

SRC 11

Interviewer: Susan Glisson

Interviewee: George Esser

Date: August 7, 2002

G: This is Susan Glisson and I'm in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, with George Esser.

It is August 7, 2002. I very much appreciate your time, Mr. Esser.

E: Glad to have you.

G: Thank you. You really helped get this project off the ground and we appreciate that very much.

E: Well, I think [the] Southern Regional Council [SRC] played a very critical role in helping ensure [that] the South understood what the issues were. I've always felt that it was remarkable that the South, on the whole, conformed to the civil rights legislation as quickly as they did. That doesn't mean everybody did or that they wanted to, but they did, and I think that the Southern Regional Council deserves a lot of credit for helping [to] educate enough people to know that when there was federal legislation, it was legislation to be obeyed. I think that a book on the history of the Council's formation and program through that period is most important.

G: It's absolutely necessary and we definitely see that. Let's maybe go back a little bit. Tell me a little bit about what you were doing, how you came to work with SRC, and what you understood about their role. How did you see its work at the time that you came to be involved with it?

E: Well, as I've told you, I have a legal background, although I've never practiced. I was on the staff of the Institute of Government here in Chapel Hill, working

primarily with city government in terms of research and training. I helped initiate the first year-long program for training of city employees and city managers who had never had formal training. That program is still going very strongly. It's a very strong program. We also had short courses for newly elected mayors and councilmen. The way things were divided up at the Institute, I didn't worry about finance officers or planners or whatever, that kind of training. I was concerned with the overall condition of the city or the overall problems of city, and I enjoyed it. It was a lot of fun, and we did a lot of good things. Some of the legislation that I drafted is still...I think we still have the best annexation law in the country, because cities can annex land when it meets a standard that we worked out, population density. If there's agreement, there can be voluntary annexation, but the city council can also annex land that has got a population density of two persons an acre. That means that North Carolina cities, on the whole, their boundaries grow with their population.

G: Right, which makes sense.

E: They have to provide services, of course, which the legislation covers. The whole thing has worked out very well. At the same time, I also taught as a member of a sort of a team, we taught two or three courses in the law school, we taught a course in municipal administration, and the political science department. Then, I was active in the Institute for Research and Social Services, which is the research arm of the social science department. I was one of the few Institute of Government staff who got so involved. As a result of that, I took part in some of the research that was going on in the planning and political science departments

and sociology departments on some of the problems of urban communities.

Along the way, I believe it was at a conference in 1956, I met Paul Ylvisaker, who has just gone with the Ford Foundation. He processed the grant to the Institute for Research and Social Sciences, for three-quarters of a million dollars or something like that, of which a \$105,000 was to come to Institute for Government for our efforts in making that research practical and useful. He's now dead. He was terrific. That was in 1956 and I kept up with him. So, when **Derek Sandford** hired **Johnny Lee** and began looking around for projects in the state that [they] could begin to deal with problems of poverty, or problems of education, they learned that I knew Paul and so they consulted me. As a result, why they shifted their whole. The younger staff member working with city planning wasn't very happy about it, but Ford Foundation had stopped funding even innovative city-planning ventures back in about 1957. You don't fly in the face knowing that you aren't going to get any support. So, I worked with the governor's office and the Ford Foundation staff came down with the president in July and confirmed the grant, and the Fund was organized [and] incorporated in that month and effective August 1.

G: Of 1963.

E: [Yes,] of 1963.

G: So, this is the North Carolina Fund?

E: The North Carolina Fund was created and it. Harry and I had agreed on five years, [but] it actually went five and a half. We closed the doors on January 31, 1969, but we kept it alive to get the final reports in and spend a little money and

so forth. It was alive until sometime in 1972. It was a lot of money for a non-profit organization to have, **particularly one that Ford had asked us and I had anticipated this and the governor's office finally agreed and we had direct conversations with some of the black [African American] leadership in Durham.** John **Wheeler**, who was also very active in SRC, became a member of the fund board. I had a great relationship with John. I mean, I learned one hell of a lot from John and he supported me in everything I did. He would have supported me more in SRC, but the problem was that he was quite ill at that time. Well, I don't know what you know about the Fund, but we went through, as I say, we had what Dave **McCollum**, who was an English sociologist, would call "The Great North Carolina Essay Contest." We had communities come together and submit proposals to us on how they would deal with the problems of poverty if they had a little money. So, we picked eleven projects. We started out only going to pick seven, but [with] the political considerations, we added four more. The selection of those projects happened in April and we helped new projects search and hire project directors. The Office of Economic Opportunity was established that summer.

G: At the state level?

E: The Community Action Program in the Economic Opportunity Act was patterned on the Ford Foundation Gray Area Programs and the committee on health and human services. I forget the name of it. I believe it had "crime" in it, Community and Criminal Justice or something like that. Anyhow, they were spending a lot of

money and they had made grants to a good many of the Ford Foundation Projects, but they had some projects of their own. We ended up as the only state-wide project. Of course, as the Economic Opportunity Act got adopted and matured, every county in the country was entitled to participate and every state had state offices. I can understand why the Congress made it apply, but if they had spent a little more time evaluating the experience of the existing projects, they might have had greater success. But the Community Action Program, if you know anything about it, was from 1967 on. Every time a crisis occurred in one project in one state, the Congress or the department who was administering the program would change the regulations so as to insure that crisis didn't happen again. Of course, that meant other crises [would occur]. It also meant that the discretionary power of a Community Action Program, whether it was county-wide or two or three counties, was gradually eroded. For those eleven projects that we supported, the federal money then became the base and our money became the supplemental funds. It meant that not only did our projects have more resources and more access to resources, but they also could take advantage of more discretionary projects, because they had private money in addition to public money.

G: So they had a little more latitude than some of the other programs across the country.

E: A good deal more. Well, it was a fascinating six years. You know the records [interviewee shows interviewer the files]. This is just the records of the Fund, this is not the records of the eleven Community Action Agencies [laughing].

G: And that's a pretty thick notebook.

E: When it was first moved in, when we closed and they moved those files in, it took up 541 linear feet of files. They've got it somewhat reduced now, but they got a grant from the National Humanities program, back in the early 1990s, to inventory the files and put them in acid-free containers and all of that. It's a well-used source, but as a result of that. I cannot express how busy [we were]. We experimented with elementary education, vocational education, with low-income housing, mobility of labor force, and community organization. We had some good community organizations in two or three places. We just experimented with one hell of a lot of things and for a while we had a big staff, I mean, relatively so. Beginning in 1967, we began spinning out things so that there would be life...

G: ...beyond the project

E: ...to those ideas and projects, even though we were going to close by early 1969. Well, there were four major organizations that were created, two of them still exist today and one of them is a very strong organization that is regarded really as a national leader in innovative, economic development and labor force problems, MDC Incorporated here in Chapel Hill. The Low-Income Housing Development Corporation still exists. They are headquartered in Charlotte, but it is more producer than an experimenter in how you [run things]. For thirty years, under the initial leadership it had, why, it experimented with ways of producing low-income housing. We had one spin-off corporation that was in conjunction with UNC and Duke, which focused on public education up through high school.

