hmm.

JG: So, yeah. So, I mean, that's basically how I ended up getting pulled into that. And, of course, I guess this was in 19—you know, my dates are kind of fuzzy, obviously, because, you know, I'm thinking back [laughs] a few years. But I think this was—wasn't this in [19]65? There was a big [0:35:00] effort, and this is when folks from the South started, you know, coming up North to recruit folks. Yeah, that was—it was Freedom Summer. Yeah.

JD: [19]64.

JG: [19]64, right. Right. And there was a big demonstration at the Hammermill Paper Company in Erie, Pennsylvania.

JD: Hammermill?

JG: Hammermill.

JD: Okay.

JG: Now, Hammermill also had a company in Alabama. And so, you know, the idea was to try to stop work and activity at the Hammermill Paper Mill in Erie,

Pennsylvania, because of, you know, in support of the efforts the folks in Alabama, you know, who were—I'm trying to remember whether—it wasn't a strike, but it was an action because of the racism that was, you know, involved at the Hammermill Paper Company in Alabama. And we were in support of that.

And so, a bunch of us went up to—and these were people who were SDS, you know, members. And we went up to Erie, Pennsylvania, and we took part in an all-day demonstration there, in which some of us sat in the roadway to make sure that the trucks couldn't either come in or go out from the Hammermill Paper Company. And then, some of us sat on the railroad tracks to block the trains from coming in. And so, we shut the place down.

JD: And this was because the plant in Alabama—?

JG: Right.

JD: What? Did they segregate their workforce? Or did they even have black employees? Or what did they—?

JG: Well, they had black employees, but, you know, it was a segregated operation. Apparently the black employees—I forget what exactly the issue was, but it had to do with the way in which the company was being run down there in Georgia, in Alabama. And so, in fact, let's see, it was one of the SCLC people, C.T. Vivian—

JD: Um-hmm.

JG: Was actually the one who coordinated the effort in Erie, Pennsylvania.

JD: Wow.

JG: And, you know, he was the contact, so that when we went up there—and, of course, we all got arrested. They arrested everybody.

JD: Was that your first time being arrested?

JG: No. It wasn't the first time, you know, that I had been arrested for this type of thing. I had had some arrests previously in Connecticut. Of course, I forgot [laughs] a lot of that, you know, because it was,—you know. And there were other, you know—now, you know, I don't know whether I need to drop back to some of the stuff in Connecticut that happened, you know, during the time, because we skipped over some of that.

JD: No, it's okay. I just—I brought it up because it's going to come up again in the interview, and I just mentioned it. [0:40:00] So, we don't have to bring up everything.

JG: Yeah.

JD: This is all really good information.

JG: Yeah. I mean, it's—you know, I mean, you know, like I say, I was being molded, sort of. And I mean that when I say, "I was being molded," it wasn't as if, you know, I was just, you know, going along with something. I mean, it was something that I was interested in and I was being, you know, I was being shown, you know, the bigger picture each time, you know. I was getting involved in some of the local issues because, I mean, there were local issues there in Connecticut that we were involved in, and there was a whole thing around the beach, Hammonasset Park, in southern Connecticut. That was off limits. It was considered off limits to black folks. And, you know, of course, that had to be dealt with also.

JD: This was when you were in high school?

JG: This was when I was in high school, um-hmm. Yeah, I mean, there were—and there were a couple of times when we did get arrested.

JD: For protests?

JG: Yeah.

JD: Wow.

JG: But, I mean, you know, we always got out. I mean, it was—you know, the group [clears throat] the group that we were part of, you know, of course, protested, and, of course, you know, we wouldn't have to worry about, you know, somebody coming to get us out of jail.

JD: What was the group?

JG: Well, there was one that was called NECAP, let's see, North End Community Action Project, I think that's what it was. It was set up in Hartford but, you know, there were people from Windsor that took part, as well.

JD: Was that a predominantly black organization?

JG: No, it was black and white.

JD: What did your parents say when you got arrested?

JG: Well, I'm trying to remember exactly how it was. But, I mean, it didn't seem like it was a big thing.

JD: [Laughs] I think you would remember if it was a big thing.

JG: I mean, you know, it wasn't as if it was unexpected, let's put it that way.

JD: I mean, again, you're painting a picture of parents who—.

JG: I mean, they, you know, they weren't (bombed/bummed) out, you know, if we got arrested for those types of things. I mean, those were the types of things that, you know, I mean, if you were going to get arrested, that's what you should get arrested for.

JD: Were your parents both originally from Beaufort, South Carolina? Or where had they grown up?

JG: Well, Mom was originally from Beaufort, but my dad was from Virginia.

JD: Where in Virginia?

JG: Was it Loretto? It was Essex County, Virginia. You know, I mean, again, it's rural, rural Virginia.

JD: Yeah. Okay.

JG: But, I mean, he had spent some time in New York and in other places, too. So. I mean, he wasn't—so, I mean, he knew that there were some things that needed to happen. And so, he wasn't at all, you know, all that concerned, you know, when the numbers started going up, in terms of the numbers of arrests and that sort of thing. [Laughs] I mean, you know, what's—I mean, they—in fact, I would say that they sort of supported us.

JD: Um-hmm. Well, that's good. Well, that's nice to hear.

JG: Yeah.

JD: I mean, I'm sure you know this, [0:45:00] but it's surprising to some people when they learn that there was a lot of pressure in some families to stay away from civil rights, in some African American families. There were a lot of families that were very disappointed with their grown children when they got involved. I'm not trying to say that

was the norm, but I've certainly heard lots of stories from activists whose parents were not supportive like yours.

JG: Right, right. Well, I mean, you know, I don't know. As I said, I mean, you know, my folks, you know, they had a different outlook on life, perhaps, than some of the others. I mean, you know, maybe some of the more wealthier blacks possibly had misgivings with their children, you know, getting involved in civil rights and that sort of thing. But, you know, I don't know. I mean, you know, it might be a class thing.

JD: Um-hmm.

JG: But, I mean, you know, that wasn't a problem with us, you know, nor with any of the rest of us who kind of hung together. I mean, you know, it was my uncles and aunts and stuff. I mean, all of us, you know, we kind of—you know, we had support, you know, basically, from our parents. And, you know, I didn't know my grandparents because they were dead, of course, at the time. But, I mean, you know, it wasn't a big thing when we started getting arrested. And that was good! I mean, it was good because, you know, I'm sure—and particularly, you know, amongst some of the white activists, I mean, that was a real problem in some cases, you know, because I know that some of them were really, you know, down on their kids, you know, for being involved. But then, there were some who weren't!

JD: Yeah. If we fast forward back to graduate school, were you already writing by then, writing news stories or any kind of journalism yet?

JG: Not by then. I didn't really start doing a lot of writing until after, you know, of course, after I graduated.

JD: So, when did you graduate?

JG: I graduated, finally finished the PhD in—I guess it was [19]68.

JD: Okay.

JG: And, you know, of course, I've never, you know, [laughs] really done anything with it. I mean, I went directly into VISTA and, you know, I was sent to North Carolina.

JD: And VISTA is the federal program—?

JG: Yeah, it was sort of a—it was a Peace Corps but, you know, here.

JD: The United States.

JG: In the U.S., right. Yeah. And so, you know, I stayed with them for, I guess it was, well, nine months. And then, of course, I ended up getting expelled because, you know, I was also active with the war.

JD: So, where in North Carolina were you?

JG: Charlotte.

JD: So, yeah, say a little bit about that. What was going on in your life then?

JG: Well, at that time, let's see, I came to Charlotte, got involved with the Quakers. And the Friends Meeting there, they had a couple of activists who weren't really—well, they were a part of the meeting but not a part of the meeting, you might say. I mean, their politics were way beyond where the meeting was. I mean, the meeting itself had, you know, they were very church-oriented, I mean, you know, because you have that [0:50:00] in North Carolina. You have what they call "church friends" and then you have the regular friends, what they call the "silent meeting", which is a lot different from the

church friends. The church friends is like a regular Baptist—you know, you have preaching, you have singing, and that kind of thing. But, you know, the silent meeting, I mean, you know, you sit and you meditate. And, you know, when someone speaks or feels the need the need to speak, then they speak. And then, things kind of go from there.

So, it's totally—it's organized totally different. And the politics may be somewhat different, as well, you know, between the two meetings. But, anyway, this was a silent meeting in Charlotte. And there were a couple of activists there, Bob Welch and—I'm trying to remember his wife's name. But, anyway, the two of them were activists. And one of the things that they were talking about, and they had connections with the AFSC office, Friends Service Committee office in High Point. They had an office in High Point, North Carolina. And so—.

JD: Was that the statewide office?

JG: That was the statewide office, right, in High Point. And, you know, anyway, I was interested in antiwar work and, of course, you know, trying to get that into the black community, as well, because a lot of black folks were being taken and sent to war during that time. And, in fact, that's another thing that I'll probably get into, you know, as we continue. But one of the things that we did—when I say "we", I mean, I'm talking about the activists from the Friends Meeting and myself. And I'm trying to remember if T.J.—T.J. wasn't involved at this particular period of time, but he got involved later on.

JD: T.J. Reddy?

JG: Yeah, T.J. Reddy and Charles Parker. Those were the other two of the Charlotte Three.

JD: I'm guessing that the Friends Meetings were almost entirely white.

JG: Yeah.

JD: Maybe you, sometimes, were the only black person there?

JG: Right, right.

JD: Yeah.

JG: Yeah, they didn't—you didn't have that many Quakers who were black. I mean, some of the—I think some of the church friends may have had some black congregations. But, I mean, you know, it was still—you know, the place was still segregated, I mean, to some extent, I mean, in terms of who you dealt with, I mean, who you were around a lot.

And, you know, of course, you know, when we came down here, there were several of us from the same area that were sent down here to North Carolina. And actually there was—three of us were black, and I think about ten whites. Some of us went to Morganton, and some of us went to Charlotte, and some of us—let's see, I'm trying to remember if any of us—I don't think they sent any of us to eastern North Carolina at all. It was all in the western part. I think there was one group that went to Asheville, also.

JD: So, of course, they weren't expecting you to get involved with the antiwar work. What did they expect you to do?

JG: Well, I mean, [0:55:00] I did what I was—I mean, [laughs] I was also involved with helping people get food stamps.

JD: Okay. It was connected to OEO?

JG: OEO.

JD: Right?

JG: Right, right, and the—.

JD: The Office of Economic Opportunity.

