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Interviewee: Leslie Dunbar

Interviewer: Susan Glisson

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G: This is Susan Glisson interviewing Leslie Dunbar on May 10, 2002 in Washington D.C.

D: I'll just start where I was. The summer of 1958 came, I was teaching at that time at Mount Holyoke College. [Founded by revolutionary educator and chemist Mary Lyon in 1837, Mount Holyoke College is a highly selective, nondenominational, liberal arts college for women enrolling approximately 2,000 students.] I didn't have anything to do that summer and wanted something, needed something. I had known Harold Fleming when I was [teaching at Emory University]. I went from Emory over to South Carolina with the Atomic Energy Commission, and from there went up to Mount Holyoke College. I'd known Harold Fleming not too well, but I knew him when I was in Atlanta that first time and had run into him actually, a couple of times when I would come to Atlanta on business. SRC had just gotten its sizeable grant from the Ford Foundation, I think about 1953. As a matter of fact, George Mitchell who was Harold's predecessor came over to Aiken, [South Carolina] where I was living, and I don't know that I should say he offered me the job of field director, but he sure did invite me to think about it. Maybe, I should have done it, but I didn't. But by 1958, SRC was expanded, had the state councils' grants, [which was] what the Ford grant was for, mainly. But [SRC] had just gotten another, for it, sizeable grant, [this] from [the] Rockefeller Brothers Fund to think about programs. [The Rockefeller Brothers Fund promotes social change that contributes to a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world.] Harold called me up and offered me a job, doing the thinking for them for the summer. So, I came down to Atlanta and worked that summer. At the end of it, I didn't want to go back. Harold and I talked and we agreed we'd set up a research department and I would be director of research. I went back and taught one more semester at Mount Holyoke and quit, moved down to Atlanta.

G: What year was that again?

D: That was January 1959, so I was there the summer of 1958 and came back January 1959 and stayed.

G: That's how you got to SRC. You started officially then, in 1959 as the director of research?

D: Yes.

G: What was the kind of research that you were doing?

- D: Well, I made it up. That Rockefeller Brothers grant, which [I] was specifically there to do, was to reach the leadership of the South. We decided we should do a series of halfway good studies so we began putting out pamphlets. I thought [–still do–] they were pretty good pamphlets. Then, the project also hired as its field director, or whatever title he had, one of the great people of my life Benjamin Muse. Ben had an extraordinary career; somebody ought to write his biography. He had, at one time, been a member of Virginia legislature. He ran for governor, once. He did a column [on Virginia affairs in] the *Washington Post* for years. [And was] just a great, lovely human being. The idea was that Ben would sort of drift around the South talking to all these leaders, which he did in a great way. He was the leadership project. We cranked out a lot of [news releases and] pamphlets in those years. I always called myself a pamphleteer. I thought they were pretty good, really. We also did “special reports.” [L]ike every year we’d put out a report on school desegregation for that year, what happened in 1958, what happened in 1959 [etc]. We began to get a lot of press. Harold was wonderful at working with the press and I was able to back him up. I think we created, in those several years, established SRC’s reputation for information. We read a lot of newspapers, clipped a lot of [southern and national] newspapers, magazines, had files– and nobody [else] had such files. [Later, *Southern School News* became strong, and we cooperated.] We became a port of call for reporters. At that time, and increasingly, in the next several years, Atlanta was just flooded with reporters. We had several bureaus there; [that of] the *New York Times* was created about the time I got there. The *New York Times* southern correspondent had been the fabulous Johnny Popham, but John had moved [on] to take the editorship [of] the *Chattanooga Times*. They[, the *Times*, then] created a bureau office in Atlanta and hired Claude Sitton. Claude had been working [in the] U.S. Information Agency. That relationship between us and Sitton, or between us and the *New York Times*, was very important. Claude, [as] Popham before him, was very much the dean of reporters. He was the best. Claude has never written the book that everybody thought he could write. Then, not only was the *New York Times* bureau in Atlanta, the *Wall Street Journal* [was there] off and on, *Newsweek* magazine set up a bureau, *Time* [magazine] did, too. Of course, we knew the southern press and the *Washington Post* would come through regularly. During those years with Harold’s [and my] leadership, we made the SRC a sort of information center. I think we established a reputation for accuracy. I used to call it partisan objectivity. We were very clear on it: opinionated, we were very clearly on the one side of things, but we were jealous of our reputation for not making [or spreading] mistakes and that was part of our reach.
- G: Who were the primary audiences for the publications?
- D: Primary audiences for our publication, that was always a good question. We had a [large] mailing list. With Ben Muse, we created a list of so-called leaders

around the South. We had a list [of] so-called intergroup relations agencies. Does that term get used any more? Intergroup relations?

G: Human relations councils probably took the place.

D: There used to be a national organization called NAIRO. [National Association of Intergroup Relations]

G: That still exists.

D: Does it?

G: It just had a national conference in Mississippi, in fact.

D: Did they really?

G: They sure did.

D: Fred Routh [who] worked [for] SRC [as field director [–the job I had pursued in 1953–] he became [president of NAIRO] for [a term]. We included all the agencies around, including all those church agencies and all the newspapers, just anybody else we could put on it [that] made any sense. SRC now, charges money for everything. Our belief was if anybody would read our stuff, we'd give it to them. *New South*, [our] magazine I think we charged \$2 a year for, but if you didn't want to pay we'd [probably] give it to you, anyhow. [T]he pamphlets, we never charged for.

G: What do you think the impact of those publications was?