It some great work. The first director was **Doc Hound** who later was Commissioner of Education. [He] was very effective, [and] who is doing a lot of great research, a lot of good consultation in school systems. Finally, the director, at one stage, this is after I went to Atlanta, got involved in a public controversy, and university [UNC] and Duke and the State Department of Public Instruction withdrew support. By that time of course, the Fund's support was already used up. So, it doesn't exist. We also had, and [and it was] successful, a foundation for community development that was based on support of community organization. Not only community organization for seeking better services, but also community organization for economic development. Many of the things that are going on today successfully and the whole Community Development Corporation were. Well, there are two projects that we support through the initiative today, one in Durham and one in Wilson, that were first established by his offshoot of the Fund back in 1969. But at the end of five years, [President Richard M.] Nixon had come in, state leadership was quite different and Terry Sanford's [governor of North Carolina] Foundations, Ford Foundations, had decided to go slow on support of community organization. So, it really became a problem of lack of resources.

G: When you all decided to just have the project last for five years, were you anticipating those kinds of changes? What was the rationale behind it?

E: Well, the rationale was that Terry Sanford figured that it was bound to step on toes and that five years was long enough for him to be involved, and that state was not going to be involved, and that, during that time, we could figure out how

in January of 1967, Mary and I went off with Terry and Margaret Rose [Sanford, the Governor's wife] and spent a long weekend and I went over with Terry the options of creating these spin-off corporations and he liked them, so that's how we came back and we sprung all off by mid-1968.

G: Did they take some funding with them or where they responsible for finding their own?

E: No, we split up the remaining funds from the Fund. The one on education had been getting about a quarter of a million each year, the other three got from \$500,000 to \$750,000, plus some federal funding. Ford Foundation funding was given to those three organizations for a period of about three or four years. Mike **Smirnoff** first had succeeded Mike Ylvisaker as Director of Domestic Affairs for the Ford Foundation. He cut it off at first, funding of community organization as a function. He said it was too risky. There were some people involved in some places that were pretty, not disciplined, pretty activist, I mean, irresponsible activists.

G: In what ways?

E: When you got riots going and some of the people had been in Community Action Programs were involved when the first thing that would happen, why you would get phone calls from angry mayors, angry congressmen, and angry senators. The pressure got too much for Ford, so they. On the other hand, then they began putting more money in former Community Action Agencies, but agencies that were formed for economic development, sometimes other kinds of community development. The MDC survived all the way through. It had its

periods of needing money and running behind, but now they...When they broke beyond simply serving North Carolina, began to serve as consultants for economic development in the South and for southern states, and began making a record, they, for example. You know the Mid-South Foundation? Well, MDC was given the responsibility of helping convert the piece of paper that created it [in]to [a] going organization. They picked **George Pinik** who was from North Carolina.

G: I didn't realize that.

E: Then, they worked with it for about a year, and once it was active and a going concern, why, they pulled out. They did the same with a Rural Economic Development Center here in the state where the research staff, or Ford Foundation-operated research program on community colleges, and now with Ford Foundation's support are helping. **David Dodson** spent a lot of time last year in Namibia helping Namibia establish a university. This spring, when the Duke Endowment broke all the expectations and came up with ten million dollars for rural development in North and South Carolina, they got MDC to implement it, because they didn't have any staff for it. So, MDC has been a great success and its got a good staff. LHDC (Low-Income Housing Development Corporation) did pretty well under Bob Smith. I mean, Bob is experienced in housing and wanted to do experimental projects. The fellow who's handling it now is a nice fellow, but he has no sense of [the project], all he's doing is seeking projects to produce and he's producing them. The Low-Income Housing Development

Housing Corporation has a contract, for example, with the Charlotte/Mecklenburg [County] Housing Partnership and doing some of their work. In 1968, Mike **Smirnoff** called me. He had been the director of the Community Action Program that Ford and others supported in New Haven.

G: All right.

E: Then, he had done work for **John Minsy** and served for not quite a year as Director of Human Resources for the City of New York. Then, he went with Ford and so he asked me to, when the Fund closed, if I would come on and be the representative in the South. It was a program that supported all the racial projects in the South. Then, nationwide, I served as an advisor on public administration programs.

G: Okay, before we go [on], because I want to hear about what you did with the Ford Foundation, I wanted to ask you [a question]. You mentioned that there was use of radio and film. You all had some innovative use of media with the North Carolina Fund?

E: Well, one of the first staff people hired was a public information officer. I got Billy Barnes, who was a North Carolinian, but who was at that time working with *Business Week* out in Atlanta. Billy is still here in Chapel Hill [and he's a] terrific guy. He was my savior. He advised me. When you're putting money out into twenty-some counties, something is always going to go wrong. He said George, [here's] one thing you [should] remember, when somebody sticks a microphone under your mouth, say something, but don't worry about if you are misquoted in

the paper. He said, there are occasional times when you make for a correction, but he says, generally, if you make for a correction, you are keeping the problem alive. He says, if you don't say anything, he said most people forget it. It was true. It worked out. He was a very innovative person and he developed radio programs. We had a regular newsletter [and] regular news-releases. He would prepare news-releases, he would help not only with us, but he was do it for grantees. He had several staff people.

G: What were the goals of the radio programs?

E: Education. They were short, five minutes or something like that. They would start out with a problem and then they would say what resources are available to deal with this problem.

G: Did those programs deal with controversial issues like race?

E: Oh yes. There are transcripts of some of those programs, and Billy, I think, if there is a lot of interest in that, Brian [Ward, historian of SRC and also of radio] ought to come up and see Billy.

G: Do you know many stations broadcast them?

E: That year there were thirty-five. I think that there were two or three programs, as I recall, but thirty-five stations pretty well covered the state. If you're going over there, look up some of them. I think they've got transcripts of it. Now, the movie *No Handouts for Mrs. Hedgepith*, was about a black lady who defied all the conventional wisdom of being on welfare. She was making her own way and through her own efforts, and her children were doing the same. It was a well-done movie. It got shown not only all over this state, but in a lot of other states,

too.

G: How was it distributed? I mean was it college campuses that showed it?

E: Well, no. It was distributed primarily through public radio listening, NPR [National Public Radio] and public TV. But again, if you want to talk to him, his number is 942-6350, Billy Barnes, and he's still active. Tell him that I suggested you call him.

G: That would be a great contact for Brian, I think.

E: We had pretty good luck with educational projects. There was a lot of regret. I won't say criticism, but there was regret that we closed the Fund. Ford Foundation wanted us to continue, but we opted for asking them to support the spin-off corporations.

G: Why is that? Why that choice?

E: Main thing was, is that there was a feeling initially, and this was carried on, that you use up your nickels. We got involved in a lot of [controversy]. I remember one day, the mayor sent an delegation of twenty-seven mayors going on to see the governor. This was the governor after Terry [Sanford], and he says, well, gentlemen, it's a non-profit corporation; I can't do anything about it.

G: They were upset about the programs?

E: They were upset about. We initiated a program that suggested to Community Action Programs that they monitor public services available in black areas.

G: I can see why they might not want too much light cast on it.

E: So, they were a little unhappy about that. There were disturbances, particularly in eastern North Carolina. So, the governor's staff shared this with me and I said,

well, we'll invite them to come to a Fund board meeting. So, we invited them and we held the meeting, a regular meeting, and not a mayor showed up. So, the Community Action Programs were of course non-profit corporations and most of them were established, they were getting support from the federal program. As the federal program got watered down and watered down, most of them still exist but most of them are service-deliverers now. There's not much experimentation, there's not much, really, community organization. You don't find delegations going to the city council, but we had a good bit of that.

G: So, did you just begin to have a sense that the spin-off organizations would have greater success on their own, that the Fund would be gone?