JG: Right, right. And the Charlotte Area Fund, which was the local office of the OEO in Charlotte. And, you know, they—you know, it was an agency. I mean, people came in and, you know, you would wait on folks and get their contact information and get them set up, you know, so that maybe they could start receiving food stamps. I mean, you know, these were the types of things that we dealt with, you know, day-to-day, bread-and-butter type issues that, you know, we were all, you know, involved with.

And, of course, you know, I saw the war as being a problem, you know, for a lot of the black folks because, you know, they were losing the young men, were being taken away. And, of course, that was before they were allowing women to join the military. This was an all-male operation then. And, well, basically, we ended up printing out some materials and some information, in which we would—they had a recruiting center in Charlotte, where people from all over the western part of the state, they would come in buses—I mean, you know, Trailways buses, all kinds of buses—and they would be brought in to be examined to see if they were, you know, fit to go to war. And, I mean, you know, a lot of these were kids that just came out of high school, and they weren't—apparently, they weren't, you know, interested in going to college or couldn't go to college or whatever. And so, they were being brought in. I mean, you know, these were *thousands* of people were being brought in.

And so, you know, they didn't have any perspective whatsoever about—other than the fact that, you know, that they had to go there in order to get examined. And they would either get, you know, get found, you know, "okay", which meant that you had a 1-A. I think that's what it was, 1-A. Because 4-F was—you know, if you were 4-F, you were, you know, unfit to go to war, and there weren't too many of those at the time. And there was no effort to tell them about, for instance, conscientious objection.

JD: So, I think what you're saying is you would greet the buses, like you would stand outside the area where people came off the buses.

JG: We would stand outside the area where they would come in, and we would pass out materials to them as they got off the bus. I mean, we were the first people they would see and we would give them materials, like about, you know, for conscientious objection. And, you know, again, this was the Quakers, and so, you know, we didn't really delve into some of the other methods that people would use to, you know, to run up their blood pressure and [laughs] that sort of thing. I mean, we did that later. You know, but this was the Quakers, and so, you know, we kind of played it by the numbers here and, you know, we dealt with conscientious objection.

But, I mean, *that* was—[1:00:00] I mean, this *really pissed* the people inside the recruitment center off, I mean, the fact that folks were passing out flyers about *alternatives*, you know, to going to war. And, I mean, you know, they just freaked out! And, of course, they called the police. The police would come. And, of course, by the time the police got there, we were finished with what we had to do, because we passed

out all the flyers we had, and the people were inside the recruiting station, you know, being examined.

And so, you know, a couple of times we had some problems because, you know, we didn't move fast enough, and the police got there a little earlier than they were supposed to. And so, you know, one time we got taken downtown. And, you know, we weren't arrested but, you know, we were lectured, saying that, you know, that "You shouldn't really do this," and, you know, "You're interfering with the effort, and we're fighting these communists," and all sorts of, you know, blather like that.

JD: And so, VISTA, at some point, decided to kick you out?

JG: VISTA, you know, probably after nine months, decided that this wasn't one of the things that they could go along with that I was doing. I mean, I was doing my other work.

JD: Yeah.

JG: But, I mean, you know, that wasn't good enough. I mean, you know, I wasn't, you know, one of the All-American boys type thing that they were trying to, you know, to push that whole effort. And, I mean, you know, hell, all we were doing at the time, I mean, we were just giving them, you know, alternatives to the system. You know, I mean, these were alternatives that were already *in* the system! I mean, you know, if you *knew* about them, which, of course, most of the people *didn't* know, because that wasn't talked about. This is North Carolina. You know, I mean, it's before I knew about Fort Bragg and Camp Lejeune and all the other various military installations here in the state

and how much the state financially depends upon, you know, the military. So, I mean, you know, I didn't know all that at the time. But I was soon to know it.

JD: How did you feel about being back in the South?

JG: I mean, you know, I knew how to handle myself.

JD: When you were growing up, would y'all go back down to South Carolina to visit family and stuff?

JG: Yeah.

JD: Okay. So, it's not like you had ever been away for a long time?

JG: Right. I mean, it was, you know—it wasn't, you know, like we left and we just, you know, shut the curtain on what was happening. I mean, you know, we still had people down here.

JD: Right.

JG: And, you know, we'd go down during the summer, especially.

JD: Oh, and go down for an extended period, weeks or whatever?

JG: Yeah, we—you know, we'd go to Beaufort—.

JD: Yeah.

JG: I mean, you know, and Beaufort County, and visit folks. I mean, you know, and we still have folks down there. So, I mean, you know—I mean, I knew how to handle it. I knew how to handle it.

JD: Um-hmm. So, what did you do when you got kicked out of VISTA?

JG: Well, [1:05:00] I went—I mean, the Friends Service Committee picked me up.

JD: They gave you a job?

JG: Well, they gave me a grant of so much, you know, to deal with antiwar efforts, you know, particularly in the black community. And this—at the time, this was really a long shot for them, because, first of all, I mean, there are not that many blacks who are involved with the Friends Service, at least at the time there weren't. Now, I think it's a lot different now, I mean, you know, the Friends Service Committee, particularly they have a lot of Africans, you know, who are involved in dealing with that. But at the time, I mean, there were maybe three or four of us who are black.

And, you know, what I did was, I just maintained—I had made a lot of contacts, you know, while I was with VISTA and, you know, I maintained those contacts. You know, I mean, just because you're not working for the agency doesn't mean that you still—you know, that you're completely shut out from the agency and the people that you were involved with. So, I ended up getting involved and really, you know, doing things in the community that maybe I couldn't have done, you know, as a VISTA, in terms of—I mean, we still passed out materials, because I still worked with the Quakers, you know, the activists from the Friends Meeting. You know, in fact, I was probably a lot closer to them now. And that's when we started, you know, changing things around a little bit and not just going by the numbers. I mean, we would, you know, put other things in the literature where they could, you know, if they were of a mind to do that, you know—and, I mean, you know, this is when I got, I really got involved in the journalism part of it.

JD: I was going to ask: Were you writing the flyers?

JG: I was doing some of the writing, you know, of the flyers.

JD: Okay.

JG: But then, of course, you know, I would have to—I would let Bob Welch kind of, you know, take some of the hard points out, [laughs] or soften them to some extent.

JD: So, he was a Quaker?

JG: He's born and bred.

JD: Okay. So, these are the flyers you were referring to that you would maybe hand out a recruitment center.

JG: Right.

JD: These were your alternatives.

JG: This was after I got thrown out of VISTA, now.

JD: But still doing stuff?

JG: Still doing stuff, doing the same type of stuff.

JD: Okay.

JG: And it was during this time that the, um—I think it was the Department of Defense. It was a program that they put into practice. This program was civilian-oriented, but it was aimed at recruiting in the black community. And they would send recruiting sergeants to community centers in the black community. And they did this in Nashville and in Charlotte. There were two cities that they focused their attention on. [1:10:00] And we, you know, of course, were out there passing out materials. In fact, we leafleted the projects that, you know, served the community centers. So, we had our stuff out there in the people's hands beforehand. And so, you know, and also when the recruiters were there, we would pass material out, also.

JD: When they were in the projects?

JG: Well, no. Well, see, the recruiters were at the community centers.

JD: Oh, okay.

JG: But, I mean, we would go door-to-door beforehand and pass material out, you know, of what was going on and what these people were there for, I mean, that they are there to recruit your sons. And see, this is when I really started, you know, getting involved and doing agitational kinds of, you know, work, leafleting, that sort of thing, putting out leaflets, you know. And, you know, this was before—you know, of course, eventually I ended up going with the Southern Conference Education Fund, SCEF, but that was after.

Well, see, there were a couple of things that happened with the Friends Service Committee. You know, the grant was good for a year, and then, of course—and then, you know, I did odd jobs and other kinds of things, you know, because, I mean, you couldn't just live on the grant as such. I mean, you know, you had to do other things, as well. And so, you know, I was able to support myself and still deal with the grant. But the person who was over the AFSC program got fired. And one of the reasons that he was fired was because of the fact that he had authorized, you know, the grant for me.

JD: Oh. [Laughs] Interesting.

JG: Yeah. And so, I mean, you know, he lost his job. And, of course, he's a minister himself, so he just went back to being a minister.

JD: Who fired him, the national Friends or—?

JG: The national—well, I think it was the local—I think the local board was the final, you know, and the local board was not particularly, you know—should I say, they didn't go along with a lot of, you know, our precepts. [Laughs]

JD: Right.

JG: And so, what we ended up with, you know, of course, we—you know, that contact was cut off. And, you know, our contact with the national Friends basically was cut off at that point. And so, you know, that's when SCEF came in.

JD: Let me ask one quick question. Weren't you involved with the protests around the Lazy B stables? Wasn't that in Charlotte, too?

JG: I wasn't involved with the protests. That was the year before I got there.

JD: Okay, that's good for the interview.

JG: Yeah.

JD: So, okay, we can talk about that later.

JG: Right.

JD: But how did you get linked up with SCEF?

JG: Well, I got linked up, let's see. I'm trying to remember exactly how I did get linked up with SCEF. I think it had to do with some contacts I made [1:15:00] while I was doing the work with the Friends. And, you know, I mean, down here in the South at the time, I mean, there are not that many contacts, you know, that are dealing with antiwar work. And, you know, they heard about it. They heard about what I was doing in North Carolina and, you know, they said, "Well, hey, come on! We can place you." And so, that's how I got involved in SCEF.

JD: They were based in—?

JG: They're based in Louisville, Kentucky.

JD: And when you say "they", do you mean Carl and Anne Braden, or do you mean—?

JG: Carl and Anne.

JD: So, you were talking to them already before you joined SCEF?

JG: Yeah, right. I mean, I knew them previously. And it probably had to do with a conference or something I went to, you know. You know, I got involved with them. I don't exactly remember now how.

JD: Okay. But it sounds like you moved to Louisville.

JG: Well, I didn't move to Louisville, actually. The way SCEF worked, SCEF had a main office, which was in Louisville, but they had projects in different places. They had—in fact, one of the guys who's—he's here now, Al McSurely. He's an attorney in Chapel Hill. He was also with SCEF but he worked in the mountains, up in Kentucky and West Virginia.

JD: I was going to ask if you knew him from back then.

JG: Yeah.

JD: Yeah.

JG: Yeah. Well, that's when I first met him.

JD: Right. And he almost got killed there, right?

JG: Very—I mean, he—well, I mean, he almost ended up with a life sentence for sedition, I mean, you know, in that case in Louisville in Kentucky. And, yeah, well, he did have some close calls. I mean, we all had some close calls.