D: I think they were important. Nobody in New York believed anything that they didn't see written in the *New York Times*, which is not really, an exaggeration [and] were working with Popham and Sitton all the time. Also, we had our foundation supporters in New York, and they wanted us to [do] good [work], so, we had foundations on our mailing list. We had a lot of people [and officers] in the [federal] government, especially in the Kennedy [and Johnson] administration[s] and as many congressman as we could reach.

G: Did you all use the other sources of mass media? Television, radio?

D: We didn't do television, couldn't touch that. We kept talking about doing radio [but] we never did. There used to be a man named Ed Randall.

G: Right. He did those "friendly world" broadcasts?

- D: Yes. There was one time, maybe in the mid 1960s, we kind of, halfway subsidized Ed. We just didn't know how to get into T.V. We did our best to get coverage on some of the news reports, [and] now and then, [we] cashed in.
- G: So, radio wasn't really an effective way as you all saw it.
- D: We just didn't know how to do it.
- G: So, you made more use of pamphlets and reports and magazines.
- D: And working with the press, directly. We all did a fair bit of speech-making, but speech-making [with some exception,] tended to be to our own [or like-minded] people, we were always talking to the choir but that's important to do]. That's about it.
- G: As there was this emergence of mass black activism in places like Montgomery and then in places in the late 1950s and 1960s, how did the SRC respond to that?
- D: I think, in the first place, before it burst [out], SRC had very good relationships and Harold had cultivated these with the NAACP and some, with the National Urban League. I always have a hard time distinguishing between King [Martin Luther King, Jr.] and SCLC. King was the SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a civil rights organization founded in 1957] King and Harold were building up a personal relationship and I inherited that, I think. Certainly, nobody predicted the mass movements. Maybe, I'm being immodest with this, but I always believed that we did a [valuable] thing in 1960. Right after the sit-in movement started up in Greensboro, we got out a report, and I think we were about the first organization to come down flatly on the side of students. We did. [We contributed importantly to making the direct action movement respected.] When that began, we always had good relationships I think with SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee].
- G: The freedom riders came next.
- D: Yeah. I was not enthusiastic about the freedom ride, at first.
- G: How come?
- D: I was so impressed by the success that the sit-in movement was having. After the initial resistance, which was intense, and after the first few months, there were about 100 cities around the South taking their own steps. I just thought this was wonderful. So here we had these southern students moving, these southern

cities beginning to move a little bit. I thought, why doesn't the North leave us alone for a little while. The freedom ride began out of New York.

G: It was a CORE [Congress of Racial Equality, a civil rights organization whose goals include equal rights, quality education, and economic and political opportunities for blacks] project, right?

D: What the freedom ride did, what it meant was that civil rights was being nationalized, and I guess that was good. I think some of us weren't ready for that, and we just did not have the personal relationship with CORE that we have with SNCC and not the personal relationships we had with the NAACP. But in the wake of the resistance to the freedom ride, you had to come to its side.

G: But initially you had a sense that maybe if they had held off, some of the cities might have been more responsive.

D: I think so. But it didn't happen.

G: Instead they maybe were felt that they were backed into a corner.

D: It didn't happen. I learned lessons along the way. Harold left in 1961 and I succeeded him. I was very, very fond of Harold. He meant a lot to me, but we were two very different persons.

G: In what way?

D: I could not do some things that he did. He had become a confidant for Mayor Hartsfield and Ralph McGill [editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*]. He did a lot of interceding for them and I wasn't any good at that. I remember [that] he hadn't been gone long, [when] SNCC kids or somebody, I forget who was doing it, but there was protest about theaters, and the power structure people always put off, put off. So I got called George Goodwin. George may still be alive. He worked for one of the banks, but he was kind of an advisor about race to the business community of Atlanta. He called me up said, can't you just get them to hold off for a day or two days, so I tried and actually, I succeeded. But I decided right then, I'll never do it again.

G: Why is that?

D: I didn't want the role of quarter-backing the movement [of trying to control its pace]. So I never did it again. When I was asked the next couple of times, I just said, I can't do that. And I never did.

G: Did those business influences find someone else to try to serve that role?

D: I think so. George Goodwin could do it himself, for that matter. But I didn't do it. I just felt it was much more important to the SRC to have the full trust of black organizations. Maybe Harold could, I didn't see that I could.

G: Ask them to hold off, and still have their trust?

D: I didn't want to do that.

G: Was there any sense of unease about the fact that southern African Americans had seized the initiative and taken to the streets?

D: Oh, sure. Unease, where?

G: On the SRC staff.

D: Maybe I'm wrong, but I think after that initial act we [all] supported the sit-in movement. I think that report of ours came out [in] February, I think [it] just established where we were. We got the voter education project created and that depended on trust [of black organizations]. I think we had made up our mind. The SRC had already lost [in the 1950s] a couple of people because of taking a stand against segregation, [but this is what we were].

G: Lost some staff members because of that?

D: [Not that I knew of]. Before I got there, SRC [had] put out its statement against segregation in 1953. Harold wrote that. A couple of the older members of the board resigned, [no staff that I knew of. In my time,] I think we were beyond that point.

G: Was SRC vilified or harassed because of [its stands] ?

D: Oh, sure. Often.

G: As part of the massive resistance to segregation?

D: Susan, there were always these cranks and others. They would send you nasty letters or call you up and say nasty things. We had one tax problem with the Georgia State Department of Revenue, which we got over and I'm pretty sure they were put up to it by whomever. They may have had another tax problem after I left; I seem to remember that they did. That would have been the same thing. Things were ugly down there in the 1950s [and 1960s], so we would hear [from the yahoos].