E: Yes, it was a way of getting new leadership in, not only staff but board. We had some excellent [members], some of them resisted local [pressure], but on the other hand, I lost one board member to local pressure. He believed that somebody started the rumor that a shopping center in Rocky Mountain was going to be burned up by a particular group of your activists who were employed by the Community Action Program there. Tom called me and said, George, I can't help you on this. I said, well, you don't have to take an active role.

G: He was a board member?

E: He was a board member. So he resigned. Well, actually what we did was we got the cooperation of the, I believe it was the Durham Police Department. Anyhow, we called that particular group of young activists up to Durham and placed them in a facility where the Durham police were watching them the whole time. The next day, sure enough, there was a report that the **Tarrytown** Mall

had been set fire to by this group. I had a press-conference and said, it may have been set by somebody, but it wasn't set by that group. I said, we've got the facts. Well, that really upset everybody up there, because they realized then the man who was actually responsible was actually the Project Director of the Community Action Program.

G: What was he trying to accomplish?

E: He was from that area and he was trying to accomplish being accepted. He had come back from being in the Navy. He had been a captain in the Navy. He wanted to be successful in the community and he realized that he was in a job where he couldn't do that successfully. When he realized that he had been duped, he resigned. They ended up, their board, selecting the first black director of the Community Action Program in the state.

G: After that incident?

E: But you always had something like that. For a long time, I knew every city manager and almost every mayor in the state from my work in the Institute. They would call me and say, George, we can't put up with this. I would talk to them and calm them down and so forth, but that usually got my nickel.

G: I was going to say, after a while, it's got to be exhausting.

E: Yes, so I went with them. Ford said I could get an office in Chapel Hill, and I did. I already knew, I had met the staff of SRC back in 1964 when **Les [Dunbar]** was there and then I knew Paul Anthony.

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G: You were talking about a retreat that SRC and the Fund staff had together, and

that the Fund staff were more...

E: We went down and met together one weekend in 1967, I guess, in Jekyll Island [Georgia]. We had problems on how they were dealing with programs in the region, and we were dealing with programs in North Carolina. It became clear that we were a more activist group than they were.

G: Could you talk about that? What were some of the differences?

E: One of the differences is that we had more black staff. The black staff were more inclined to go in and sit down and talk with the black leadership and to give the kind of advice, or action that was not as restrained. And we had more people dealing in a smaller area. Their staff was dealing with the whole South. They didn't mix together well.

G: Really? You must have had a sense that there were common goals; that was why you had the retreat.

E: Oh, yes, they had the same sort of common goals, but there was more feeling that. Well, the SRC felt that the Fund had more resources, and we did. We had helped the agencies we were working with get more resources from OEO than they did.

G: Why do you suppose there was a difference in the level of funding for the Fund as opposed to the SRC at the time?

E: Well, I think it was because we had more direct contact with our projects and more responsibility for our projects under the way we were organized. SRC was providing consultive services, but they weren't providing a lot of money to local projects, except for the Human Relations Councils. So that [the result was that]

their role was different when you actually got down to it.

G: Do you think that maybe the Ford Foundation was more comfortable with the high level of state involvement with the Fund?

E: Oh, definitely, and some involvement of the state continued under Governor [Dank] **Moore** and his staff. I mean Terry Sanford was chair and stayed as chair of the Fund Board until 1967. It was understandable why the Fund had a different type of personnel and a different view of its role, but I was just citing the fact that we did attempt, the directors did attempt. John Wheeler, being a prominent member of both organizations, pushed this too.

G: Some attempt at collaboration?

E: There was not as much shared experience. They did not find the Fund experience as helpful as they might have wished, and we did not find the SRC experience, at that time, [as helpful]. No, I wasn't trying to be critical of SRC.

G: I understand.

E: Simply, there was just a difference in their role...

G: ...in role and scope and...

E: ...and staff. You know, it made a lot of difference. They did not have a senior staff member. Except for VEP [Voter Education Project], which had become separate, they had not had senior staff who were black.

G: Right, I have heard that.

E: I made an effort to [change that], well, I had to. Ford Foundation would have looked askance if I hadn't, and we made a pledge to John Wheeler that there would be. Actually, one time in the years 1965, 1966, 1967, [and] into 1968,

those projects were spun-off. We had more minority staff. We had black staff, we had women staff, we had [American] Indian staff, and we had more minority staff in positions of responsibility than any other organization of the state. It was an anomaly in the region. By 1967, my deputy was a black, my controller was black, the director of one major funded project was an [American] Indian [and] the other was a black, [and in] the staff working with Community Action Projects, there were about four blacks, but two of the senior ones were black. It made a difference.

G: It seems reasonable or possible to me that the SRC would have come under fire. I mean, by that time, there would have been a Black Power movement, there would have been a growing women's movement, it's curious that...

E: We ran into that when I was at SRC. See, when I went to SRC, I decided that we've got to [have more black leadership]. I had already stated publicly and stated to the SRC Board that I felt they ought to pick up a black director. Well, they couldn't find one that they [wanted]. So, I made an effort to get senior black staff and I had substantive staff. It is unbelievable the tensions that that created.

G: Yes.

E: There were tensions. Some of the black staff would want to do things that the white staff would not want to do. Nor were they, in general. They were not as close. They did not go to meals together, and there was no social life together, which I had thought was important.

G: I get a sense that that's maybe a change. It sounds like it might be a reflection

of the times, the social landscape, because some of the things that people, who were associated with SRC in the early 1960s, say, some of the things that they recall as the strengths of the organization was a level of social interaction, of going out together and drinking together. **Warren Pritchard** talked about all the parties, that that was a haven, that there was an annual gathering.

E: That was true of board members and it was true to some extent of staff, and I may have made a mistake here, I think that some of the black staff I employed expected more of SRC and of veteran staff. That's why they didn't get it.

G: Right. Well, it was a different time-period when you were there then. A lot of things have changed.

E: You know, the 1970s were. Actually, you didn't find these tensions, you didn't find activism much until 1965, 1966, [and] 1967; I mean, this is true in Mississippi. Also, I remember there was also a tension between men and women.

G: Well, there was a growing women's movement too, at the time that you were there.

E: I remember one crisis I had. A rather famous black activist from Mississippi came to a staff retreat we had. We were thinking of deploying, and somewhere in the process of the late evening, he knocked on the door of a white staff member who was married. He wanted to come in and be interviewed and, first thing we knew, we had a rather explosive situation. You know, he was a good man, but he misread that situation. **In the North Carolina situation, I have**

**wondered, and I continue to have the respect of my staff.** When we had a reunion of Fund staff about five years ago, which was not organized by Fund alumni, but by young people who felt it was an important background in the state, the leading. Well, back in the 1960s, I had a staff member named **Howard Ford** who scared the living daylights out of mayors and councilmen. Actually, he was a great speaker, but he actually was a damn effective community organizer and he could keep people from [violence]. You didn't find riots where Howard was involved, even though he was blamed for them. He made three talks that four days that we were having the reunion. He managed to get into every one of them the fact that he did things that he knew upset the white community, but that he never had any problem at the Fund level, because he always briefed me on what he was going to do before he did it. He made the point that he felt that he had been successful because he had support. I used a lot of nickels. [laughing.]

G: I bet. So, the Fund is closing down and you're dispersing the funds out to different organizations and you are contacted by the Ford Foundation about coming to work for them to work in the South, especially around...