JD: Right. [Laughs] I'm sure we're going to get into that at some point.

JG: [Laughs] Yeah, we'll eventually get into that, right. But, I mean, you know, those—I mean, that was part of the—I mean, again, this is just something that you do. You know, I mean, it's part of what you know needs to happen, and you just go ahead and you do it. You don't question it, you know, because—you know, I mean, maybe it's the same way that people look at, you know, what you do when you're on the battlefield. You know, you do what you have to do in order to maintain. And so, it's not a problem, you know, because it's something that you expect *can happen*. You know, and so you face it with that mentality.

JD: I mean, were you already getting death threats or things like that?

JG: I mean, that's—you know, that's part of—I mean, [laughs] that's nothing!

JD: Yeah. I mean, Al McSurely, he had a stick of dynamite thrown in a car he was in, I think, [laughs] something like that.

JG: Right, right! I mean, Al came close to being, I mean, you know, taken out. But, I mean, this is—you know, this is how you have to maintain, you know, your—you know, it's part of the mentality that you have to undergo, you know, as part of being prepared for this type of activity. [1:20:00]

JD: Now, did you stay in Charlotte, working for SCEF, or where did they place you?

JG: No, I was in Charlotte, but I traveled.

JD: Yeah.

JG: Because I had—let's see, I had North Carolina, I had Virginia, I had South Carolina, Georgia, and part of Florida. And those were the five states that I had, so I was doing a lot of traveling.

JD: What were you tasked with? I mean, what was it you were supposed to be doing?

JG: A lot of it had to do with reporting. That's when I started doing the journalism thing, you know, as opposed to organizing, you know, groups—which, of course, I did that, too. But that was sort of a secondary thing. I mean, there were a lot of things that were happening in the South at the time that weren't being reported in the regular media. And, of course, you know, it was my responsibility to see that it got reported, and that's basically what I tasked myself to do, you know, which meant that I was all over the place, and particularly in the rural areas. You know, I spent a lot of time, for instance, in *eastern* North Carolina.

JD: Yeah. I think I've seen some stories that you've written. Can you remember an example of a campaign or something you wrote about for *Southern Patriot* that maybe never showed up in the mainstream media? Like, what were the kind of things that—?

JG: I'm trying to remember if—.

JD: Or maybe just anything you wrote about for the *Southern Patriot*?

JG: Uh, because I'm trying to remember exactly—I know that the stuff that was happening with Golden Frinks at the time, that was 1968. And, you know, I got involved in that.

JD: Can you remind me what that was? I know the name but I can't remember.

JG: Okay, that was school issues. It was during the time that the schools were integrated, and I guess it was during the period of time after 19—let's see, because I know they had the Freedom of Choice here in North Carolina. This was during the sixties. But around, I guess, the late sixties, maybe [19]67, [19]68, [19]69, [19]70, [19]71 and [19]72, was when a lot of the schools were integrated.

And the way the integration, the way it would work, would be the people would file lawsuits in each county, and it was like county-by-county. And, you know, of course, I mean, *Brown versus Board of Education* had already been decided years ago. And so, I mean, that was already, you know, on everybody's mind. And so, you know, they would have different—different counties would have different—well, you'd have different judges. And then, of course, these different judges would give out different things that the counties would have to do in order to bring about, you know, desegregation. I mean, it wasn't across the board. I mean, it was like different—there were different counties that would do it different ways, you know, depending on what the judge told them that they would have to do.

JD: Um-hmm.

JG: Because they didn't do [1:25:00]—they didn't—you know, they weren't trying to make it easy on anybody. And Hyde County, I think the way they did theirs, it

ended up where the black kids had to get up at five o'clock in the morning, and they would have to be bused clean across the county to another school. And there was a school, a new school that had just been built right in the area where a lot of the black folks were living, where they could have gone to. And, you know, of course, they said, "If you're going to bus, let's bus both groups. You know, bus the white kids, you know,into this school, and bus us, you know, over to the other school." And, I mean, you know, there were two schools, you know, in the county. Hyde County is sparsely populated.

JD: In northeastern North Carolina.

JG: Yeah, this is out on the coast, actually.

JD: Right.

JG: And so, you know, the school board said, "Hell, no!"

JD: Right.

JG: You know, "We're not going to do anything like that." You know, "This is how we're going to do it." You know, "You all are going to be bused over here, you know, and that's the way we're going to do it." So, you know, boycott!

JD: Yeah.

JG: And, you know, all the black kids came out of school, and they marched to Raleigh. You know, Golden Frinks at the time was the leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, which had, of course, been organized by Dr. King.

JD: Right, okay.

JG: But he was the North Carolina contact person. And so, he organized the march. And they marched. You know, I mean, and, of course, you know, when you say when you "march", you don't march the whole distance. I mean, you march to a certain level, maybe five or ten miles, and then you get on the bus and you go further. Then you start your march again, I mean, because otherwise, you'd be marching the whole year.

JD: Yeah! [Laughs] I mean, that's a good example, because I'm forgetting the historian's name who wrote the book about Hyde County in the last ten or fifteen years and about that struggle. It's not a very well known struggle, and I just came across his bibliography, or his footnotes recently.

JG: Was that Dave?

JD: Yeah, Cecelski.

JG: Dave Cecelski, yeah! Yeah, okay.

JD: And he even says in one of his footnotes that your reporting on the Hyde County struggle for *Southern Patriot* is some of—maybe the most extensive.

JG: Um-hmm.

JD: And that connects back to what you were saying was that the *Southern Patriot* needed you, for example, to write about campaigns that were going on in the South.

JG: Yeah.

JD: That mainstream media wasn't covering.

JG: Right.

JD: And so, that kind of gets me to a question. The mainstream media seemed very interested in civil rights in 1963, [19]64, [19]65. Why do you think they may have

been less interested by the end of the sixties? Why was it hard for a place like Hyde County to make the news?

JG: I think probably just because of where it is.

JD: Yeah.

JG: I mean, there's no—I mean, I don't even think you still have a newspaper out there. I don't believe—I mean, they have maybe a weekly. But, I mean, it's way, way out there [1:30:00] and it's very rural. You know, let's see, Engelhard, I guess, is the largest town in the county, and I don't think Engelhard is more than maybe, you know, a couple of thousand.

JD: So, were you living out there and involved in that campaign?

JG: No.

JD: How did you know about it?

JG: I knew about the campaign, you know, because I was in contact with some of the people who were—not Golden, per se, but some of the other folks who were, say, I guess you'd call them mid-managers, you know, in the whole, you know, thing. These were people who were on the ground level.

JD:Right.

JG: You know, who were working with the kids, you know, every day.

JD: And since you worked with SCEF, they knew you?

JG: They knew me. And then, of course, I was all over the place anyway, as a SCEF reporter, you know, and I was able to get information that maybe other people couldn't get.

JD: Now, did I hear you were also involved with the Charleston hospital strike?

JG: I was down there, yeah. Yeah, I mean, I was—you know, when I say I was involved, I mean, I went down there in support of it with, again, with SCLC.

JD: Yeah.

JG: In fact, Milton Fitch, whose—well, let's see. His son is, of course, Milton Fitch Jr., who is a judge here in Wilson County now. Anyway, his dad and I worked together. And Milton was also with SCLC.

JD: He lived out in Wilson?

JG: No, he was from here. I mean—.

JD: The dad is, too?

JG: Yeah, right. But, see, yeah, Milton Sr. had retired from the post office. And he, you know, he went with SCLC, and so he was doing a lot of the field stuff, the field activity and organizing. And one of the things that we did was we went—we took a busload of people and went to Charleston, South Carolina, and took part in the march that took place there to support 1198, or 1199, I guess it was.

JD: The union from New York?

JG: Yeah.

JD: Yeah.

JG: Well, I mean, but see, they—actually, the union—it wasn't a New York union. It started in Charleston and it went north. See, [laughs] this is one of the things that, you know, I guess a lot of folks don't know. Because, let's see, was it Doris Turner?

She was from Charleston, and they organized the hospital workers there, and *then* they moved out from Charleston and ended up going to New York.

JD: Well, the folks that got on that bus with you and Milton Fitch, where were they from?

JG: From around here.

JD: From Wilson?

JG: Some of them from Wilson; some were from Hyde County.

JD: Uh-huh, okay. So, these campaigns are—they're—the SCLC is helping to connect these campaigns.

JG: They connected the campaigns at the grassroots level.

JD: Yeah.

JG: See? And, I mean, this was very important, you know, both in terms of the way in which, you know, people were seeing themselves. I mean, you know, they could see themselves as not being just an isolated, you know, element of somebody who's upset with how things are going, you know, here [1:35:00] in this particular community, but, you know, part of a larger picture of folks, you know, who are also struggling with the same fucking thing that's going on, you know, in other places, as well.

JD: That system that you were talking about, right, like kind of getting people to think more in terms of systemic change—?

JG: Systemic.

JD: Instead of just—?

JG: Just, yeah—local, you know, spot-by-spot-by-spot change. Yeah. And, I mean, this was very important, I mean, the way in which the grassroots elements were able to connect with each other.

JD: Um-hmm.

JG: And, see, this is something that—well, I think the fast food workers are actually trying to bring it back, you know, just talking about, you know, how it affects what's going on today. You know, the fast food workers are actually really projecting that type of connectedness.

JD: Yeah. I mean, I think the Moral Monday Movement and the NAACP, they're doing a lot of that, too. I mean, they're so close now with the fast food movement in this state, I almost sometimes forget that they're kind of separate groups.

JG: Um-hmm.

JD: But, in theory, if you go to a Moral Monday and even just look at the list of speakers, it'll represent five, six different groups on just one single day.

JG: Right!

JD: And it always ends with the Reverend Barber, but it could be someone from Black Workers for Justice.

JG: Right.

JG: Or it could be—.

JG: All the different—.

JD: A rabbi from Raleigh, or it could be someone from FLOC, F-L-O-C.

JG: Yeah, or Students for Farm Workers or, you know, different groups, different grassroots groups. I mean, you know, they're all part of this effort that's being made to bring about change. And it's important that, you know, that people understand that this is the way you build a movement, you know, and that it's from the ground up, not from the top down.

JD: Right.

JG: You know. I mean, in fact, I don't know of any movement that's really, you know, been a top-down movement.

JD: Were there other grassroots campaigns that you wrote about for the *Southern Patriot* that come to mind?