G: What was the SRC's attitude toward non-violent direct action?

D: All for it.

- G: All for it. I just want to make clear the distinction with the freedom rides which others would have seen as non-violent direct action, the distinction with that was because it was initiated by CORE, by northerners.
- D: I can't recapture all of my thinking at the time. I think some of us were just kind of put out that these people from the North were sashaying into the South. Then they did, of course, attract southern students--some of them--like John Lewis. John Diane Nash. After they were heard from, [we] didn't say anything more, didn't have anymore questions.
- G: Yeah, Chuck McDew who was the chair of SNCC around that time had the sense that CORE started the freedom rides and then they met with violence and they were going to quit them, and SNCC felt like that was a really horrible message to send to people in the South, that if you start something and you meet with violence then you defeat it, and you can't send that message [if you quit]. You can't send that message. You can't let the people in the South think that they're going to be abandoned as soon as the going gets tough, and that's why SNCC came in to take them over, because they didn't want to send that message.
- D: That's about right. The freedom rides meant that civil rights was being nationalized, but then [SNCC] kind of made it southernized.
- G: Right. And you know Miss [Ella] Baker had the southern and the northern students meet separately at the first SNCC conference because she felt like the southern students, they were the ones in the trenches.
- D: Chuck McDew, do you know him?
- G: [Yes].
- D: Where is he?
- G: He's in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He's teaching at Metropolitan State University. He said he wanted to get as close as he could to the borders of the nation in case he needed to get out of the U.S., quickly.
- D: What does he teach?
- G: He teaches history, teaches Civil War history.
- D: I never knew him very well, but I knew him for awhile. He was one of the people who led SNCC out to Mississippi. Is he still Jewish?

G: He is.

D: Good for him.

G: And you know why he made that choice? Because it was the church that would accept him when he came South. The Protestant churches wouldn't allow him in the door and synagogue did.

D: He and his wife were married by one of the great people in my life, one of the great influences, Justine Polier. She [was] a great judge of the family court up there in New York. Someone I became very close to. Justine was the daughter of the founder of the American Jewish Congress, Stephen Wise, and she was very proud of Chuck and happily married [him]. Is he still married to the same woman?

G: He's not married, now. He has a child, but he's not married, now. I just want to revisit the period after the *Brown* decision a little bit before we move forward. How did the SRC seek to encourage southern compliance with the *Brown* decision?

D: The *Brown* decision was in 1954 and then 1955, and I didn't get there on the ground, until 1958, but the answer would have been that [they] put [out] as much information as they could. George Mitchell and Harold handled it. Also, the creation of the Human Relations councils. They were to be in every southern state, [but] that didn't [come off]. In the early planning and thinking, the Human Relations Council were to, not supplant SRC, but were to be more central to the program than was the Atlanta office. I used to hear that every year [at] annual meetings, some of the state people [usually from Virginia] would [rise] and say you're supposed to go out of existence. I think the councils on human relations were the chief response or hoped for response. The councils never could get as well established as they should. We fought all the time to make them more than they were, and some worked, some did a great job. They never had any money. We would get grants every year— well, after the initial grant from Ford wore off, which it did [soon after] I got into it— what we had was I think \$50,000 a year from a [Field and Taconic] foundations and by the time you divided that up among [ten or so] councils, nobody got much. [From time to time, we got additional grants for designated states, and some of the councils were successful in their own fund raising, including at foundations with our support]. The Georgia council became a good one. It had a big problem, [however], because the Atlanta council managed to get separate funding through the Unitarians, which meant that the Atlanta council got probably more money than the Georgia council did, didn't really feel accountable to Georgia; and besides the director of the Atlanta council was a woman named Eliza Paschal and she and Frances Pauley had been old, old acquaintances, not necessarily friends. They had each served a term I think as president of the state League of Women Voters; it was sort of competitive. I

spent an awful lot of time in the last year or so I was there sort of mediating between Atlanta and Georgia. Nevertheless, the Georgia and the Atlanta councils [both], I think, did good things. We had a couple of other good councils; Tennessee did pretty well, South Carolina did what they could. We couldn't get one started in Mississippi until 1965 and [were] never much in Texas. Off and on we would have one in Florida. In Alabama, we could show the flag, but that was about it. We had a fellow over in Alabama named Bob Hughes. I don't have any idea what [has] happened to Bob. Like a lot of these [state directors] he was a minister, a Methodist minister. You probably don't remember this, but in 1958, maybe 1957, the *New York Times* [sent South] Harrison Salisbury, who had been their big Russian correspondent. He came to the South to write it all up. And in Alabama, he did a series of reports; maybe not a series. He did some reporting from Alabama about the Citizen's Council and the police department in Birmingham, [and the *Times* ran it prominently]. This led to one of the great Supreme Court cases, because the state of Alabama sued the *New York Times* for this and that's when we got the great decision of the court, [protecting] against libel newspapers doing this sort of thing. During all [his time in Alabama], Salisbury was getting [much] of his information from Bob Hughes. The Alabama people, [police commissioner] Bull Connor [or his predecessor, a man named Sullivan] in Birmingham wanted Bob Hughes' mailing list and his membership, and he wouldn't give it to them. So they put him in jail. He was in jail Labor Day weekend 1958. Harold [Fleming] was still there at that time. I don't quite [recall] how I got the leadership of this thing, but when we heard, we wanted to get Bob out of jail, [and] I [had] heard about [a] young attorney in Birmingham who was something of a maverick, Charles Morgan. I [phoned]. For a fee— Chuck never believed in working for free— he got Bob out of jail. [Chuck has] always credited [that] with being the beginning of his downfall in Alabama. [He] never again had access and he eventually got driven out of the state in 1963. Bob, they got him out of jail, but his district superintendent [or bishop], moved him out of Alabama, in fact sent him to Rhodesia.