E: It's an interesting thing. I was also a member of National Association of Community Development Agency Services, I think that's what it was called. I was vice-president that was due to be president. We had scheduled a meeting in Atlanta for a day that turned out to be the day that Martin Luther King was buried. So, we showed up and some of the people went to the funeral. I felt that I was not going to make a special plea for a seat when it was obvious that the

church was overcrowded anyhow. I thought it was actually bad form for people to politically feel they had to be there. But that night, I flew to New York, because the next morning I had a long discussion with Mike **Smirnoff** about what I would do. We finally agreed. I mean, for awhile, I was to move up there and that didn't work out, and I was glad it didn't work out. We stayed in Chapel Hill; I had offices there. At that time you could get a seven o'clock plane out of Raleigh Durham [Airport] and hit LaGuardia about 8:20. I could be downtown before some of my colleagues. I did have an interesting three years or so, but as the program advisor, I had input, but I didn't have the responsibility of a program officer for making initial decisions about whether a project would be sent forward or not. I finally got frustrated. In the meantime, I was in and out of Atlanta a lot. I knew that Paul Anthony was going to retire and I had said that it ought to be a black director and I recommended one, but **Vivian Henderson** was President of Clark College, chairman of SRC Executive Committee, and also a member of the Ford [Foundation board]. I don't know whether it was his fault or whether Mike, I think it was Vivian's, Vivian asked me to consider applying for the Council position.

G: Had you had any contact with SRC while you were working for Ford?

E: Oh, yes, they were a regular. They were grantees, so I had to make visits there regularly.

G: What was the kind of work they were doing, using board money at the time?

E: I didn't feel that they had a very good research program, particularly on things

like housing and then vocational education and welfare and things, substantive service areas. They were stronger in human relations. Paul wasn't a very aggressive type. The best SRC programs then were unquestionably the two publications, *South Today* and [*New South*]. There again, you see, we had senior white staff. They were good publications, but I just felt like there was opportunity for more good technical assistance and good research.

G: Did you have any sense that, say, the roles of minorities were changing at SRC as you saw them through Ford....

E: I noted that support staff tended to be black. When I took over at SRC, there were only two black staff programs and they were both very junior. **Leon Hall** and **Art Kemp** [directed them]. Art is one of my very good friends today. Leon is dead, but they were both excellent people. I'm not criticizing the senior staff, I'm simply saying that the senior staff was not as sensitive to the changes in the black community as I had hoped they would be. Well anyhow, the fall of 1971, **Vivian** and Mike encouraged me to consider SRC and I was invited down to interview the board. I later found that they were considering a black director. I can't remember his name right now, [but I know] he was from Little Rock. He was a good man. So, I got an offer. I can't remember exactly when it was; I think it was in January. I thought about it a long time. I'm strange that way. Susan and I [talked, but] I didn't talk about it with a lot of people; I should have. I might have changed my mind. Eventually, I took it. I didn't impose many conditions. I could have, I guess, in retrospect, but I didn't.

G: What conditions would you have imposed?

E: Not necessarily conditions, but I think it would have helped if I had indicated that I wanted annual evaluations. I think that if I had been more specific on fringe benefits that it wouldn't have. One of the problems was that I could never get. Well, one of the staff that should have been **pushing it** didn't push it enough and it had long delays and an effective system was not [implemented]. I brought my own system. **I have TIAA**[-CREF; retirement fund for academics]. I tried to get TIAA for SRC, but they wouldn't. By that time, TIAA felt that they had supported/included too many non-profit corporations in the Johnson years, so they were not including it. I should have made a point of that and I should have not accepted responsibility for that so much as gotten the board to accept responsibility. Well anyhow, I accepted in, I believe it was March to be effective June...

G: ...of 1972.

E: I went down there two or three times. I went down for the press conference and all, but I didn't move until June. We bought an old house in the Emory area, and it took us about a year to [get into shape]. Mary served as the general contractor and there were a couple handymen who did most of the work, but it turned out it was a lovely area, nice people, and the house was about fifty years old but, you know, once we had made some improvements, it was great. We had a fairly good set-up. But, anyhow, I do feel that I did not talk to enough people about that. I depended on my own knowledge of it. I did not talk to enough people

about the staff, the role, the whole business of it. I accept that responsibility.

G: So, what's the social landscape like in the South in the summer of 1972?

Vietnam is still going on, Nixon's in the...

E: Well, that was the summer of the Nixon-McGovern race and, my gosh, you could hardly. My son, who was fifteen, I guess, at that time, worked for the McGovern staff for the state and it was one lone, little storefront. Gosh, McGovern didn't get anything in the South. It was pretty grim. The social landscape. I think that there were expectations in the black community, that not enough had been done and they wanted to see more progress. At the same time, I tell you, you know, when you compare Nixon and Bush, well, Nixon did a lot. [laughing.] I was optimistic that summer. I took the staff off on a retreat and had some outside facilitators in. There were little traditions that had grown up in SRC that I unintentionally terminated.

G: Like what?

E: A Black staff member usually served as purchasing agent I believe, but she had authority to send flowers on a lot of occasions. I felt that that was [not good]. My experience with the use of Foundation funds was, you didn't send flowers. That created a lot of problems. Then, I brought [in] a lawyer deputy that was black. If you know him, well, you know that I probably made a mistake there, Harry **Gould**. Harry, I had been in a meeting with him at **Penn** Center and I was impressed with him and he was smart. He is smart.

G: He is smart.

E: He wants things done the way he wants things done [laughing], and he doesn't

get along with a lot of people.

G: So, that caused a lot of tension.

E: That caused a lot of problems right from the beginning. Now that is one of the sections that I may want to seal.

G: You got it.

E: It was difficult.

G: He was coming into a situation where the organization had not really promoted African Americans to positions of authority.

E: That's right. See, all of that veteran white staff had never served under a black staff. I think that he was aware of that too. You know, I didn't learn until later that some of the problems that had been created. So, let's see. I got there in June, we had this retreat in early September, and the Ford Foundation staff were pushing me for change.

G: In what ways?

E: Well, they wanted to see more research. They wanted to see more ability to advise communities on a wide range of education issues, housing issues, vocational training, and I spent a lot of time in October putting together a proposal that did spread a much wider net. I think that the veteran staff were pleased to see that there would be more done in that way. We didn't get full funding and I made the mistake. When I was at the Fund, first of all, we started with a lot of money. The second thing was that I had superb financial officers. I could depend on them; whenever there was a financial problem, they would raise

it and they would have a solution for it. I assumed that I was going to get the same support at SRC, and I didn't. I don't think it was intentional on their part, they simply didn't know how. I had grown accustomed to a style of operation that didn't fit. We'll come into some of the other aspects of it a little later, but from the beginning, I shifted from a program that evolved out of the dollars available to a program that required x-dollars and Ford gave us y-dollars. I was working hard to get the difference from other foundations. Well, sometimes I did and sometimes I didn't, but I got new dollars. One of the best programs that I introduced was the Southern Governmental Monitoring Project. You could say that it was modeled on Ralph Nader. It was actually a staff member at Carnegie, who was an old friend of mine. We worked it out together, and that's when we brought Peter **Pekers** [in]. They built the staff and a program that affected every state. It was just a good program, but it was administered separately. That was one of the requirements the funding foundation imposed. [They said,] we don't want the old staff to administer that. I was not, because I was not sure any of the old staff would be attuned to that sort of reviewing how public money is spent. We had a project on the Sunshine Laws, and in each state we had a number of special projects. I'd have to look it up. I remember, I came up to my old stamping grounds. We put an intern up in Raleigh one year. He worked out some really excellent programs, and I came up here and we had a press conference. Right at the moment, I forget what precisely [it was], but it was related to research for minorities in the legislature. That was a big element. The same Carnegie [guy] also showed an interest in an investigative reporter project

and we got that money. Then, while I was working for Ford, I had helped some in getting the Southern Grove Policies Board established. When they came up with the idea of a commission for the future of the South, the first one, the director of the Southern Grove Policies Board came and asked for consulting and help from the Council. Well, some of my staff didn't want to take that, because they felt we would be polluted in some way, I guess. [laughing.] It worked pretty well. That report was a lot different, because we were involved, then it would have been. When the full commission met, there were some people there [that] I wish hadn't been there. I mean, every state had two representatives and there were some people who were pretty conservative, but there were others who were pretty good. That's where I got to know Jimmy Carter, because he was the chair. I got to have an honor and respect for his ability.