JG: Well, yeah. There were—[clears throat] there were things in Georgia that were going on. There were some efforts in—what's the name of that place—Winder, Georgia. This was more of a—this was dealing with law enforcement. Actually, this was a case involving a young girl who—she was defending her house. She was living in a recently-developed all-white—well, it was all-white but, you know, her people moved in. And, you know, she was being harassed. And what ended up was somebody, you know, threatened, and she shot the person and killed him. And, you know, they were trying to charge her with first degree murder.

And, basically, you know, there was a campaign around that that was—[1:40:00] well, actually it dealt with some of the legal people in Atlanta, also. But, you know, we were finally able to get her, you know, basically acquitted of the charge. And I'm trying to remember how it went. But that was one of the points that we made, in terms of

building support, you know, for this particular issue. You know, and to some extent, we used some of that in our own, you know, effort later on.

JD: Charlotte Three?

JG: Yeah.

JD: Okay, so that was—the incident inWinder, Georgia, was—do you remember when?

JG: That was 19—it was between 1969 and 1972.

JD: And was SCLC involved? Or was that more of a SCEF thing?

JG: Well, SCLC, their local people were involved, as were the NAACP.

JD: Yeah.

JG: Their local chapter was involved. I mean, it wasn't a national kind of thing.

JD: Right.

JG: It was—you know, I mean, they didn't really even report it. I mean, you know, we did some work on it, SCEF, and there were some other—I'm trying to remember some of the other activities that we were involved in in rural Georgia, because there was some stuff relating to some voting irregularities that took place, I think it was down in—it wasn't Bibb County. It was the county next to Bibb. Was it Marion County? It was down in that same neck of the woods. It was like when you go out from [clears throat] Macon.

JD: Middle Georgia.

JG: Yeah.

JD: Yeah.

JG: Yeah, you go out from Macon and you go southwest. You go through Forsyth, Georgia. I can't—I used to know those counties, you know. [Laughs]

JD: Yeah.

JG: But I can't remember (the others). But, I mean, you know, they were—there was a bunch of stuff that happened down in those areas that we covered.

JD: I mean, you're covering a lot of ground. I mean, you mentioned the states you were responsible for, but, I mean, middle Georgia, Charleston. You're in Charlotte some. I think maybe you mentioned Virginia. UNC cafeteria workers' strike—were you involved with that some? I think I heard that, maybe.

JG: I'm trying to remember.

JD: Howard Fuller was kind of the main—.

JG: Yeah. Yeah. Well, now, Howard—well, yeah, that's before he—well, he changed his name to Owusu.

JD: Right, Owusu Sadaukai.

JG: Yeah, and then he changed it back to Howard Fuller again after he went north, you know, to Milwaukee. But, yeah, I mean, that whole—well, that was something that—it began, I guess it was around 1970. And then, I know it was still going while we were locked up and I'm trying to remember how long it lasted. Because they moved from—they were in Durham [1:45:00] for a while—you're talking about the Liberation University?

JD: That's what you're talking about, right, Malcolm X Liberation University?

JG: Yeah, right, right. Yeah, they moved from Durham to Greensboro.

JD: Right.

JG: And I think they were still going strong in Greensboro.

JD: Yeah.

JG: I'm trying to remember, because when we were released—let's see. Whew!

JD: [Laughs]

JG: Okay, we got out in [19]76. But actually, [clears throat] you know, we were out for a while, and then we had to go back. But we didn't stay that long the second time. That was after we were—they gave us a, what was a time cut, or something, to time served. I think that's what it was.

JD: Going back just a second, how did you get—you know, I brought these articles that you wrote for *African World* newspaper, which was the newspaper for the Student Organization for Black Unity, Nelson Johnson's group.

JG: Right.

JD: Which, I think, was also close to Malcolm X Liberation University.

JG: Yeah.

JD: How did you get involved with that outfit and with *African World* newspaper?

JG: I think, again, it was through contacts, I mean, you know, because I know Milton Coleman. I had met him. And, of course, I knew Nelson from before. I mean, you know, this was during the time that they were having a problem over there with the National Guard at the A&T.

JD: Right, when the Guard came in, and Willie Grimes got killed.

JG: Yeah, Willie and—.

JD: Yeah, and so, you knew Nelson because—had you been up in Greensboro or writing about it?

JG: Yeah! I mean, I'd been around them, you know, because Nelson was, you know, I mean, he was active in Greensboro for years, you know. And, I mean, he was one of the people, you know, that you just got in contact with, I mean, if you were involved in any kind of activity in that part of the state. You know, so, I mean, it was just sort of a natural coming together of folks.

JD: Yeah. So, you weren't based at MXLU, or you weren't living in Greensboro, really. It's just—.

JG: No.

JD: You're kind of moving around this whole region.

JG: I'm moving, yeah.

JD: Yeah.

JG: Yeah.

JD: See, now this makes more sense, because if I—it seems like looking through a lot of these articles that I found, it almost seemed like you were everywhere at once! [Laughs]

JG: [Laughs]

JD: Now I'm getting it that you were kind of a roving reporter.

JG: I'm traveling. I'm traveling. I'm traveling. Yeah. No, I—you know, I was still—you know, if you want to talk about a base, yeah, I had a place where I lived at but, I mean, I didn't spend much time there.

JD: And that was in Charlotte?

JG: Yeah.

JD: And maybe that's a good way for us to talk about the Charlotte Three, which I kind of just wanted to save it for the chronology, but it's such an important chapter in your life. So, maybe you can just talk about that some.

JG: Well, let's see. I mean, I'm trying to remember exactly what it was or how it happened. You know, the place got burned.

JD: The Lazy B stables.

JG: The Lazy B stables got burned.

JD: But that was back in 1968.

JG: Yeah?

JD: Maybe I'm wrong on the date.

JG: No, the stable—let's see, the stable was burned, I think it was in the—was it in 1970?

JD: Okay.

JG: Or it might have been [19]69. But it—[clears throat] I know T.J., Vickie, and C.P.—.

JD: T.J. Reddy, Charles Parker—.

JG: And Vickie Reddy, who was, you know, she married T.J. They went out there and they rode the horses. [1:50:00] Prior to that time, the stable was segregated. I mean, you know, there were no—they didn't serve—you know, no clientele were black. You know, and that's—you know, that happened. You know, this was in [19]67, so I think the

year before I got there, because I came in [19]68. You know, so, I mean, T.J. and Vickie and them—you know, T.J., I think, was working with the—it was a church group, because he had a teen center on the east side of town. And he was working—I'm trying to remember the name of the group, but it was church-oriented. I'm trying to remember if it was—was it the Lutherans? It might have been a, you know, a mixed group of different [clears throat] different, you know, like Methodists, Baptists, and all of them together, ecumenical kind of group.

JD: Um-hmm.

JG: And so, let's see, I met him, you know, of course, when I came with the VISTA group.

JD: T.J. Reddy?

JG: Yeah.

JD: Okay.

JG: And, you know, at the time, he was a, you know, grassroots worker, you know, doing work in the community, you know, with the teenagers mostly—you know, basketball, that kind of thing. And he and I, you know, of course, we had similar ideas about, you know, things. And so, you know, and Charles Parker, who was his buddy, you know, both of them actually had gone to UNC-Charlotte, or they were going to UNC-Charlotte at the time. Yeah, and that's another thing, is the student group out there at UNC-Charlotte, you know, was one of the things that actually T.J. and C.P. really cultivated and organized, and they did a lot of activity.

JD: Was Ben Chavis there, too?

JG: Yeah.

JD: It's interesting. I read somewhere that there was an effort to organize a chapter of the Black Panther party in Charlotte that Ben Chavis was involved with, and it never got off the ground.

JG: Yeah, right, right. Yeah, I'll tell you something about that if you want to know about that.

JD: Sure. I want to ask: How are you doing with time? And how do you feel right now?

JG: [Clears throat] Well, I'm doing okay, I mean, as far as time is concerned.

JD: Okay. I just wanted to make sure you don't need to be somewhere. I'm not holding you too long.

JG: No, uh-uh.

JD: Okay.

JG: We may have to—[laughs] we may have to come back and finish this, because there's a lot of stuff.

JD: Well, would you want to break for lunch or something like that?

JG: Well, let's see, what time do you have now?

JD: It's about twelve fifteen.

JG: Oh, well, we can—I mean, we can go for another hour or so, and then—.

JD: I think that'll be enough. I mean, maybe not enough for your whole life, but that, I think—.

JG: [Laughs]

JD: [Laughs] We can fit a lot into an hour.

JG: Uh-huh.

JD: I would feel bad to make you stay longer. Well, you were about to talk about the Charlotte Three, but [1:55:00] just because you reminded me of the Black Panther chapter in Charlotte, maybe—you seemed—you were saying you had some stuff to say about that.

JG: Yeah, well, Ben and—I wasn't really into the Panthers, as such, because of the way in which they're organized. I mean, you know, it seemed like it was a very top-down group. And, you know, it was, you know, West Coast. And, you know, I knew something, in terms of the Panther chapter in Winston-Salem, you know, where they had organized a chapter. Larry Little, you know, who was a longtime activist and still is, up there in Winston-Salem, was one of the founders of the chapter. And I think—what's his name—Lee Faye Mack, whose daughter was actually, actually ran the legal services here in Wilson for a few years, you know. And in fact, I think Hazel, that's her name, still works. See, so now we're talking about—you know, actually you're starting to get, you know, a couple of generations of folks.

JD: Right.

JG: You know, who you're in contact with.

JD: Yeah.

JG: And so, anyway—well, getting back to the Charlotte chapter, I think it was a matter of the Charlotte people were more oriented towards—in terms of the national question, they were, I think, stronger oriented towards black people doing things on their

own, as opposed to doing things with, you know, other groups, which is the way the Panthers, you know, nationally were oriented, you know, as basically—you know, I mean, that's how it was on the West Coast. I mean, you know, they had groups, coalitions with white groups that were similarly situated and, you know, equally as militant as they were, whereas this wasn't the case down here.

JD: Um-hmm. So, you're saying because activism—.

JG: That's why *I'm* saying that—you know, this is *my* feeling as to why it didn't, you know, go.

JD: Yeah. So, are you saying that—was there more interracial activism in Charlotte than in Winston-Salem or in Durham?

JG: I think, at the time, there was *less* overall. I mean, you know, I was working with the Quakers and all, you know. And T.J., of course, you know, the people who were funding him were white, you know. But, I mean, in terms of—I think Winston-Salem was probably somewhat *more* integrated. Greensboro was definitely more integrated, Guilford County. And, of course, you know, Durham, I guess, was probably more so than anywhere else in the state, at the time.