The Alabama council recovered somewhat later, with Ed Stanfield, who was another minister, [a refugee from an Arkansas pulpit,] when he came there. He pulled the council together and he made something of it I think. Then later he came to Atlanta [as field director] for us for SRC. A good man. The Tennessee council was off and on, vigorous, especially [when led by the exciting Texan, another ex-minister, named Baxton Brant. Alice Spearman was the director of the South Carolina council. She was one of the great dames, great ladies of the South, I always thought. The South Carolina council was hers. We never got a decent council going in North Carolina, I thought, partly because [for] North Carolina liberals, even at that early date, their [own] organization was the ACLU. The North Carolina ACLU is still the liberal [nucleus] in North Carolina. All these good North Carolinians, my friends including Marion Wright from the SRC, McNeill Smith, and Dan Pollitt, [other] good people, [were] ACLU, they pledged

themselves to it. They couldn't do two things. They were taking the same kind of positions that SRC would. Ray Wheeler and Marion Wright, and John Wheeler, were leaders of the SRC [but in the state it was] the ACLU. (I don't even pay my dues to the ACLU anymore. I just cannot forgive them for their role [on] campaign spending. I cannot.) [After several crashes, we thought it an exciting victory when we got a Mississippi Council off the ground in 1964/65; Ken Dean was its executive.]

G: Is it accurate to say then that the SRC saw itself more as a source of information and that the Human Relations Councils were more active on the ground at the grassroots level?

D: I think the latter part of what you said is accurate, but I think SRC became more than that. We never shook off [the] core principle of information and research, but we did [more,] especially when the Kennedy administration came in. [W]e worked all the time with Washington, we did a lot, and were just busy. Of course we ran the Voter Education Project.

G: That's what I wanted to talk about next. Why do you think the SRC was particularly well placed to administer the VEP? [Voter Education Project]

D: Maybe, because there was nobody else. I think a considerable part of it is the fact that we had influence on the ground. I first heard about VEP, first heard, [that is] about the possibility that there would be something like this, when I got a call from Harold [who was by then in Washington at the Potomac Institute, set up by] the Taconic Foundation. [He said he thought] we can get some money together [for voter registration,] so could [I] come up to Washington and talk? It just kind of snowballed from there on. We had several meetings in Washington, one in New York. There [would be] the civil rights leadership, and I was [then a] new boy, and people had to get to know me. John Wheeler was an immense help because John was known by the black leadership, he was president of the bank, [a principal state leader] and people knew him. John went to these meetings with me. The story gets told so often, I hate to start, but the VEP was the Kennedy administration...

G: We were talking about the Voter Education Project and you had gotten a phone call?

D: Harold called. I think I said this but we had a whole series of meetings [with the donor]. We always thought we were going to get more money than we got and [that] the Kennedys were going to raise money for this [at least] covertly. They never really did it. [End of Side A:1]

G: You were talking about meetings?

D: Those were the kind of people who were there and there was always [someone] from SNCC. Marion Barry came and he was the first chair of SNCC. The idea [was] that SRC [would] simply be handling the money, and these other agencies would do all the work, which they didn't do. I think one of the contributions I made to VEP was right here. From the beginning, we got written into the statements that SRC would work with, all these big agencies, but also with local groups. Of course, that was the salvation of VEP because the big group [did little]. The leader most supportive of me was Roy Wilkins, but on the other hand the NAACP, once you got [to] work it didn't do a whole lot, for sort of internal reasons. We got going. We [had] the Taconic Foundation, and they brought in the Field Foundation and later the Stern Family Fund. That was the support we had. Later on, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund did come in. The Ford Foundation wouldn't touch it. The other good thing I did was to hire Wiley Branton as first executive director and Wiley was the perfect man for the job. He was an attorney in Little Rock, the primary attorney for the Little Rock's Nine [Nine African-American students who sought entrance to high school following the *Brown* decision]. He wanted to do this. He moved from Little Rock to Atlanta and was great. VEP, during my tenure, was the biggest single thing we had on our plate, and it was great to do. My successor, Paul Anthony, Paul is no longer living, I don't like to talk poorly about him, but Paul, despite the fact that he had been [my] field director and was close to the councils on human relations, he really cut them adrift and I think that was a bad decision to make. [Interviewee text insertion: A word about SRC's staff. Routh was succeeded as Field Director while Harold was still there by Paul Rilling, a first rate man, and he by Anthony. Paul had been Harold's and then my assistant. When he became Field Director, Vernon Jordan took his place. A succession of persons followed me as Research Director: Jim Moss, Staige Blackford, Lloyd Elliott, Sam Adams; Staige and Sam had outstanding post-SRC careers. Pat Watters and Margaret Long were our writers; they were great. Vernon followed Wily as VEP director] [Subsequent interviewee text insertion: Ruth House Alexander and Mrs. M.E. (Dorothy) Tilly, both of whom had worked at the Council from George Mitchell's days through Harold Fleming's, mine, and into Paul Anthony's, and maybe beyond. Ruth had capably kept the books and paid the bills etc.]