[There are a few comments about the tape recorder.]

E: Well anyhow, I was trying to do too much. I can see [it,] in retrospect, I was trying to do too much too quickly. We were involved in that Commission on the Future of the South, we were involved in the Southern Governmental Monitoring Project, we were...

[End of side A2]

G: We're talking about busing. I just want to clarify for the transcriber; we're talking about busing.

E: I think this was in 1973, we got a call from the Chamber of Commerce in Memphis. The head of it was from North Carolina, [a] good man. I didn't know

him, but a friend of mine knew him. He wanted help in helping Memphis implement busing. So, we went up there and met with him, decided that we could help. We assigned two staff members, this young black staff member that I spoke to you about and a man that I had known in North Carolina who had been in Atlanta at that time. He was more middle-aged, but he was a very good man. They went up to Memphis and worked with the police department. It was the education people and the integration of schools went smoothly. We didn't do a lot of that direct kind of support, but we did a fair amount of consultation on it.

G: You worked for the Charlotte school system too, right?

E: Oh, we had worked with Charlotte. Actually, I worked with Charlotte when I was working for Ford. I used a little bit of Fund money that was left over and had a charette between the school board and representatives of some of the neighborhoods. I took them up to a church conference center that I knew in Western North Carolina and it worked out pretty well. It helped move things along. We didn't have the staff to do a lot of [things], but, you see, we brought that staff member on. We didn't get any money from Memphis, so those are the sorts of things where your expenses went up and my staff didn't call to my attention that the [expenses had changed]. 1973 was an exceedingly busy year, and still I've managed. I remember Mary and I took a vacation. We hadn't gotten a vacation the year before, so we took one. The board was very supportive, they liked to see the new things coming in.

G: Who was the president of the board at the time?

E: Vivian Henderson was chair and Dr. Raymond Wheeler of Charlotte was chair of

the executive committee. I think that 1973 was a positive year, I mean, a lot of things were happening. With more staff, why, we contracted for more space and of course that ran our costs up too. We were getting a lot done, but in retrospect, we weren't. We had gotten significant support from Carnegie, we had some support and interest in giving more from Rockefeller, Rockefeller Fund was a supporter, [and] we didn't get anything from Atlanta Foundations, which disturbed me. We didn't have a good system for pricing things like when we went to Memphis, which we should have had, in retrospect. We also developed a program that I was very pleased with. We had about five interns: a couple from Yale, one from Harvard, Southerners, [and] a couple from North Carolina. I was very pleased with the quality of the young men and women who came in on that program. That was in addition to the interns in the Southern Governmental Monitoring Project. I keep up with some of those people today. So, 1973 was a good year.

[There is a break in the interview.]

G: Okay, this is Susan Glisson with George Esser, it's August 8, [2002] and we are back talking about the Southern Regional Council. I think we finished up yesterday talking about 1973 and some of the programs that you did. We mentioned yesterday some of the others that you thought were important to mention.

E: Yes, I'm going to touch briefly on several programs that were important to me in 1974 and 1975, and then I'm going to go into more detail on the problems that

we encountered. I spoke yesterday about the Commission on the Future of the South. We worked pretty hard on that in 1974, because the final report was scheduled for that November. I don't recall, it seems to me that we didn't get adequately compensated for everything we did, but we felt it was a good opportunity, and it was. We were able to say some things there, with the imprimatur of Governor Jimmy Carter and a lot of other people, that we couldn't have gotten the coverage that we did with them. At the very end, putting the final report together, we were right in there at the final stages. They weren't tinkering with our contributions. We were in there at the final stages and I thought that it went very well. They were interested in supporting a task force on southern-rural economic development. We had in our membership one of the leading economists on that subject, who later became Secretary of Labor, Ray Marshall. Vivian Henderson and I worked pretty hard on putting the Commission together. We were successful in getting **Ellie Curd** to transfer [from] Vanderbilt and Chairman of the Ford Foundation **Gore** to be the Chair. We had a distinguished Commission, and Ray himself became the chief investigator with the help of **Lamon Godwin**, a black economist that he had worked with before. That work continued and the final report came out in the fall of 1976. Actually, it was after I had left the Council, but they had asked me to come back to be involved in the final presentation. They focused on health as the greatest opportunity for economic development in many southern states, because of the fact that you did not have a large turnover in population in many rural counties, but you had continuing problems in public health. It was an interesting venture.

The Ford Foundation, for a number of years, had supported a leadership-development program, which involved bringing or giving school principals and other officials a year of independent study, but working closely together. They finally decided that it would make sense if they brought the administration of that program under the Council to simplify the logistical problems. The head of it, **Casey Chavis**, was from North Carolina and was a good friend of mine, and I was glad to have the fulcrum under the Council. It involved a lot of interesting people.

Then, we had the Black Women's Employment Program. It was going when I came and it [was] completed in 1975, but it was an effort to secure opportunities in professional positions for black women in the South. There was a focus, obviously, in Atlanta. It was a very good program and Alexis Herman was a very able director, as her subsequent career has demonstrated. When I first went there, **Matt Waters**, who edited one of the publications [of the] Council, had a reputation for having been influential in helping journalism cover the civil rights problem, came to me and expressed his great interest in saying [that] the Council move away from newsletter- and pamphlet-type of publications. [He thought] a magazine would be more popular [and] in-style, and [it] would include fiction as well as serious things. It would have some features [like] a *New Yorker*-style magazine, and more [like] *Atlantic*; I mean that kind of [publication]. He knew the name of a consultant in Atlanta who specialized in new ventures in magazines, and so he came in. We have a foundation we thought was interesting. Well anyhow, we had a study made by this consultant and he came

up. I forget exactly what [he said]. I think he said, if we had a promotional mailing and got either a 2 or 3 percent return, that would be sufficient. Well, despite the fact that we didn't get the grant to cover that, we had moved along far enough that I thought, well, we ought to try. So, we tried it. It costs us something, we got good publicity on the promotion, we got barely enough to justify trying, and so we, I guess it was in 1973 and 1974 that we published *Southern Voices*. I think it was a pretty good magazine. Did you ever see it?

G: I haven't seen it.

E: The response was not sufficient to justify it on an extended basis, so we brought the consultant back in the fall of 1974. We decided we would have to terminate it, so we wrote everybody and we refunded the unexpired [subscriptions], which was not easy to do.

G: Who had funded that?

E: We refunded...

G: Oh, you refunded the subscription.

E: ...subscription prices.

G: I see.

E: I think that, during this year, because we were involved with the Commission on the Future of the South, the Task Force on Southern Rural Development, and we [had] the magazine, there was a lot of question about whether we were focusing too narrowly on civil rights. I pushed, not hard, but I pushed for recognition for poverty and civil rights as a focus.