JD: You mean, like the schools and just like civic life?

JG: The schools and—I mean, you know, the whole way in which, [2:00:00] you know, people interacted with each other. I mean, you know, it was just a totally different place.

JD: Yeah.

JG: And to some extent, it still is. I mean, you know—like, for instance, here in Wilson, I mean, you know, there is interaction now more with some white activists than there *was*. But, I mean, prior to maybe three or four years ago, there weren't that many white activists in Wilson.

JD: Yeah.

JG: So, I mean, you've got—I mean, it's just a matter of, like, sixty miles to Raleigh from Wilson, and it's like a sea change, I mean, in terms of how people look at each other and how people interact more so with each other.

JD: Yeah, it's interesting. I mean, the phrase "Down East" implies that—I mean, I would use the phrase "Down East" to even describe places like Wilson or maybe even Goldsboro. I don't know if you would, but I feel like people in the Triangle do. It implies that it's a place that's very far away, but it's not very far away geographically. But politically and culturally, like you're saying—.

JG: It's, you know—I mean, you know, you're probably ten years further back, maybe even—I mean, as you go further east, it even gets worse.

JD: Right.

JG: You know, and so, I mean, it's—it's just the way in which, I guess, the whole way that the state was developed. I mean, the eastern part of the state is agricultural. And, you know, that was the plantation, you know, and slavery was strong in that area. And, you know, it's more aligned with what you call the Deep South.

JD: Right.

JG: Than the rest of—well, let's say, middle North Carolina. You know, we're talking about Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill, you know, that area. And then, of course, you go west to Greensboro and Winston-Salem [clears throat] and High Point. And then, you've got Charlotte, you know, down further in the west. But, I mean, you know, it's the way in which I guess the state developed, you know, in terms of the culture and how it's different, you know, as you move around in the state. It just—you know, and it just means, of course, that there's more work to be done, I mean, you know, in order to bring about, you know, some sort of effort to make things, you know, make folks in eastern North Carolina see things a little differently than they do now.

JD: Yeah. Yeah, maybe we can fit that in towards the end, talk a bit about Black Workers for Justice and that kind of stuff.

JG: Yeah. Well, I mean, you know, that and some other efforts that are being made, you know, because I know Bob Zellner, who's here in Wilson now—well, I mean, you know, he's based in Wilson. He doesn't spend much time here. But, I mean, he's doing some stuff, I mean, you know, with white folks, you know, trying to get white people organized and that sort of thing. I mean, you know, that's something that he did when he was—he's also [2:05:00] a SCEF graduate.

JD: Oh, okay. So, after SNCC, he went on to SCEF?

JG: Yeah.

JD: Oh, that's interesting.

JG: Yeah. That's where I met him. I mean, he was organizing people—the Woodcutters in southern Mississippi.

JD: Right.

JG: He organized them, I mean, you know, into being a group, you know, a progressive group of folks. You know, I mean, it took him some years to do it, but he did it.

JD: I guess we were talking a bit about—.

JG: [Laughs] Let's see, what were we talking about?

JD: No, I don't want to steer too far back, but the Charlotte Three—and you had talked about how you'd gotten to meet T.J. Reddy and Vickie—.

JG: Yeah, T.J. and Charles.

JD: And Charles Parker. And you were kind of setting the scene for how the whole Charlotte Three thing happened.

JG: Yeah. Well, [clears throat] what had been going on, of course, you know, and this has to do with why, you know, why they came at us the way they did. When I'm talking about "they", I'm talking about, you know, the authorities and the pigs and, you know, the people who we were fighting.

I mentioned some of the stuff that we were doing with the Quakers, you know, when we were passing out materials. [Clears throat] And, you know, this was not something that was not being looked at. And, you know, it was being looked at by people in the city of Charlotte. I didn't realize it at the time, but they had some people who had been trained with the Red Squad in Chicago. And—.

JD: Was that like the Chicago special tactical force or something?

JG: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, they were—these were actually all over the place, I mean, you know, and their job was to watch, quote, "radical types", unquote, to see what they were doing and that sort of thing. And so, you know, I didn't realize it at the time, because, you know, I mean, we were just out there trying to get some things done. I mean, we were [laughs] trying to, you know, make some changes. And I guess we didn't feel it quite the same way that we should have, probably, that these changes were of a type that, you know, that some of these folks were not going to sit well with, and that they were not going to, you know, go quietly with, and that they were going to, you know, try to resist and do whatever they can to stop us.

And the thing that really, I think, that really kicked things off, in terms of them coming at us, you know, with the whole frame-up of the Charlotte Three thing, you know, because that was [clears throat] pretty much of a frame-up, I mean, you know, as it turned out. They were concerned about when we had done the work in the projects, [clears throat] when they had—when I'm talking about "they", I'm talking about the Department of Defense when they set up that program here in—well, it was in Charlotte and also in (Nashville/Asheville)—to try to recruit black youth to send to Vietnam.

And I don't know how things went in (Nashville/Asheville), but they ended up [2:10:00] shutting down the program here—when I say "here", I'm talking about Charlotte. They shut the program down because, you know, of the resistance from the black community to that, you know, recruitment thing, you know, especially—you know, I mean, coming out in the open and sending someone in there from the Army to recruit

people *in* the black community *at* the community center, I mean, you know, I mean, this was just outrageous!

And, you know, when they observed that someone was fighting this—and we *were*—I mean, T.J. had his center, you know, and we were passing material out to the guys when they would come to play basketball, you know, say, "Hey, look at this!" You know, "Check this out," [clears throat] you know, that kind of thing. And then, we'd go up into Earle Village—that was the name of the project that we concentrated our efforts on. And, of course, it's—I think part of it is still there. I know that they tore down a large part of it years ago.

And so, what happened was, they saw us as a problem. And the Red Squad people,of course, were already, you know, active in the Charlotte police department. And, you know, they decided to, you know, to use certain folks—to make an example of us and get us locked up.

JD: And just for the context of the recording, the stables that the Reddys and Charles Parker—they had protested at it earlier.

JG: Yeah.

JD: *A few years later*, it got burned down.

JG: It burned down, right.

JD: And so, the question was: Who did it? And the authorities, the police department were saying, "Well, Charles Parker, Reddy, and you [laughs] were the people who did it."

JG: Um-hmm, yeah.

JD: Okay, I just wanted to get that on the recording.

JG: Right.

JD: For someone who may not be familiar with this case known as the Charlotte Three.

JG: Right, right.

JD: Do you think there was actual communication between federal authorities and the city police?

JG: Oh, yeah.

JD: Yeah.

JG: Yeah. I mean, you know, we [clears throat] we—you know, we were able to get a lot of that information. I mean, actually, in fact, when we made our appeals, you know, especially when we went into the federal courts, this was part of it: I mean, the fact that they were using informants, you know, in both cases—well, in the case involving the Charlotte Three, that they were using them and—let me see, how—that they were paying them, that the Feds were paying them.

JD: Right. There were these two guys who—.

JG: Yeah, Hood and Washington, and they were being paid by the *Feds*.

JD: Right.

JG: But, I mean, you know, this is supposed to be a state case, now. I mean, you know, but now, the Feds are involved in this whole operation. [2:15:00]

JD: And there were multiple cases, too, right?

JG: Yeah.

JD: Unfortunately. They charged you with also aiding a fugitive, or something like that?

JG: Yeah, yeah. That was also something involving—that was involving something up in Oxford. Yeah, so I ended up—I ended up actually—[clears throat] they sentenced me to a ten-year term, but the way in which they had it set was that I could go on parole after nine months of serving, you know, the sentence. And what they ended up doing was they—let's see. What they said was that I had given some money to Washington to leave the country. And, you know, I mean, basically I gave him some money to help for—he had a case. You know, he said he needed some money. And so, I mean, I knew him. I knew him. I mean, you know, I knew him. I knew Hood. I knew there were several other people who were sort of tangentially involved and stuff.

JD: They were in Oxford? No.

JG: They had been involved in stuff that we were doing here.

JD: In Charlotte.

JG: In Charlotte.

JD: Ah, now I get it.

JG: You know.

JD: Okay.

JG: And they had actually, they—how they brought Ben into it was they cashed a check that I had written at Ben's place of business up in Oxford.

JD: Oh.

JG: And that's how they tried to bring Ben into that.

JD: What was his place of business.

JG: He had a—it was a food concession.

JD: Oh, okay.

JG: Yeah. And so, you know, they charged—they got the check cashed and then they went on to Canada.

JD: Wow.

JG: And, you know, I mean, that wasn't [laughs] what the money was supposed to go for, but, I mean, you know. They said that we had planned it that way.

JD: And so, they got caught.

JG: They ended up—well, they stayed in Canada for a while. And then, supposedly, they came back to—what was it—Detroit or somewhere. And the Feds supposedly had gotten them there. And this is all "supposedly" now, but we don't know, you know, what really happened.

JD: Yeah.

JG: But we figured that maybe what the Feds did was that they, you know, that they hooked everything up when they first got in contact with them, and it may have even been up there, for all we know.

JD: In Canada?

JG: Yeah.

JD: So, conceivably, since we know that the federal government paid those two guys, they could have engineered this whole case.

JG: Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, that's what our theory was. Of course, we never, you know, were able to prove that.

JD: Who burned the stable, do you think?

JG: Well, Hood and Washington.

JD: Oh, *they're* the ones who burned the stable?!

JG: Yeah, but then they said that *we* were involved in it.

JD: Wow! And they never had to serve time, did they?

JG: No.

JD: Or not for those crimes.

JG: No.

JD: I think I heard one of them, maybe, was charged with a murder later.

JG: Yeah.

JD: I don't know if that's true or not.

JG: Well, I mean, you know, there were all kinds of things that were going on, you know, a lot of rumors, you know, that were afoot about [2:20:00] somebody, you know, being murdered and that sort of thing. I mean, there was even a rumor that someone shot at Dave Washington, you know, while we were in prison.

JD: Dave Washington is one of those two who testified against you.

JG: Yeah, right.

JD: So, you were convicted in—was it 1973?

JG: I was convicted in [19]72.

JD: Wow.

JG: Yeah. In both—let's see, yeah, both cases in [19]72.

JD: Where did you go to prison?

JG: Well, they sent me—well, first, you know, I was at the Charlotte jail. And this, of course, this involves another phase of my activity, you know, which involved organizing inside prisons.

JD: Yeah.

JG: Which, you know, which I did.

JD: Inside jail, or inside prison?

JG: Inside jail *and* the prison, because we—while we were at the jail, we filed a lawsuit against the sheriff.

