

## AN ORAL HISTORY

with

LARRY RUBIN

*This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi, North Mississippi Oral History and Archives Program. The interview is with Mr. Larry Rubin and is taking place on April 28, 2001. The interviewer is Gloria Clark.*

**Clark:** I'm Gloria Clark. I'm here with Larry Rubin. This is Saturday, April 20, 2001. We're at Larry's house. Larry, give us some little bit of background on you.

**Rubin:** Well, my birthdate is June 23, 1942, and I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where I was born and raised until eighteen when I went to Ohio to college. My parents, Leona(?), who is still living and in fact is in a home nearby here where we're sitting in Takoma Park, Maryland—oh, and you wanted my address, which is—

**Clark:** I want your address and your phone number.

**Rubin:** Well, OK. My address is [the address and phone number of the interviewee have not been transcribed in order to protect his privacy]. The second line is my councilmember line. I'm a member of the city council in Takoma Park, and I get most of my phone calls not on the family line but on that line. And you see, there's two telephones here. They're right next to each other, but one is one number; one is the other. Anyway, I was saying I was born in Philadelphia. I mentioned my mother. My father's named Aaron(?), and he was a welder, and he died in 1976. My mother was always a hairdresser. They both worked. They were both very active politically, and we were victims of the McCarthy period in the [19]50s, my whole family. Well, I was on several picket lines in the [19]50s at the Woolworth Five and Dime, for the refusal of Woolworth to hire African-Americans. There was a movement at that time. And actually I went on several Marches on Washington in the [19]50s, too.

**Clark:** With your parents?

**Rubin:** Actually, no. My parents never did go, but I went with a youth group called Teens Ahead in Philadelphia. I went to college in 1960 at Antioch. Antioch was then and is now a small, liberal arts college. It has a co-op program, a work-study program. At that time, every three months you switched. It was three months on campus, three months work. And so there was a woman there named, in 1960, named Marjorie House(?), who was the girlfriend of Chuck McDew, and Chuck McDew at that time was the chairman of SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], the chair of SNCC. Yeah.

**Clark:** Yeah. He was the first chair.

**Rubin:** The first chair. And actually I met him really before SNCC was set up 100 percent. SNCC sort of grew out of SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference]. As you know, it was during the time of great explosion of sit-ins, starting in Greensboro. SCLC needed a way to coordinate the aid for them. So they started actually the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and through Ella Baker's good offices and others, it became separate. But I attended a lot of the meetings that led—well, I can't say led to it being separate. It was in the process of making, of setting up the organization. And Marjorie and I went to several meetings, and then from here in Washington, I had a co-op job, and we went to several others. In any case, it was through Chuck McDew that I first got involved with SNCC. It was either late [19]60 or early [19]61. I can't remember exactly. But he convinced me to work for SNCC, and I went to Albany, Georgia, to southwest Georgia, which was at that time, I believe, the only project that allowed whites. And I worked for Charles Sherrod, Reverend Sherrod, and I was there for, I want to say, close to a year. I'm at the point now where I can't remember exactly, but I have it all in my files. I stayed close to a year.

**Clark:** You left school.

**Rubin:** Well, that's interesting. I thought I left school, but when I came back, they told me actually that I hadn't. I thought I quit school and worked for SNCC, but it turns out that the school wrote me down as being on a co-op job. So I wrote a rather long paper about a year being away, and I got credit for it. I got credit for being in jail, for doing my work for SNCC. I also, when I got back, I had a collapsed lung. For a variety of reasons in Albany, it led to my lung collapsing, and so when I came back to Antioch, I spent most of my time in the hospital. The lung had to reinflate itself. They didn't operate. It was called a spontaneous pneumothorax. They didn't operate. I laid in bed for three months, sort of recuperating from the South. Then I went to work here in the Washington area as a community organizer for Southeast Neighborhoods. I'm skipping a lot of things, other things in the middle, but just the stuff related to SNCC. And this brings us to [19]62; yeah, let's say the later part of [19]62, early part of [19]63. I was a community organizer for Southeast Neighborhood Housing, and a (inaudible) at the Barry(?) Farms Public Housing area. At that time Marion Barry was here and others, forming a rather well organized support group for SNCC. And I got—it was natural that I would get involved with them. And one thing led to the other, and I went back to work for SNCC after Washington, and I was sent to Holly Springs. And now—