G: Cut the VEP you mean?

D: The VEP, [too]. I shall always believe that the Ford Foundation was (by this time SRC was getting money from Ford) (and by this time, I'm not even there, I'm up in New York)...but I shall always believe that Paul was being responsive to Ford. VEP turned into its own independent organization. It's not why Vernon left, but it coincided with his leaving and John [Lewis] took over. It was a bad thing to do because VEP needed the kind of research help that SRC could be to it, needed

the base of SRC. I think John [Lewis] did a great job, but he could have done a better one. He could have done a significantly better one.

G: With SRC support.

D: [With] SRC resources, which by that time, were considerable. [With these decisions, I cut loose the State Councils and I separated SRC and VEP; all of these organizations began their declines.] On the other hand, Paul built up I think, the best staff I ever saw [in] a private agency. I thought I had a good one, I did have Wiley and I did have Vernon, [Pat] and a couple of others, and I had Maggie Long. Of course, once I left, I was kind of Maggie's protector, they fired her. But [Paul] had Vernon and John Morris and Ed Stanfield and Pat Watters, Marvin Wall, [and] Reese Cleghorn. There had [never] been a better staff put together in my opinion. And John Lewis, [too] John first went down [from working with me at Field to SRC]. I think it was a great mistake and I kept telling people this, I think it was great mistake, to sever or disconnect SRC and VEP.

G: Do you think that Mr. Anthony was doing that from some pressure from Ford?

D: I think so. That always was my belief [but maybe I'm wrong]. Paul, his own taste really was working with business people, church people. I think he was glad to get rid of it.

G: What were the major impediments to black voter registration in the South and what did the SRC-VEP project do to overcome them?

D: If you're talking about the late 1950s and early 1960s, the main impediment was intimidation. Beyond that, literacy tests were still- you've probably got the figures, I've forgotten, but most of the states had some kind of literacy test. The poll tax was still strong in Virginia and a couple of other places, Mississippi [Refers to the killings of Cheney, Schwermer, and Goodman]. Nothing was stronger, though, than just intimidation and fear. The SNCC kids did so much. Wiley was a fearless kind and Wiley supported the- well, he was good. Wiley and I had to make a decision late in the game not to fund SNCC's activities anymore because they weren't registering anybody, they couldn't. It came to a point where we wanted to pick up some [registration] figures, but also, it didn't matter much. SNCC was living off the land and having money was not a big thing, I didn't think. What they needed was bail money and we were always helpful in trying to raise that. The outrageous tactics sometimes reaching the worst possible levels as the killings up there in Philadelphia. Mississippi summers in 1963 when they organized the voters and then the freedom summer of 1964, these [actions] didn't crack anything in Mississippi, but they were just terrific persuaders of national opinion. I think you have to see SNCC's activities in 1962, 1963, 1964 as being the [muscle of the movement]. You have the Civil

Rights Act [1964], the Voting Rights Act [1965]. It was great; they did it. I just take off my hat to SNCC for those years. SNCC [went] sour and fell in 1965, 1966. John has written about that in his book. [But] they were just an incredible bunch.

G: So you're managing the money for...?

D: We handled all the money.

G: So there's SCLC, NAACP, SNCC.

D: I don't think we ever sent any money to the Urban League. They didn't do anything. But, we did [to] NAACP and SCLC and SNCC [and CORE? I forget]. What we did was we established at the beginning that we'd work directly with local groups and we did. That's what Wiley mainly did. He was running around to these local voter groups.

G: ...like a city-based or a town-based group.

D: Yeah. None of which were tax exempt. So we were putting ourselves [on the] line for them. But it all worked.

G: How did it work, organizationally? What were the main organizational challenges of running the program?

D: A group, let's say a group in wherever, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, you would put together a proposal and send it over to Wiley. Wiley might, as a matter of fact, have stimulated it before they did. [B]ut we get a piece of paper, and then we would make a grant which I think I always had to sign off on. Wiley would bring it in to me. That was it. Wiley had a guy named Jack Minnis working for him, [who] didn't work out very well. He also had a good man who did a lot of fieldwork, Randolph Blackwell, and Randolph was good. I think he's dead now. Then on a part time basis, he would get a couple other people. We had John Dew; saw his name in the paper not long ago. [We had Weldon Roogeau.] It was a simple organization.

G: How did you decide which projects to fund?

D: That largely depended on Wiley and Randolph's judgement. So-and-so down there in Hattiesburg, they're going to do a good job, let's give them a little money.

G: Did he have set criteria that he used?

D: I don't think so. But we always did have a proposal. I guess in the VEP files or wherever the SRC files are, maybe not.

G: Did you have to then write reports to your funders?

D: Oh, yes. VEP, SRC, got a special letter from the treasury department covering the tax exemption for this activity. We had a lawyer named Adrian "Bill" Dewind. I guess Taconic found him, they probably paid his fee, I know they did, they paid his bill. Bill became a very important lawyer in later years; I think he was one of very, very few lawyers ever to serve two terms as president of the New York Bar [Association]. He became a good [personal and work] friend. He constructed this theory that VEP was really engaged in research, that we were researching the best ways to register voters in the South, and our method of research was [direct involvement];, an ingenious kind of theory. Joe Haas in Atlanta, who was our SRC attorney, cooperated with this. We got a letter, and I think maybe the administration did help with this, from the Treasury. I remember I happened to be up in New York on some fund-raising when the letter came through, and we all were very happy about it. That's when SRC could announce officially the launching of VEP. The research, we were the reports from the field [and] the best of these reports [from] the field was an occasional SNCC kid writing something. The way we satisfied the research requirement of VEP was finally to publish a book, *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*. You've seen that book?