JD: Mecklenburg County?

JG: Right. For, you know, for the slop that he was feeding us. And so, you know, what they ended up doing with me was that they [clears throat] they sent me, because I had already been—you know, I had already been charged with the case involving Hood and Washington in Canada, and I had already received, you know, sentence for that. But I was being held, you know, in Mecklenburg County, you know, because I had been sentenced on this other case, you know, with the Lazy B. And so, you know, what they did was, they—evidently, they sent me to the Feds. And so, I was shipped out of Mecklenburg County and sent to Atlanta Federal Penitentiary.

JD: Oh, wow.

JG: And, of course, I got involved in stuff down there, too.

JD: So, yeah, what was the stuff, the organizing down there?

JG: Well, [clears throat] when we went there, there was [clears throat] there was some people in Atlanta that I knew. And, of course, you know, once I got down there, I got in contact with them. And, you know, and that's pretty easy to do, I mean, at least—.

JD: Activists from outside, you mean?

JG: Yeah.

JD: So, you would call them from inside the prison?

JG: I would be in contact with them. I mean, I couldn't call. We didn't have phones.

JD: Right. So, how did you—letters, or visits?

JG: Letters. Letters and visits. You know, and then, plus, you know, I was still on staff with SCEF.

JD: Wow.

JG: Yeah, I mean, I stayed on staff with SCEF during the whole period of time I was in prison.

JD: Wow. So, what did you start doing in Atlanta?

JG: Well, we had a group of prisoners in—I mean, basically, this was a church—it was a church group. I had also—of course, I had gotten involved with Ben Chavis and the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice. And they had some people in Atlanta, and, of course, I got in contact with them. And we started getting them—and they had ministerial, you know, credentials—and so, we were starting to get them to come [2:25:00] into the prison and hold services.

And, of course, you know, they had a particular type of way in which they would do things, you know, like liberation theology, you know, basically like you would, [clears throat] like you would have maybe in South America, or in someplace, other places like that, or something maybe that—well, like the guy who's in Raleigh—what's his name—Patrick O'Neill with the Catholic Workers, you know, something that he would do, inside. And so, you know, we started getting them to come in to talk to the prisoners inside. And, of course, you know, I mean, pretty soon, I mean, the room would be overflowing with [laughs] with people, you know, wanting to hear the message.

And, of course, you know, one of the things that the—the minister was named Reverend William Land, L-A-N-D, and he was also a minister with the United Church of Christ. And, of course, I had known him before, you know, during the time that we were doing campaigns in eastern North Carolina. I mean, he was also involved with that, and Ben was, you know, as well—and so, I mean, you know, all of these people, you know. And so, Bill started coming in, and he had a large group of folks. And, you know, he would start out with the red, black, and green flag, [laughs] which is the flag of black liberation.

JD: Was he black?

JG: Yeah, he's black.

JD: Okay. So, he was bringing in those symbols into prison?

JG: Right, right.

JD: Yeah.

JG: And, I mean, it lasted for a while. But the prison administration got wind of it, and they shut it down. They told the minister, the prison minister, that they couldn't have that any further. And so, they shut it down. And then, he was no longer able to come into the prison.

JD: What were his sermons like? You said it was a bit like liberation theology.

JG: Well, I mean, you know, he would talk about conditions that were going on out in the street, you know, which, of course, people were familiar with anyway, I mean, but he would talk about truth.

JD: Yeah.

JG: And what needed to happen in order to change, you know, these conditions that were going on out there in the street. And, you know, the authorities were not happy. And the prison minister, you know, he was a wimp. I mean, he—you know, he was black. I mean, you know, and, you know, we thought that at least he would stand the ground, you know, from a ministerial point of view at any rate. But he didn't. I mean, he just caved into the Fascists and, you know, the administration. But, I mean, I guess maybe, you know, that was too much to ask of him, you know, that he would have to give up the job or something, because they were paying him. But anyway, you know, so Bill was no longer able to come in to preach.

And, of course, at that time, they were talking in terms of sending me to another prison, because they had an idea that [2:30:00] I was involved with it.

JD: And you were. [Laughs]

JG: And I was. [Laughs] And I was, you know.

JD: They had put you in the federal prison on the charge of helping Hood and Washington go to Canada?

JG: Helping Washington, yeah, right. And I'm what they call the A2 number, which meant that I could go to—I could be paroled, you know, in nine months and all. But, you know, as it turned out, you know, I did end up being paroled after—it was a little after two years. A little over two years I spent, you know, in Atlanta, and then they paroled me to my detainer, which was the State of North Carolina.

JD: Who then put you back into—?

JG: Who then, you know, ended up sending me—well, I was at Central Prison for a while.

JD: In Raleigh.

JG: Yeah.

JD: What was that like?

JG: Well, I mean, we had a hunger strike. You know, that was the only time that Ben and I were in the same prison at the same time, because, you know, he had already been sentenced under the Wilmington Ten case.

JD: Right.

JG: And so, you know, he was there, so that when they sent me from Atlanta, they paroled me back to the detainer, you know, I met him.

JD: Wow.

JG: You know, at Central Prison. And so, I mean, we had—you know, we had a hunger strike and everything, and so, you know, they ended up sending us out.

JD: What were the demands of the strike?

JG: Better food, you know. I mean, you know, the quality was terrible. I mean, you know, and then also, we were—at the time, we were also talking, but we hadn't really put it down, that we would want the people who were working in some of the prison industries to be paid.

JD: The inmates who were making things for one cent an hour.

JG: Right.

JD: Yeah.

JG: Right.

JD: So, you were also addressing—.

JG: We were addressing the issue of a prisoners' labor union.

JD: Wow. And did you try to form a prison labor union?

JG: Well, yeah. I mean, we—see, there was already some talk of one, but it was amongst, you know, a group of the white prisoners. They were the ones that actually had started the thing, but they couldn't or wouldn't, you know, move to the blacks. But then, you know, I ended up—well, I knew Donald Morgan, who was one of the people who was in the prisoners' labor union, you know, the white folks' part of it. And, you know, we kind of were able to hook up a thing wherein we both worked together on the union. And then, I knew people outside who were also involved, (Robbie Perner and Allen McGregor) and those people. And, again, I mean, you know, these are all a lot of the same people that I had met coming along when I was free.

JD: Through SCEF?

JG: Through SCEF and through the Quakers.

JD: So, it's really interesting that, yeah, like you're saying, you were still able to build on your outside connections while you were on the inside.

JG: While I was inside, right.

JD: Yeah.

JG: To do the necessary work that had to be done inside. [2:35:00]

JD: And did the authorities—of course, they saw what you were doing on the inside.

JG: Yeah.

JD: But did they realize that you still had these outside connections?

JG: Well, I don't know if they *realized* it or not. I guess they assumed—I mean, you know, if they put one and one together, I mean, you're supposed to get two. But, I mean, you know, these people would be coming in to *visit* me, you know. I mean, like—I mean, it was no secret. I mean, [laughs] I wasn't trying to hide nothing. [Clears throat]

You know, I mean, people would—I mean, even when I was in—oh, yeah, that, also the NAACP chapter. We formed that at Atlanta Federal Penitentiary.

JD: Oh, you formed an NAACP chapter in—?

JG: We formed—.

JD: Wow.

JG: We formed a chapter of the NAACP. And that was through the efforts of, again, some contacts that I had made, you know, while I was out before, Ms. Ruby

Hurley and W.W. Law and people, you know, who were strong within the NAACP that I had known, you know, back during the time that, you know, again from SCEF days.

JD: These are folks in Atlanta?

JG: [Clears throat] These were folks—well, Ms. Hurley was like, you know, she was the—[coughs] she was over the region. She was the regional director for the NAACP at the time.

JD: In the Southeast?

JG: In the Southeast, right.

JD: Wow. So, y'all were able to establish a chapter.

JG: Right.

JD: And what did the prison say?

JG: Well, they went along with it because, again, they had—I mean, it was pushed from the outside, as well. And [coughs] the NAACP wasn't really considered a threat to the prison administration as such.

JD: Right. But that may have been a way they could seem racially sensitive.

JG: Yeah, I mean, you know, especially with the large number of black inmates.

JD: Right. Going back to Raleigh, what year was that hunger strike?

JG: That was in—was it [19]73 or [19]74? Somewhere in there.

JD: Okay. That was at Central Prison?

JG: Yeah. It was right after I had came from Atlanta, so it had to have been [19]74.

JD: And—sorry to jump back and forth, just the thoughts are coming—.

JG: Yeah, I mean, you've got to.

JD: Yeah.

JG: You know, because, I mean, the thoughts are jumping back and forth in my head, too, because I'm remembering stuff that, you know.

JD: Yeah. What did y'all do with the NAACP chapter? What did y'all try to do or what did you do in Atlanta?

JG: Well, I mean, one of the things we were trying to set up was a way in which some of the people could get out, you know, on furloughs, on trips, you know, like where people would take them out, you know, and, you know, maybe for a few hours, and then bring them back. I mean, you know, these were guys—I mean, Atlanta was a hardcore institution. I mean, you had—I mean, there were people there with so much time, I mean, you know, thousands of years, you know, in terms of prison sentences.

I mean, [2:40:00] you know, but I mean, you know, these—and I mean, *still*, I mean, you know, you're human. I mean, you know, you still have contact, I mean, you should have contact with folks. And we figured that, you know, as more of these contacts were facilitated that, you know, that maybe these guys could, you know, could work something out wherein they could, you know, perhaps, you know, not be locked up all the time. I mean, it was always an idea of trying to make it better, you know, for the people who were inside, you know, as well as maybe getting the people outside to look at them as a human being, as opposed to the way the mass media were going about, you know, depicting them as being some sort of animal or something.

JD: Yeah. I mean, you were in prison with people, some people who had been convicted of murder.

JG: Sure!

JD: It's—I mean, the fact that that's where they put you, I mean, they put you in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary for a charge that originally was supposed to be a year in prison, I mean it was—.

JG: Yeah, they sent me there.

JD: Yeah. I mean, it's interesting that you stayed so active. I mean, that must have been really important to you as a way to—.

JG: Well, it's part of, [clears throat] of what I am, I mean, you know. I mean, it's—you know, so, I mean, it's not something that I would not have thought, or given a second thought of doing. You know, I mean, it just comes naturally, just like that. I mean, you know, you're fighting the system. I mean, you know, it's the same. It's the same system that's—I mean, the system that framed you, that put you in, I mean, is the same system that's screwing over all these other people, you know, who are already in and maybe who shouldn't be in. And also, people outside who, you know, who are not getting paid what they should be paid. I mean, it's the same damn system that's doing this. And so, you know, you fight.