G: Where these internal concerns or were these external concerns that you were

focusing too much on civil rights?

E: In terms of saying what the Council stood for and getting grants and so forth, it was somewhat easier to have an expanded purpose than a narrower purpose...

G: In terms of getting funding?

E: ...in terms of getting funding.

G: Okay.

E: Questions were raised by board members and people like **Julius Chambers**, but we were on a somewhat expanded definition of mission [in] 1974, 1975, 1976. It seemed to me from what I read, the program under **Steve** went back to civil rights primarily.

G: Also, it became much smaller. He got rid of a lot of staff.

E: I'm not criticizing that, I'm just...

G: Right, you're just saying...

E: ...simply stating.

G: ...the fact.

E: So, as we ended 1974, we had the disappointment of the magazine, but our research was beginning to produce. The Commission on the Future of the South was finished, but our research on education had been useful there. The Task Force on Southern Rural Economic Development was moving along. I was conscious of the need to raise more money. I knew that we weren't breaking even in grants that year. The reports I was getting from the financial officer showed that we weren't too far behind. I'm not a particularly good finance-man myself and I'm sure I didn't read books carefully enough. The financial officer

made a major mistake. She showed two major accounts with, I forget the details, but there were revenue-sources [shown twice]. In effect, she counted the revenue twice. I looked at the reports and it showed those two large accounts pretty well breaking even when, as a matter of fact...

G: They weren't.

E: ...they weren't. So, the auditor came in February, or had been in. He was finishing his job in February. The auditing firm was a black firm from up here that were good friends of mine. I had thought that it was appropriate for a black firm to do that job. Until then there had been the standard [white] firm. So **Deut Sullivan** called me, and we're near the end, and he says, George, you obviously don't realize it, but we're going to show you in debt by \$429,000. Well, I gawked. We looked at all of the possibilities and there was no question that we were in debt that much, so we had to find a solution. The solution actually was working out, you'll see later. First, I went to the Ford Foundation and I got assurance that a somewhat limited staff would be funded through to eighteen months, to the fall of 1976. The Southern Governmental Monitoring Project was separately funded and had a separate bank account, as did the Task Force on Southern Rural Economic Development. What was causing the problem, primarily, was the research and consulting staff and overhead. I went to New York and sat down with Mike Smirnoff and we came to an agreement that he would [help]. This was nothing new to him. I mean, he had experienced it in a number of projects, not as badly, as a matter of fact, though. I mean, he had had worse, but it involved cutting back pretty severely on some staff, not all. It involved correcting

the accounting. It involved just general tightening on all sorts of things. People had been accustomed to having a credit card since long before I came. There was a feeling that we could save a little here, a little there, a little there, and it would add up.

G: Was there any, I don't mean to be indelicate, but in terms of the financial officer who hadn't reported things accurately, was there an accountability for that person? Was that person let go?

E: Well, she stayed on until we got replaced, but [she] was transferred. She had gotten her start at the North Carolina Fund, but it turned out that she wasn't all that she appeared to be. She had used some rough tactics with some of her [methods], she realized it, but she had never informed me of the problem. Obviously, since she made the mistakes on that, she didn't realize the mistakes. So, I think she terminated in about six months, but, from the beginning, we had a search for a replacement and eventually came up with a man who had moved to Atlanta from the middle West. I think he was technically very good, [but] he was somewhat naive. After I left, he stayed for several months, but I think he left in 1977 sometime. He got a better job, I guess. Technically he did a very good job. My problem with Russell was, he didn't understand the politics of it. He was white and didn't understand the politics. He didn't understand some of the things that I had done. [My actions were] perfectly legal, but questions [arose], again, of making sure that races and genders were treated equally. He saw opportunities for savings in some places that I thought would be ill-advised, because it basically would have hit blacks and women first.

Well, anyhow, I got an agreement from the Ford Foundation. Then, I came back and I consulted with the staff, and then I called a special board meeting. I tried to be as frank and detailed as I possibly could. They voted to support me and I had no problem with the board. They asked me what staff I was going to terminate, and they said, you have either got to leave or Harry has got to leave. We can't have two people at the top. At that time, I was having a lot of problems with the staff because of Harry.

G: You'd really had problems with the staff and Harry almost from the beginning.

E: Yes, and I said, you know, it's your choice, but I said, I want to warn you that there are problems there. They said, well, we prefer that you stay. So, I stayed, even though I knew it was going to be hell.

G: And you let Harry go?

E: Yes, but I left some senior white staff go, too. I determined [that] I had gotten into this, so I'll do it myself. So, I called everybody in and the ones that I terminated I informed directly. Now, one of the problems was that we still hadn't solved that damn pension problem. They had a pension plan that had been in effect for a good, long time, but it was a lousy plan. All of a sudden, we didn't have any money to provide any real severance-protection. That may have been at the heart of some of the problems we encountered later. I just didn't have the money. I informed the board. I had to remind the board later that I had informed them. I think that was probably the worst thing. It was probably good for the organization to down-size, but it was not good for the individuals or the organization to not have resources for a better service arrangement. I knew that,

but I had no choice really. I had to move ahead. So, we cut several positions, including two of the real veterans from the previous staff, **Pat Watters and Jim Wood**. Jim was an administrative jack-of-all-trades. He didn't really have any substantive contribution to work and he had always sort of run the office, and that sort of thing. He came as a shock to him to be terminated. He came as a shock to Pat. Pat later wrote a book about it. When I was in Washington, **Harold Fleming**, Harold was Head of the Potomac Institute, just had an office up to the street from me, and we had seen each other, and we were good friends. Harold called me one day and he said, George, I want you to stop by, can you stop by this afternoon? I said, sure. He said, I just wanted you to know that **Pat Watters** has written a book about mid-career crisis. He said, he refers to the situation at the Council in terms that you wouldn't like, and he said, I would advise you not to read the book. And I never have.

G: Really?

E: The Ford Foundation sent down a retired auditor to check our books, and he found that the accounting, with the exception of that balancing, had been appropriate. The problem was that the communication to me and communication to the board was lousy. So, that was another thing that had to be changed and dealt with. One of the things that I learned, however, [was] I learned that I had been very fortunate, I had really been spoiled. The finance people I had at the Fund, they kept me very closely informed. I knew what I could do and what I couldn't do, and the people I had in the Council [weren't as good]. The person I inherited, who resigned, and I can see now why she

resigned, she knew we were going to run into problems, but she couldn't bring herself to tell me. As you well know, Susan, when you get into a small organization and the executive director is trying to do too much, it's easy for something to give.

G: Yes.

E: I've observed it closely, not only in organizations that I've been in, but in a lot of other organizations. One man can't do everything, and one woman can't do everything. I had trouble again at the National Academy with the accountant. He had a lot of good experience, but, boy, he was a wild one. It wasn't so much a question there of a sudden discovery, but he would come in and tell me all is very good, but I would realize that we weren't. I had my finger on it closely. In the last twenty-five years, [there has been] this revolution on fund-raising. This is at a time when I brought two people with development experience on the staff of the Southern Regional Council, but their experience has been in either in colleges or large organizations; they didn't know how to be here.

G: I'm curious too, do you have a sense that foundations just weren't interested in funding organizations that were doing the kind of work that SRC was doing? I mean, is it the post-civil rights period?