G: I haven't.

D: It's by Pat Watters and Reese Cleghorn. It was a great book. It's about the VEP. Then, ever since [the separation], the VEP had its own tax exemption.

G: Then, in some ways, because you were the source for the funding, you have got this power-brokering role. What are the rewards and what are the problems with that role?

D: Well, the rewards of it were feeling closely involved. Also, rewards of meeting and getting to know a lot of wonderful people and feeling like you have made some kind of impact. There were problems. Things didn't always go smoothly. Whitney Young [Executive Director of the Urban League] was a pain in the neck. I liked Whitney but he, less than any of the other leaders, accepted [SRC's role]. And they did nothing. Well, at one time, when this would be, I am not sure, 1963, 1964, something like that, SCLC was dissatisfied with how much support we were giving it, how much financial support. We had to have a couple of meetings, one at least with King. Wiley and I talked with King in a restaurant in Atlanta. But you got over those things. When we decided not to fund SNCC, anymore, the criticism we got, came mainly from outside SNCC. I think the guys in SNCC accepted it.

G: When would that have been?

D: 1964.

G: After Freedom Summer or before Freedom Summer? [The Council of Federated Organizations (COFO), a network of civil rights groups that includes CORE and SNCC, launches a massive effort to register black voters during what becomes known as the Freedom Summer.] [COFO had been formed with Wiley in assistance].

D: Oh, after. There were other ways we were helpful, especially Wiley was helpful. I don't know. I found those years very exhilarating.

G: Some scholars have talked about, in regards to SRC, that after a period of relative impotency, that a revitalized SRC was a response to the challenges of a dynamic civil rights movement.

D: After a period of relative what?

G: Impotency. Inability to...

D: All of us were impotent.

G: How would you respond to the idea that SRC was reactive, rather than proactive?

D: Well, in part, I would agree. I think, Susan, that [one] of the things that SRC was wise enough to learn--and I believe that both Harold and I felt this way--was that after a point sometime in the 1950s, when it was clear that white people could not lead. Up until that time, mid and late 1950s, it had been expected that white leadership would rise to the occasion and would [take charge]. Well, it wasn't going to happen. I think SRC was wise enough to understand that it was not going to be the leader. We would be supportive of the black leadership. Now, we were going to be discriminating, somewhat. But we had a natural affinity, almost, with the NAACP. When direct action came along, I think, we understood that, that is the way to go. And we were more supportive of direct action than was the NAACP. We were reactive but I think we did what we could do best. Especially as the 1960s wore on, there was this conviction that white people ought to organize white people. Whites got thrown out of SNCC, as a result. Well, [we] couldn't do that. We had always, at SRC, I think, had always tried, especially through the councils on human relations, to reach out to whites--to organize white people. Mainly, to organize them to be as we were, that is, supportive of the blacks. We did that. I wouldn't shy away from that word, reactive. Yeah, we were reactive.

G: Would you argue that the SRC deserves more credit for its role in the civil rights movement, than it has gotten?

D: Let other people do that.

- G: You have talked in some different ways about the relationship with SCLC and with SNCC, but would you characterize the SRC's role with those two organization, specifically.
- D: Well, yeah. I think we always liked the SNCC kids. Maybe we had a more personal relationship with the SNCC kids than we did with the SCLC staff. Wyatt Walker. I liked Wyatt. He was abrasive but he was [straight forward]. I liked him. Maggie Long liked Wyatt and had a good relationship with him. I never really was close to [Andy Young]. I was closer actually, to King, than I was to him. I think we were always friends but that was about it. I would like to believe that SRC did what it was supposed to do and that was to stay supportive, in its own way, of all these organizations—keep on good terms with all of them. I think we did. Getting Vernon on [our] staff was a big help.
- G: You have also mentioned a relationship with the Kennedy administration.
- D: Yeah.
- G: Did you have an especially close relationship with Bobby Kennedy?
- D: No.
- G: No.
- D: No. I didn't. But people under Kennedy, yes. Under him. I am saying in this book that I am publishing that I didn't like Robert Kennedy. And I [have since] decided [that] I was [probably] wrong about him. But the people under him, Burke Marshall and some of the [other] guys up there, John Siegenthaler [for one]. The [Kennedy and Johnson administrations] built a whole bureaucracy, Harris Wofford, John Feild, we saw these people – Berl Bernhard and Bill Taylor, over at the Commission on Civil Rights— we just saw these [fellows] all the time. We spent a lot of our time in relationship with the Kennedy administration.
- G: Did things change with LBJ? [Lyndon B. Johnson]
- D: He brought in a somewhat – of course, there was a lot of overlap of people.
- G: Do you think that it was easier to secure funding in the early 1960s for the civil right movement?
- D: No. I couldn't get in the door at the Ford Foundation. I mean Ford made a decent-sized grant to get the Councils on Human Relations started and then they just quit. This long quest, "get in to Ford; get to Ford, get to Ford." It just went on and on [and it wasn't just SRC. It was the whole movement]. One time, this is a true story. You may not want to believe it. But one time we got an appointment to see Henry Heald, who was then, the president of Ford. I say "we" got an appointment. The appointment was actually arranged by Jack Greenberg, who was running the Legal Defense Fund. It was to be Jack Greenberg, Martin Luther King Jr., and me, and that was [to be] it, [but we coopted Wiley Branton].