JD: Yeah.

JG: I mean, no matter where you are, wherever they send you, wherever they put you, you fight, because this is the same system, and you try to do whatever you can to dismantle the system. I mean, and this is just—you know, this is how—it's not just a way

of coping for being in prison. Because, I mean—and prison itself, I mean, you know, that's—ninety-five percent of that is mental. I mean, you know, you can—if you have a mind to it, I mean, you can—you know, you can even go to solitary and spend a lot of time there and still get things done. I mean, you know, because you think. You're thinking. You know, and they'll let you have your books.

JD: Did you have to go to solitary?

JG: Well, once or twice.

JD: Yeah.

JG: You know, I never would stay. I mean, you know, because I had—and, again, this is another thing about having contacts outside. See, because, you know, once they found out I was in solitary, you know, I mean, Ferguson was on the horn.

JD: Who was Ferguson?

JG: Ferguson was the attorney, James Ferguson.

JD: Right.

JG: I mean, he was on the horn. I mean, you know, and he has contacts. You know, and I had contacts outside. You know, and, I mean, you know, people would be up in arms, I mean, you know, raising hell.

JD: You had an incredible support network outside.

JG: That's it! [2:45:00]

JD: I mean, the fact that your case became such a *cause célèbre*, the Charlotte Three, and this ongoing campaign to get you out of prison, I mean. It was really powerful reading about, in that one article, about your parents protesting.

JG: Yeah.

JD: Maybe not every single day, but they would come down to North Carolina from Connecticut, I think.

JG: Yeah. Well, they were doing a lot of protesting up in Connecticut.

JD: Okay.

JG: Yeah, because, I mean, they would be there, I guess, once a week, in front of the Old Statehouse in Hartford, you know, which is the capital city.

JD: Yeah.

JG: You know, and, I mean, you know, Amnesty International. I mean, you know—see, all of this, you know, was what really freed us, you know, just to be honest. You know, because, you know, we weren't freed by the courts. I mean, we were freed by the people. You know, and when I say that, I mean, I'm not just throwing words around. I mean, you know, because when we were finally turned loose by Jim Hunt—Jim Hunt was the governor at the time. Jim Hunt, from what I understand, was told by Jimmy Carter, who was the president at the time that we were released, that the U.S. was getting a black eye in the U.N.—and a lot of this was coming from the Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries and some of the European countries—because of the Charlotte Three and the Wilmington Ten.

JD: Right.

JG: And that he wanted something done about that situation. I mean, that's how we got out.

JD: Yeah.

JG: And, I mean, you know, it was shortly thereafter that we were released.

JD: Wow.

JG: And, you know, of course, Ben got—he got a—they cut his time first, and then he went on the federal—the federal people turned him loose, you know. I think it was the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals turned him loose.

JD: When were you released?

JG: I was released, actually, was that—? It was [19]78 or [19]79 when—yeah, because it was after we had gone back in. It was about maybe six months or so after we had gone back. We were out for a long time on bond, you know, I think from—was it [19]75? I think it was from [19]75 through [19]78 we were out on bond because we were going through the courts. And we were finally freed, you know, through a commutation, you know, in—I think it was—it was either late [19]78 or early [19]79. But that's when it came to an end.

JD: Hmm. I'm going to pause it just for a moment. [Pause 2:49:37 to 2:49:50]

JG: …to really get with some of this stuff that you, you know, that you forget, I mean, you know, because, I mean, you know, especially if you stay active [2:50:00] the way I stay active. I mean, you know, I'm still active, you know. Well, let's see, where were we?

JD: Well, you had just basically wrapped up with getting out of prison. One thing occurred to me, just to mention on the interview, I came across an article you wrote for *Southern Exposure* that was about black labor organizing.

JG: Um-hmm.

JD: And it was apparently you wrote it while you were still in prison.

JG: Um-hmm.

JD: And so, were you doing a lot of writing in prison?

JG: Yeah.

JD: So, who else were you writing for?

JG: Well, I mean, you know, of course, I stayed writing for SCEF until I, you know, of course, got out, but—.

JD: Wow. So, you're writing for the *Southern Patriot* while you're in prison?

JG: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you know, I was still on staff.

JD: Yeah.

JG: And, you know, doing other kinds of things. I mean, you know, we were doing things. You know, I mean, I didn't really have a set plan or a set—you know, saying that this is what you do, *boom, boom, boom, boom, boom!* No, I mean, you know, that's not the way it worked. You know, I mean, I pretty much, you know, designed whatever I wanted to do. You know, and, I mean, you know, continuing the work of the *Southern Patriot* and making sure that things were being reported that wouldn't ordinarily get reported, that I still had contacts—I mean, I had contacts with people. You know, I mean, I had scads of mail coming in all the time, you know, was getting information, you know, sending out information. I mean, you know, we were dealing with stuff with the NAACP. I mean, we had a chapter going, you know, I mean, and that in itself is—you know, that takes a lot.

JD: Keeping a chapter running?

JG: Keeping the chapter running. I mean, I wasn't one of the officers but, you know, I was involved in it. You know, the officers, I mean, they're the ones that have to sign the papers and all that sort of thing. I mean, you know, but, I mean, I'm still active with the mission of what we were trying to do. I mean, we were still trying to work on getting the furloughs, you know, for the guys so that they could go out.

JD: When you were released from prison from Raleigh—?

JG: Yeah.

JD: What was that like? How did you feel? What did you do?

JG: I mean, I mean, I mean—you know, I went—I got me a good meal. That was one thing. But, I mean, in terms of like, you know—I mean, I don't think—it wasn't really anything other than—well, I mean, obviously, you know, you can get up, you can drive, you can go where you want to go, and all of that. But, I mean, you know, in terms of the organizing, that remained.

JD: Right. That's what sounds so unusual about your prison experience. I mean, maybe it's just assumptions I'm making, but all the organizing you did and all the writing you did in prison—I mean, of course, it was a huge change and a challenge to be in prison, but it seems like you were still incredibly active, so that maybe coming back out was less of a change than it would be for some people.

JG: Right, right, right. Yeah, because, I mean, you know, I guess most people—you know, I mean, its like, "Alright, I'm not—I'm in a different position now, so, you know. But, I mean, the mission is still the same," I mean, you know. [2:55:00]

JD: Yeah.

JG: The mission is still the same, I mean, whether you're in or whether you're out. You know, the system is still doing its dirt, and it's got to be stopped, I mean, you know. And, you know, there's plenty to do. There's plenty to do, believe me.

JD: Did you go back to Charlotte? Or what did you—you were still working with SCEF, but what—?

JG: Well, yeah. I mean, I stayed in Charlotte for a while. But then—well, actually when I came up here in Raleigh, I just sort of, I just kind of stayed put in Raleigh, because there was enough stuff that was happening up here in Raleigh. Because, I mean, during the time I was in Charlotte, you know, of course, that's when they had sent me to the minimum custody camp, you know, where you could—[recorder beeps?]

JD: I'm going to pause it for just a moment.

JG: Sure.

JD: I'm sorry.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JD: I'm sorry. You were saying about Raleigh.

JG: Yeah. No, I basically stayed up here in Raleigh. And how I got up here to Raleigh is another—because during the time that I was at Camp Greene, which is a minimum custody camp in Mecklenburg County, you know, I was going out, you know, on the weekends, you know, because they have that program and all that. And so, I availed myself of all of that, and so, you know, I mean, I was out, you know. And, you know, then, of course, when they sent—I got what they call a work-release job. And the work-release job was back with the Commission for Racial Justice.

JD: United Church of Christ?

JG: Right. Right, it was with them, and they were in Raleigh. So, you know, I ended up coming up here to Raleigh to work with them during the time that, you know, I was going back and forth, you know, to work. And then, of course, when I was released, you know, I just continued, you know, my work with the Commission for Racial Justice. And I stayed with them for a while, but—you know. By this time, SCEF had fallen apart. You know, (2:58:17) sectarianism that affects the left just, you know, was too much. And, of course, Carl had died. [Clears throat]

JD: Carl Braden had died.

JG: Yeah, he had died. And Anne was, you know, was in poor health, and so she couldn't maintain, you know, the organization quite the way it did, and it kind of fell apart right around 19—what was it—78, yeah, 1978. So, you know, I ended up, you know, when I came out, you know, I went with the Commission.

JD: And Ben Chavis worked for them, too, didn't he?

JG: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, Ben—actually Ben was—I'm trying to remember if he—he had gone to New York, I think, because he was—I think he was either the head of the Commission—I'm trying to remember. And then, of course, he went with the NAACP for a time until they actually pushed him out.

JD: Right. [3:00:00] And I think that was in the nineties.

JG: Yeah, early nineties. But, let's see. Yeah, I had gone to Raleigh, actually, for that. So, I just stayed up in the Raleigh area and then, you know, kind of made my base in

Raleigh and continued to push towards the East, because the East was where things were really, *really* messed up.

JD: So, what were you doing for the Commission on Racial Justice?

JG: Well, [laughs] a lot of the same things I had been doing before: working on different campaigns, you know. Let me see, I'm trying to remember. What's that one that—I don't know. I'm getting my—my dates are coming in—I'm trying to remember exactly what year it was that these things happened. I'm trying to not to—because I know that there was some activity that was going on in, let's see, 1980. There were some things that were happening in Scotland Neck. Oh, yeah, yeah, okay, Scotland Neck. There was a case involving a—let's see, alright, this was when—this was right after I came out completely from, you know, from the prison.

There was a case involving—a black man was shot to death by a white woman in Scotland Neck. And I'm trying to remember exactly what the details of it were. But, you know, what we had—we had suspected that she wasn't really the one that had shot the man, that it was really her son that had shot him, and we never really could get an idea as to why he was shot. But anyway, to make a long story short, she was acquitted. And people up there in Scotland Neck were really upset about it. And so, you know, there was a big campaign that was going on up there, which I think Golden Frinks was part of.

JD: She was a white woman?

JG: Yeah.

JD: Who had killed a black man?

JG: Yeah.

JD: Or was charged with that?

JG: Was charged with killing a black man. I'm trying to remember what year that was. Was it [19]79? Or was it [19]80 or [19]81? I'm trying to remember. I can't. There are certain periods that, you know, that are not clear in your mind.

JD: Right.