E: I was trying to expand our funding base. For example, later, at the time that I left the Council, I had pending visits scheduled from Rockefeller, Kellogg, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, which we were always getting support from, and an auditor of some foundation who was funding the Task Force on Southern Rural Development, [but who] would not give us a dollar for general support, but for the

overhead. You know, foundations don't like to give money for overhead. Well, overhead is essential for to an organization. I was negotiating with **Lily [Foundation]** and I was negotiating with **Donner [Foundation]**. We were involved in seeking funds from a whole variety of foundations, including many who knew they should support something like the Council and hadn't. [However,] when I left, all of them closed off negotiations. In other words, the negotiations had been with me. **Steve** later came in and said, what about this foundation, this foundation, this foundation? I said, you have got to establish a [relationship]. They felt they knew me and they wanted to deal with the top-man. I said, you'll have some luck when you go back, but the 1970s were a tough period for non-profits. Not that it isn't considered a tough period now, too. It was a tough period and a lot of non-profits, not the council but a lot of non-profits, had support from federal sources: OEO, HUD, [and] Labor. [They had this support] during the 1960s and early 1970s, and that being cut off, they were going to see foundations. So, I was aware that we needed to have them. The reason I experimented with these development people was, I had talked to a fund-raiser for Ralph Nader. I had a long talk with him. He had recommended, if you can get small gifts, they will add up.

[End of side B3]

E: We did not develop that alternate source of revenue that we very much needed to, because, you know, foundations [and their money] don't continue and we needed a steady source of income that was not related to foundations. I was on

the board of the National Sharecroppers Fund. Well, the National Sharecroppers Fund had gotten a **giver's base**, back in the 1950s. They were still, even though the situation had changed and I didn't think that their program was nearly as effective as it might have been, but they were getting this \$150,000 [or] \$200,000 every year without too much trouble. It was a base that had been established, actually, back in the 1940s. I think The Southern Regional Council, I don't know exactly whether they established that kind of work. I know that Wendy is working on it, and I have contributed to it. As of 1975, I was just trying to develop it, but you need money to see money, and I was doing it on a shoestring. I was working on it, but it was not producing. I was working on a lot more foundations. I was really trying to do too much. I felt that it was essentially important. In 1975, we down-sized. We adopted economies. We reduced investment in some types of research. We ceased dramatically, but we kept the Southern Governmental Monitor Project going full- blast, [The] Investigative Reporting Project was going, the Task Force of Southern Rural Economic Development was going, and some of the research we were doing [was] having some good results and some of the things in education [were having good results]. I remember when the executive committee met in January of 1976, things were pretty good. I remember the attitude was good. Everything looked like it was working pretty well. They closed this special motion, thanking me for good performance. Well, I left that meeting and Mary and I drove to Florida, where I had appointments with several foundations. I was in the office of one of them. I can't remember which one it was. I remember it was on Orlando. I was

on the way home [and] I got a phone-call from my secretary that **Vivian Henderson** had died. So, I got in the car and drove straight through to Atlanta, Mary and I did. It wasn't big like Martin Luther King's funeral, but it was a big funeral, because he was well-known and had a fine reputation. So, soon after that, there was a meeting of the executive committee to choose the successor to **Vivian**. The vice chairman, I forget the title, was **Pat Darian**. I sat in on the election, which I later realized I shouldn't have done. I felt it necessary to call the attention of Ray Wheeler to the fact that there had been a tradition in the Council that the vice chairman moved up **[to the presidency]**. There was some effort to consider somebody else. So, **Pat** was finally elected. She and I had a couple meetings that I thought were very good meetings and then she came down to Atlanta just about two to three weeks before the meeting and she told me that she was checking some things and that she wanted to talk to some staff individuals. I felt that I couldn't stand in her way. I realized that she was doing a lot of research on the finances because **Russell Haney** was going in there and she didn't say very much to me.

To make a long story short, I knew that she was doing some research on the operations of the Council. She did not tell me what they were. I did not pressure on what it was. We came to the meeting and there had been some conversation among some of the board members about the specific role and purpose of the Council. The poverty and civil rights issue came in. There were legitimate questions and I had put some material in their hands, background material on this. We had the discussion that afternoon. It was a good

discussion, [but] there was no consensus. Then, we had supper. After supper, **Pat** said, George, would you let us meet tonight without staff, an executive session. So I said, sure. I called Mary and we went to a movie and my practice had been, when the executive committee met, I usually stayed at the hotel. So, I got back to the hotel and I had a message that, however late it was, to please call **Mrs. Darian**. So I called her and she said, could you come up. She said, we had a long discussion and by a one-vote margin, only half the committee was there, we would like to suggest to you that you resign. She didn't give any reasons.

When I look back on it now, I realize I should have pressed for the reasons, but this was over a year after. She said, my impression is that you have burned out. That was a difficult thing to discuss at one o'clock in the morning. I said, all right, I'll think about it and have some reply. She was very warm and solicitous. So, I went back and I went home and talked to Mary. I came back in the morning. My feeling throughout my career has been, if you're working with a board and they don't have confidence in you, then you don't get very far. On the other hand, in thinking about it, I made a mistake in not pushing for why they asked for it, other than the general problem that there had been such a change in attitude from one meeting to the other, that I knew there were underlying reasons, but I didn't push them and I should have. So, I said that I would resign effective September 30. I would make it appear voluntary and there were some other things. I said, you realize that the negotiations I have underway will probably all fail, but **Pat** didn't realize that until later. Everyone that

she tried to call or talk to didn't [talk to her], that was a shock to them, except for the Ford Foundation. The Ford Foundation had made commitments, but their commitment had to be renewed that fall. So, I went home, took the afternoon off, the next day I came in and wrote out a press release and released it. I said that I had spent too long trying to establish a financial base for the Council and that somebody ought to try it. Then, I called the staff together and told them. They were shocked, I think. Some of them raised the question right away, you should fight it, but I just hadn't had my strength, so I said, I don't think so. Then, I called other members of the executive committee and I realized that they probably wouldn't have gotten the majority from those ones, if the whole committee had been there. **Julius** wasn't there, **John Wheeler** wasn't there, but I had already acted.

G: They had a quorum?

E: They had a quorum, yes, but it was a five-to-four vote. In many ways I was relieved, because I had been carrying a lot of pressure. After I satisfied all of the notifications of people, I took a two-week vacation. Mary and I drove up to North Carolina, Virginia, and Washington. I went to see Harold Fleming and I went to see Les Dunbar. I told them both what had happened. I didn't ask them to be committal, I just told them. When I got back, I don't recall all of this, but I realized that [my] resignation [being] effective September 30 was all right for the public to have but, actually, there wasn't much I could do. **Pat** came back to town and

she took over the office. I went into the conference room and I tried to bring her up-to-date with the things that I had going. It took her a while to realize that she would have to start over with the funding. They had a special meeting of the executive committee a month after I got back. They first sent an emissary to me to see if I would agree to termination as of June 30. I said I would not, because I had announced publically what the conditions were and that it would be embarrassing to me and to the Council. I realized that the members of the board had a lot of anger, for reasons I didn't understand. I think I would say today that it must have been something about the whole pension situation. The next thing was that they had this meeting and it was clear that I was not to be a part of it, but I asked for opportunity to appear before them. I spoke almost entirely of program things that I hoped that they would continue, particularly reaching out to young people. I pointed out the intern programs, pointed out the monitored programs that were being successful, but there wasn't much said, so I left.