So, we four people got to the Ford Foundation office. At that time, they were still on Madison Avenue. At the appointed hour, we presented ourselves, and I will never forget this. [Heald] came in—we were sitting in some kind of ante room—he came in, with a couple of his people behind him and he looked around at the four of us. And he said to Jack Greenberg, who had arranged this meeting, I thought you said you [would be] two or three. And the meeting went downhill from there. He was a son-of-a bitch. Later, through John Wheeler, John and I got an appointment to see Heald. This was about a year later. We went up there a sat in his office and talked to him. We got nowhere. I don't know when, maybe 1965, anyway, they hired this guy, Paul Ylvisaker. Did you ever hear of him?

G: No.

D: Paul was [a] pretty well-known [man]. Ford had, what was called, a gray areas programs. It was Paul Ylvisaker's program. He was a planner. The gray areas program meant that they were going to take [poor] areas in different cities and get them restarted. So, they had a program in Philadelphia. They had a program in New York City, that was the one down in lower Manhattan. Then, Terry Sanford, governor over in North Carolina [1960-1964]--he was a great salesman, a great visionary and a great figure--persuaded Ylvisaker that the whole state of North Carolina could be a gray area. So, he got his point [with] Ylvisaker and North Carolina became a special program with Ford Foundation. That is when the North Carolina Fund was set up [with] George Esser as director. Terry Sanford had a group of young guys working for him, one of them being a fellow named John Ehle. He also had Joel Fleishman. John was a novelist, a playwright, all-around good man but he also was creative planner about programs for other people to do. Ylvisaker took him up to New York [on his staff]. John signed up to work for one year. I think he already had the North Carolina Fund going then. John called me and said we have got to put together a plan. We have got to get some money for SRC. So, we put together a plan. I spent a good part of my last year, my last several months at SRC, planning and negotiating this Ford grant, which we never would have had it not been for John Ehle's work. The grant came through on the day of my resignation. I never got to administer any of it. That was Ford's entry in to SRC. They had made the earlier entry into North Carolina but it was sort of the same momentum.

G: What year was that, they finally funded?

D: 1965. We were driving, moving from Atlanta to New York City and I am waiting, waiting, waiting for the Ford Grant. I stopped in a phone booth on the damn Jersey Turnpike and called John. He said, grant is approved. So that was it. So, then, later, Ford began pouring money into the South. I think maybe, too much. It was taking a cork out of the bottle. Once, they made a grant to us, they began making grants to other people. The Rockefeller Foundation, which kept SRC alive during most of my tenure there, fifty thousand dollars a year, which was big money in those days. Harold, in his last days, had negotiated the Rockefeller grant. I got to administer it. It was general support, which was wonderful. Rockefeller gave us that five year commitment, of fifty thousand a year. Gosh, I don't know what we would have done without it. At the same time, they made a grant to the National Urban League and then they shut their doors.

That was it. They weren't going to do anything more about civil rights. But, at least two of us got in there.

- G: How do you think those funding arrangements shaped SRC's agenda and priorities?
- D: Well, of course, VEP was money that shaped a lot of things. Other money didn't, I don't think. Other money came. What we asked for. The Rockefeller money, the Taconic money, the Field Foundation money—they were all general support. That was our big schtick as people say, now: ask for general support. The Rockefellers Brothers Fund; its grant was, essentially for general support. The Stern Family Fund, that was it, too. So, the money didn't shape our program.
- G: Talk to me a little bit about the dominant personalities and intellectual forces in the late 1950s and early 1960s.
- D: Which ones?
- G: The people that you think were the most dominant.
- D: You mean in the South?
- G: And associated with the SRC. The people who were associated with SRC.
- D: Well, Terry Sanford was not personally associated with SRC although he was a friend. But, I think Terry Sanford had a tremendous influence. Within SRC, just to start there, James McBride Dabbs, Marion Wright, Ray Wheeler, John Wheeler gave us a lot of [leadership and] intellectual support. Throughout the South, I think the good southern leadership included people like [LeRoy] Collins down in Florida, Governor Collins [Governor of Florida, 1955-1961]. To a lesser extent, Brooks Hayes [Congress-Dem.], out in Arkansas. Always, there was Will Campbell. Will was important. Ralph McGill was especially close to Harold. In fact, Harold was almost a project of his. Johnny Popham. These were newspaper people. [Interviewee text insertion: Josephine Wilkins, who in fact was probably my closest advisor, a great person; a great Southerner]. Those are the names that occur to me. Lillian Smith. I think one of the good things I did at SRC was to re-establish relationships with Lillian Smith. Harold was too close in some ways to offend McGill, who had a bee in his bonnet about Lillian Smith so SRC hadn't had much to do with Lillian Smith...
- G: ...till you came on board.
- D: Yeah. She was a great person. We also got separated from Highlander Folk School. That shouldn't have happened. George Mitchell, after all, was chair of its board and we were close. But, again, I am not criticizing Harold. Harold was very sensitive about all this. He wanted to keep SRC like Caesar's wife, we were not going to have any taint. And Highlander was a little too rich for his blood.

There was virtually no contact between Highlander and SRC for the last few years of Harold's tenure. I can't say I re-established them because Highlander, at that time, was pretty weak. We managed to find ways to get along. Fred Routh added to Harold's problems. Fred was a good guy. He went up to Highlander for one of Highlander's meeting, one time—not with Harold's blessing. But he went, anyhow. That was the infamous meeting where this Georgia photographer, Ed Friend, came in and took pictures of all these people. King was there and Fred was there. So, [their] pictures [were on] billboards around the South. So, that didn't help Harold's disposition, any. These kind of ["red"] issues bedeviled the civil rights movement. You may have heard of the Southern Conference Education Fund, SCEF.