JG: It seemed to me it was during that period of time, because, you know, there were several marches that took place from up there in Scotland Neck. And, let's see. [3:05:00] I'm trying to remember what else. No, that's not when that was.

JD: Were you involved with any of the stuff after the Greensboro Massacre?

JG: No.

JD: No?

JG: No, I—you know, I mean, [clears throat] we—I was, at that time, I was—I think I—was that during the time that I was briefly with the—okay, I had left. Alright, I had left the Commission and I had—that was during the time that I was out. Damn! Because there was a period of time when I was with the—when I had gone to work with the National Alliance, and I'm trying to remember what year that was. But I know I was out.

JD: What's the National Alliance?

JG: The National Alliance Against Race and Political Oppression. This was a group that—well, actually, we ended up—because Ben and them were still in at that time, and we were working on trying to get him out and the rest of them out, you know, the Wilmington Ten, and I know I was doing a lot of work with that. And I know I had left

the Commission for Racial Justice because of some internal stuff that was going on with them up in New York that, you know, reverberated back [laughs] down.

JD: Yeah, drama.

JG: Yeah, drama, you know, and I ended up going with the National Alliance. It was a group that was set up—they actually really—oh, hell no! Uh-uh. No, that wasn't—I wasn't out at that time. I was on bond. See, that's why—some of this stuff just (folds).

JD: Yeah, that's okay.

JG: Yeah, but that was another period that we could talk about. It was during the time that I was out on bond. It was between [19]76 and [19]79.

JD: Okay.

JG: No, it was [19]75 and [19]79, when I was on bond.

JD: Okay.

JG: I was out on bond during that period of time. It was just a lot of things that were happening during that time.

JD: Yeah. [Laughs] It's pretty incredible just to—your life is so dense with activism.

JG: Yeah.

JD: And the whole stretch of the seventies, the dealings with the legal system—.

JG: Right.

JD: It's pretty complicated just trying to get a timeline for that. Did you get involved with Black Workers for Justice?

JG: Okay, Black Workers for Justice really didn't get started until—I mean, I was out then, for sure.

JD: Yeah.

JG: But they didn't really—I'm just trying to remember. Was it 1980?

JD: Their website says it was 1983.

JG: Was it [19]83?

JD: That's just what their website says.

JG: Well, I mean, I—well, actually, I'm a charter member of Black Workers for Justice. So, I mean, I remember when we had that first meeting in Rocky Mount, and that was during the time that the workers had been fired from K-Mart.

JD: Right.

JG: Up in Rocky Mount. And at that time, [3:10:00] I think Saladin was working for—Saladin Muhammad, was working for Legal Aid at the time.

JD: How did you get linked up with those folks? And also, yeah, how—?

JG: Well, I mean, it was—let's see. I think Naomi Greene was the one who linked us up. Naomi was an activist in Rocky Mount, and she had been—well, she knew Saladin Muhammad. In fact, I think she knew his whole family.

JD: Isn't he from Philly originally?

JG: He's originally from Philly. But, you know, his people are from down here.

JD: Oh, okay.

JG: In Rocky Mount and outside of Rocky Mount.

JD: Okay.

JG: And Naomi was—she was active. Let's see, I had met Naomi during the time—oh, hell. See, this is what I'm saying, when you make these contacts, you know, you can't always put a timeline, in terms of when you first met them.

JD: Right.

JG: But Naomi was active during the time that the—when they were marching in from Hyde County. This was before I had gotten arrested.

JD: Gosh, okay. Wow. And so, years later, she was in Rocky Mount.

JG: She's in Rocky Mount. She's active.

JD: Around this K-Mart employees issue.

JG: Yeah, yeah. And, I mean, and I think it was through her—you know, a contact, again, that I had made and kept, you know, through the years—it was through her that I got in contact with Saladin and the people, you know, who were organizing around the K-Mart workers.

JD: Did you know Abner Berry?

JG: I met Abner. I didn't know him like, you know, Saladin knew him. I mean, Saladin knew him from back aways.

JD: From Philly?

JG: Yeah.

JD: Oh, okay.

JG: Yeah. See, Abner had been active in the—I don't know if he was in the Party or what, but he had been active earlier.

JD: Yeah, just looking him up online, he was very active in the Party, in the Communist Party, you mean.

JG: Yeah.

JD: Yeah, there's no question about that. And what's interesting about him, he was quite the journalist, too, and he wrote a lot for communist publications.

JG: Um-hmm.

JD: And so, you can see things that he wrote in the thirties and forties for these New York communist papers.

JG: Yeah, yeah.

JD: So, that was more Saladin—could speak to him.

JG: Yeah, Saladin could tell you all about Abner.

JD: Yeah.

JG: In fact, I think Abner came and lived with Saladin for a while.

JD: So, gosh, I think we've done—pushing—what time is it now? I think we're pushing three hours. [Laughs] We've already—I'm sure there's a lot more we could cover, but what I want to ask is—.

JG: We've got the eighties and the nineties! [Laughs]

JD: No, we didn't even get to that, really.

JG: No! [Laughs]

JD: What were—maybe you could just say what were the big highlights of that period for you, organizationally? You don't have to get really in depth, but maybe if we

ever wanted to do another timeline, or another interview, or just—some of the groups you worked with after the Commission on Racial Justice.

JG: Well, let's see. There was the people in Moore County, you know, around the Klan, the anti-Klan campaign down there. You know, that's when we had to—we had to actually, you know, pull our guns out [3:15:00] and run them the hell away from there.

JD: When was that?

JG: Well, this was 19–I think it was [19]86.

JD: Wow. Moore County, where it's just—not Sanford.

JG: That's Southern Pines.

JD: Yeah.

JG: Southern Pines, and there were a whole bunch of—well, there was a group that we organized down there that was called Voices for Justice. But I'm trying to remember the acronym for the first group that we organized down there. It's called Rural Activists—it ended up being RAMBRO—Rural Activists Monitoring Black and Racial Organizations. I think that's how it came out.

JD: And that was in Moore County?

JG: That was in Moore County.

JD: Wow. And there was a lot of Klan activity there?

JG: Very much, very much. You know, and, of course, that's something where you can probably talk with—[clears throat] he's retired now from the prison service. He worked for the Department of Corrections. And, in fact, it was his case that started, you know, everything down there. His name is Bobby Person, and he was a prison guard—

well, I'm not going to start this, because, you know, we ain't going to have the time to really go into this thing. [Laughs]

JD: [Laughs] This might be good for another interview, then.

JG: Yeah.

JD: Yeah.

JG: Yeah, let's try to do another one.

JD: Yeah. Let me ask you one final question, if that's okay.

JG: Sure.

JD: Last summer, I was looking through the Moral Monday arrestee data base that's on the internet.

JG: Um-hmm.

JD: Have you heard of it?

JG: Yeah.

JD: And I had been arrested, and I was looking to see if I was in there, and I was kind of clicking through it and seeing different names that I recognized, and I came across your name.

JG: Um-hmm.

JD: And I said to myself, "I wonder if that's the same Jim Grant."

JG: That is.

JD: And, I don't know, maybe you could talk a little bit about—I mean, that experience probably was not as significant to you, as someone who's had a lifetime of activism, but to me it was interesting to see, "Wow, still! This person is still active and

still protesting and even going to jail for what he believes in." You know, why did you get involved with Moral Monday?

JG: Well, I mean, it was because of what they were standing for. I mean, you know, basically, I mean, you have an extremist group that's seized power here in the State of North Carolina, and, you know, they're really turning everything back. I mean, you know, I mean, not that, you know, things were all that much forward before, but, I mean, you know, it definitely—you know, I mean, just the whole attitude is totally different now than it was before. And, you know, something needed to happen. I mean, you know, and hopefully, we can push forward even *beyond* what it was before to something that, you know, is further on towards a real substantial change, [3:20:00] you know, in the way things are done, you know, in this state and in other states, as well, in the whole United States.

So, I mean, yeah, this is why I—you know, I mean, I'm still very much involved in activity. You know, where I see there's a need and I can help, you know, I'm going to do it!

JD: Yeah.

JG: You know, and so, that's basically why I got involved in the Moral Monday thing. I mean, obviously, I was going to get involved in it anyway [laughs] at some point in time or the other. I mean, you know, I know everybody. I mean, I know—you know, I mean, I knew Reverend Barber, I mean, when he was that high. I mean, see, I worked with his father. See, we're talking about a couple of generations now.

JD: Oh, so he came—I thought there was some Indiana connection. Where was his father from?

JG: Well, his father is from here.

JD: From Wilson?

JG: No, from Martin County.

JD: Ah, okay.

JG: In fact, that's where Bill is from. I mean, you know, they grew up right outside of Williamston.

JD: Bill?

JG: Bill Barber.

JD: That's his dad?

JG: Well—.

JD: Oh, William!

JG: William!

JD: Right.

JG: I call him Bill.

JD: No, well, that's—yeah, okay.

JG: I've known him since he was eight years old, him and his brother Charlie, a couple of years younger than him.

JD: Yeah, okay. So, I didn't know you had such a long connection to that family. So, that's very—.

JG: Well, I mean, I—you know, like I say, I mean, I met his father—actually, it was through another contact that we both had who was with the church, Disciples of Christ Church, who was an activist down there and still is. His name is, or his name *was* Robert Wilkins, but he changed it to Israel Shachia.

JD: Israel Shakeel?

JG: Shachia.

JD: How do you spell that?

JG: S-C-H-A-C-H-I-A, I think. Don't get me on my spelling now. I mean, that ain't my strongpoint.

JD: So, Barber Sr., he was from outside Williamston?

JG: Yeah, all of them. I mean , you know, Wilkins—well, at the time he was Reverend Robert Wilkins. I mean, he had a church in Jamesville; he pastored a church in Jamesville. And, you know, but he lived in Plymouth, and Plymouth is right down the road from Williamston.

JD: Yeah.

JG: You know, and everybody knows each other, I mean, you know, in the rural areas.

JD: Yeah.

JG: You know, that's just how it is with black folks, you know, I mean, especially, you know, if they're connected in the church.

JD: Right.

JG: In the same type of church, and that is the same church that William Jr. preaches at. You know, it's a Disciples of Christ Church.

JD: Okay. Wow. That's a great note to end on.

JG: [Laughs]

JD: Because I didn't know a whole lot about Reverend Barber's family background, and so that—.

JG: Yeah.

JD: It's almost like full circle.

JG: Circular.

JD: Yeah.

JG: Circular, yeah.

JD: So, I'm going to turn it off, but—.

[Recording ends at 3:24:13]

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Sally C. Council