**Clark:** Who sent you to Holly Springs?

**Rubin:** Well, that's a very good question. The way SNCC worked at the time, you were never exactly 100 percent sure. I'm not exactly sure how I ended up in Albany in the first place. Who made the decision? I do remember in the case of Albany, arriving in Atlanta, and somebody saying, "Take a flight to Albany." (laughter) And I

did. I think actually I was assigned to Pete Seeger. I think Pete Seeger was giving a concert in Albany, and I think that's how I got there in the first place, by (inaudible). In the case of Holly Springs, I don't know exactly. I assume it was Jim Forman. Whenever I tell the story, and especially if Jim is there, I always say he was our boss, and he made the decision, and he sent us, and probably he did. But honestly I don't know. But my assignment, whoever gave it to me, was—this was now in early [19]63, in winter of [19]63. And I was there by myself. There was nobody else there but—

**Clark:** Frank Smith had left.

**Rubin:** He had just left, and—

**Clark:** (Inaudible) February, [19]63.

**Rubin:** So he left in February; so I must have arrived around the same time. Thank you. I've always wondered exactly.

**Clark:** That's what he told me; he left in February, [19]63.

**Rubin:** If he left, that's when I arrived, shortly after. He had been working for SNCC for years, and he was still working for SNCC. I assume he was assigned elsewhere.

**Clark:** Yeah. He went to Greenwood for a while and then Columbus.

**Rubin:** Ah. You know, I worked for him when he was a city councilmember. I was his campaign manager for the first year he ran, and then his executive assistant. But I'm jumping ahead twenty years. Yeah. Anyway at that time—so it must have been February, and they were talking about the possibility of bringing down a bunch of Northern students. It wasn't 100 percent formulated yet, but my assignment was to set up a project in Holly Springs, to rent a place to stay, a Freedom House, and just get the lay of the land and sort of stay there in preparation for everybody else coming. So I was living at Rust College. And I got to be rather well known in Holly Springs, for one thing, being white. I guess I was the first white SNCC person assigned there. It was shortly after the time when it was decided to include whites in organizing projects outside of southwest Georgia. So I was living at Rust College, and—

**Clark:** Do you have any idea how that was arranged?

**Rubin:** Why?

**Clark:** For you to live at Rust.

**Rubin:** Oh. No, I don't.

**Clark:** You set up, and you knew that that's where you were supposed to go.

**Rubin:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Clark:** You didn't have to—it had been arranged?

**Rubin:** No, no. It had been set up. I don't remember how. I don't know if I knew then. I mean, these things were very casual.

**Clark:** Well, yes. I lived at Rust College, too, when I went there.

**Rubin:** Ah. Well, all the women lived at Rust College.

**Clark:** Yes. The women lived there.

**Rubin:** Yes. That's right. I remember that.

**Clark:** So how long did you live at Rust?

**Rubin:** Well, until we opened the Freedom House right across the street, actually, and so that must have been that summer.

**Clark:** When did you open the Freedom House?

**Rubin:** Shortly before y'all came. Not very long.

**Clark:** Really?

**Rubin:** Yeah. I don't remember living at the Freedom House by myself, although I suppose I did, but I don't remember it. It was actually, in the end, Ivanhoe [Donaldson], and Charlie Cobb who actually rented the house and set it up.

**Clark:** Oh, they did?

**Rubin:** Yeah. I was unable to do it for a variety of reasons, although I was there. But then Ivanhoe came, and he did it, as Ivanhoe is wont to do. He does things; he gets things done. But I was into voter registration work and getting to know the community, and getting to know the students. In fact, now, I was an experienced SNCC organizer, by this time. I'd been, you know, working for SNCC on and off, as I said, since late [19]60 or sixty-one. And this was my first experience with what later we would call the Black Power Movement, which was in no way a movement, but at that time, at least in Holly Springs, but several students, you know, expressed resentment to me that I was white, basically, and you know were saying that I was—I forget the terms that they used. What the hell was I doing there?