G: Yes. Ann Braden.

D: Carl and Ann Braden. I will just be frank, honest with you. I thought Carl was a bastard. I didn't like him. I always thought Ann was a pretty nice lady. Carl did strange things. In 1962 this was at a time when [the SNCC workers were still underground] he went down to Mississippi, which was a good thing, I mean, fine. He spent a lot of time visiting the SNCC projects. That is fine. He came back [home] and he wrote it up and he mimeographed what he wrote up. I always figured in those days if you mimeographed something, it is in the public domain as soon as you do that. Well, he sent it around to a lot of people. He sent me a copy. But, the *Jackson Daily News* got hold of it and it was a big story. Now, this is at a time when these SNCC kids are hiding. They had not gone public, yet. It was like he...

[End of side 2]

G: ...You were talking about Carl Braden.

D: He went up, once, to Lynchburg. Lynchburg was a cruddy place. It had one of the worst newspapers in the whole South, *The Lynchburg Bee*. At Randolph-Macon Women's College, there was a professor named Ken Moreland, who had been for years a co-worker with the Southern Regional Council. He did all kind of good things. As a result, he was lambasted constantly by the local newspaper. Carl Braden got into Lynchburg, sought out the press, and they say, why did you come to Lynchburg? Well, I came to see my good friend, Ken Moreland. Ken said to me, later, I had never met the man. [Our wives may have known each other in college.] Anyway, that becomes another headline in the *Lynchburg Bee*: Carl Braden comes to see Ken Moreland. He was irresponsible. So, I didn't have much to do with him. SCEF. We used to have something called the Southern Interagency Conference. It was all of the agencies—we would meet together, periodically, quarterly, just to discuss things. It had no program, no power, no nothing. SRC served as kind of a secretary and convened the

meetings. I didn't always go but [Paul R. or Paul A.] did, usually. SCEF wanted to be invited. I had never realized that people got invited; I just thought people came. But some how or other—maybe they were told, they couldn't come. But this became a big thing. Will we admit SCEF? Will we not admit SCEF? Finally, SNCC sponsored SCEF and so that put it on the calendar. So, we had this meeting. It was like the UN [United Nations] sitting around to decide whether to admit Red China. SCLC was also supposed to be in favor of admitting SCEF. To my recollection, neither SNCC nor SCLC showed up. The only votes that SCEF got came from the YMCA, of all people. That was sort of a ludicrous situation. The effective opposition to admission of SCEF came from CORE. As soon as this issue came up, CORE was just all over the place, opposing. CORE was also very alert to this red scare, always was. So, CORE—I can't think of the man's name, right now—[led the opposition]. I was there. We voted with him but I did not do any talking.

G: How are you doing?

D: I will be here other days. You don't have to do it all...

G: Well, let me do a couple more questions and then I will have gone through my list. Did the SRC have membership, per se? I mean, were there people that paid dues?

D: They didn't. I could be wrong about this. I think up until the early 1950s, it did. I think I may have joined SRC. In fact, I am pretty sure, I did. Nominal dues. Part of the deal involved with that big Ford grant was that SRC would get out of the membership business and the Council on Human Relations would do it. So, from 1953 on, it had no members.

G: OK. One of the things that Brian wanted me to ask was how vigorously did the SRC seek to increase its African-American membership during the 1960s. But, you wouldn't have had a membership base. The last thing, in the early 1960s there is a Southern Leadership Project, sometimes known as the southern project. How was it organized and how effective was it?

D: About a year ago, a woman who was on a faculty someplace, called me about the SLP and I had really had forgotten it. She was writing a masters thesis about it. She came here. I can't remember her name right now. Well, after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, we created this Southern Leadership Project to try to work toward the acceptance of the Civil Rights Act. That is what it did. We got Lou Mitchell, who had been the executive of the Florida Council on Human Relations. Lou came to be the director of the Southern Leadership Project. When the woman interviewed me a year or so ago, she brought back things that I had forgotten, really. It involved itself wherever it could—just trying to create

organization support in various parts of the south for obedience or acceptance. And in doing that, the project worked with a lot of other agencies that were doing the same thing, the same kind of things. The government was also doing that. The Commission of Civil Rights was doing that kind of thing. I know a couple of times, I was asked by the Commission to speak at meetings. They sent me out to Little Rock, one time and I spoke to a bunch of whatever leadership had been convened out there, business people, mainly. Ruby Martin came down from the [Commission]. She was a black attorney. I was very proud of her, this black attorney, this [young] black woman attorney, confronting all these Little Rock business guys—telling them what they had to do whether or not they agreed. And I [once] did a similar thing for the Commission over in Atlanta, Georgia. The project, itself, I just cannot remember it too well. Somebody is writing – I wish I could remember her name.

G: Do you remember – was she from a school? Was it a dissertation?

D: I think she was writing her dissertation. But I am sure I have got it here, someplace. I can't remember what university. I will find it.

G: OK. Was there anything else that you think I should have asked you, today, that I didn't ask?

D: I can't think of it. As I said, I am not going anywhere. You can always check in with me.

G: Come back. Well, this is Susan Glisson, wrapping up with Leslie Dunbar, May 10, 2002. Thank you.