About two weeks later, I had a call from the general counsel. He said that, as a part of that meeting, they had further terminated more of the veteran staff, so there wasn't anyone left of the veteran staff, including all of the people during the Dunbar-Anthony period. They owed me, it was on the same basis as the others, something like \$19,000 on retirement. He said, because you couldn't solve that problem, we want to cut that to \$9,000. That irritated me, because it wasn't my fault so much, it was the consultant's fault for being slow. The consultant, his contacts were with some of the older members. So I said, no. Over a period of time, I looked back and found that I had informed them of the things they said

they didn't know, and that they had taken action approving it. I said, I see no action for it. Well, I understood from **Peter Petgus** later that the general counsel shut up and then they just said that they would split the difference. I left that request on my desk for several weeks before Peter called, and he said, please sign it. He said, you're just not going to get any more, we're just being held up. So, we agreed on almost \$15,000. The thing that I objected to was that they never said what their problems were. I never knew what I was accused of. It interested me as to why they were interested in talking to me about it, whatever it was. I'm sure, as I said, on the pension thing, they had overlooked several things. It hurt me that people who had been my friends had not had the courtesy to talk to me about it; **Paul Gaston** [and] **Ray Wheeler** had been close friends. There was no problem with **Julius** or **John Wheeler**, but **John Wheeler** was sick. John would have been very forceful about it, but I have a feeling that Pat did an analysis of the finances and she drew conclusions from some of the things that were different from what they appeared to be. I was very disappointed that I could not get into dialogue with people. I asked two or three members of the board what they would do, and they said, I think we need some time before you do it. Well, that's been twenty-five years ago and I have tried not to let it affect my regard for the Council and what it achieved in the tough years, which is why I pushed for this money. I don't think that I was unreasonable on wanting to know what the problems were, accepting the fact that I admit there were problems. I'm not trying to avoid accountability, I just would like to have it on a straightforward basis. I haven't been back. It's an

interesting thing, I have had warm relationships with some friends from the Council days. John Griffin has continued to be a very close friend. John never mentioned [the situation]. Bob Anderson, a staff member, was loyal to me, but he never mentioned what happened. He had a tough time, [but] it worked out all right for him. The only staff member that I really had a problem about was, I really regretted, that **Embry Via** was upset and I never really established the relationship with him. I see **Lucy Watkins** all the time. She came with me from the Fund. She's been very loyal. I have not talked with her at length about this, but she's been very supportive of me and I've been supportive of her when she's had her problems. As I say, Peter came to Washington; I would see Peter occasionally in Washington. Occasionally, Steve came to see me a couple times, but we never were very close. On the other hand, there was not any [hard feelings]. By the time he took over, he simply had a rebuilding situation, and I think he rebuilt it very well. The programs with respect to the legislature and the election laws have been very good, I think, I support them.

G: I know that this was a difficult thing to talk about and I appreciate your openness and your willingness to do that.

E: It seems to me that if Brian [Ward] is going to write a book, he ought to know that it was tough. I would really counsel Brian that I think that there's a lot of reason for completing a book with 1970 or 1971. The organization had some false starts and maybe it isn't as broad in purpose as I had ventured, but I think it's a very legitimate role.

G: Could you talk about how you see SRC's role in the African American freedom

struggle in the post-war South. How do you think historians ought to assess the SRC?

E: I think that it had a very significant role in the 1950s. At the time, there was becoming a greater sense of purpose among the black population that there was a place that they could refer to for good advice; support, and George Mitchell and Les Dunbar and Harold Fleming, we were mighty fortunate to have people of that quality concerned with those problems. Now, by the time we reached the mid-1960s, there were so many other organizations, including all of the organizations that came out of King's leadership and the black leadership itself, the SRC's primary contribution at that time was VEP. Even when I was there, you had to be sensitive to what the organizations were thinking about and what they were doing. When you look at what the program of Mrs. [Coretta Scott] King today, in the early 1970s, the Southern Regional Council provided the help to her that she needed to write proposals and that sort of thing. That wouldn't be true now, because the [King] family feels independent, but they felt they needed help then. When I was there, when you had **John Wheeler**, **Julius Chambers**, and **Vivian Henderson** on the same board, they were strong on the board. The board, through them, made an impact, and **Hodding [Carter?]**. But a lot of the members of the board did not have an impact. I tried, I don't think I was very successful, but I tried to have the black staff have as much significance as the black board members. We got them in numbers, but I'm not sure that we got them in quality. I feel very strongly that, and my sense is, I did not build that staff nearly as successfully as I had built the Fund's staff. I learned a lot that way.

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G: Why do you suppose that the SRC has remained relatively unacknowledged by historians, or maybe even misconstrued?

E: There were historians in the 1960s who knew about the SRC, but as more and more leadership organizations developed in the South or in the nation, there was less and less [attention given to the SRC]. It's interesting to me that there were historians here who were very sensitive to SRC, but I don't think SRC reached out to the George Tindall .[professor of Southern history at University of North Carolina] George is out here now. Paul Gaston was on the board, and still is, of course. [He's] another person that I regarded as a close friend who never, I think, played straight with me. There were a number of young historians and young political scientists who wrote about the South and they did not know or seek out the council. I think it's a two-way street. After Les, the years of Paul Anthony, and up until I took over, there was not any outreach from the Council to the academic community. I believe that was because you didn't have academics on the [board]. Now to some extent there was Dan Carter [professor of Southern history at University of South Carolina] and Numan Bartley [professor of Southern history at University of Georgia], I believe. They date to the earlier years. We did succeed in some ways to involve the academic community, and [with] the Task Force Southern Rural Development, we did. We used an economist who was with Emory [University], **Eva Golumboast**, we used her. It's interesting, you know to your question, why wasn't a history written, and I don't know. I just don't know.

G: When historians talk about it, often the charge that's labeled or the descriptor

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that's used is that [the SRC] was too gradualist, that early in its life, it could have come out more forcefully against segregation, that it was reactive to the black freedom struggle instead of initiating things. What do you think?

E: I don't criticize them for being gradualistic because, after all, they were created in the crucible of the 1930s and 1940s. As we talked yesterday, **my staff didn't warm to their staff, because they felt that....** When I went, I gave more authority to Leon Hall, I brought in Happy Lee, and we did do some activist things. I think it is true that the older staff were less activist. There's another reason I think would be better to close [a history of the SRC] at 1970, because Steve didn't really get his program pushing until the mid-1980s, as I recall, to really beginning to be effective. As I said yesterday, one of the mistakes that I made initially was not talking to more people about the Council before I accepted the job. I found that it was hard to mix points of view.

G: Is there anything that I should have asked you that I didn't, or that you expected me to ask?

E: I don't think so. I've tried to be as forthcoming as I could. Now, when I get the transcript, I may seal the whole thing.

G: That's absolutely your choice.

E: You can tell Brian that I'm willing to discuss [some things]. When he gets to the writing, and if he decides to include our period, I'm willing to discuss it, but I'm probably going to seal it. A lot of those people are still alive and one of the things I have learned is, it's twenty-five years since that happened, it's thirty-five years since the Fund was active, most people have forgotten about it. **I have**

**rakes with people** in this state, reminding them of the way that they reacted to **Howard Fuller** in the 1960s, and now he is a legitimate figure that even supports school vouchers. This was an issue in the Episcopal church in which I'm a member, it's not an issue anymore, they just don't remember. We have black bishops.

G: So sometimes there's a value in forgetting. Do you think?

E: Oh yes. We not only have a black bishop, he was elected on the strength of his support from the lay delegates. Thirty years ago, the lay delegates were the ones that reacted violently to....

[End of side B4; end of interview]