**Clark:** They confronted you?

**Rubin:** They confronted me, yeah, several times, just verbally; I mean, no—and what I would say is, “Well, it’s easy to say that to me that I’m white. You know nothing’s going to happen to you if you say that to me. Now, let’s go down and say it to the sheriff because I just did. I just got out of jail.” I would say, which they put me in and out of jail quite a lot. And I got—

**Clark:** County jail or city jail. Was it the sheriff that arrested you or the city police?

**Rubin:** Jeez!

**Clark:** There was a difference. Not to you, huh?

**Rubin:** No. You know, I don’t know. Flick Ash(?) was always the one that arrested me.

**Clark:** Then that’s the county.

**Rubin:** Yeah.

**Clark:** And he was the sheriff in [19]62?

**Rubin:** Yeah. He was always the sheriff.

**Clark:** Sixty-three.

**Rubin:** Yeah.

**Clark:** He was the sheriff.

**Rubin:** Yeah. He was the sheriff when I first came. Was there two separate jails?

**Clark:** I don’t know. What jail were you put in?

**Rubin:** In Holly Springs.

**Clark:** Holly Springs. But you were arrested by sheriff’s people.

**Rubin:** Yeah. I had no idea. I’m learning something now.

**Clark:** I’m learning it, too.

**Rubin:** But yeah, I guess it was all county. But it was all—

**Clark:** Why did they arrest you? What kinds of things did they do?

**Rubin:** It was always trumped things like, “Hey, boy, a car like that”—I had a little Studebaker Lark, and, “A car like that was stolen last week. Prove that you own it.” Well, when I first came I had actually Atlanta tags on, and I had an Atlanta owner’s paper, but they didn’t accept that. They said, “You have to show us your bill of sale.” So, and remember, at this time they could keep you in jail. See, they didn’t exactly charge me with stuff like that, or sometimes I would get charged with, “Prove you own this shirt that you’re wearing.”

**Clark:** How long did they keep you in jail?

**Rubin:** That’s the point. I was never charged exactly. It was always “suspicion of.” And they could keep you in jail for three days on suspicion of without officially charging you, just suspicion of.

**Clark:** And then they can do it, again, though. Can’t they?

**Rubin:** Yes, they can. So they didn’t have to prove any kind of anything, and generally they would either let me go in seventy-two hours, or if it was a traffic charge, like one time I hit a cow. It was my fault. I did; I hit a cow in Marshall County. And so they arrested me for that, although it was the cow’s fault. (laughter) It was.

**Clark:** Cow walked in front of your car.

**Rubin:** Yes. And it was at night, and it was out in the woods; I mean out in the country. And it is illegal for cows to be on the highway in Marshall County and why I say it was the cow’s fault. Cow had no business being there. I totaled the cow and totaled my car, both, but I was arrested for this. So they fined me something, and I always paid. And they would arrest me for trespassing. “Trespassing on what?” “Well, when you were doing the”—they didn’t use those terms. I’m telling—“Well, when you were doing voter registration canvassing.” I forget how they said it. “You were agitating,” probably. “You crossed on Mrs. Jones’ yard.” And she would always be black, and they would say, “Mrs. Jones complained.”

**Clark:** What happened to you in jail?

**Rubin:** Well, I got beat up a couple times.

**Clark:** By whom?

**Rubin:** The deputies.

**Clark:** Deputies?

**Rubin:** Yeah. But nothing much; this is when I was by myself, nothing much. But then they would let me go; give me a fine. Actually after a while—I’m going to jump

to the end of the story right now, that we're talking about arrests. After a while it occurred to me—oh, one time I was pulling out of a parking space in Holly Springs, and another car scraped against me, very lightly, and we exchanged paint chips. Well, that other guy was a friend of the sheriff—well, everybody's a friend of the sheriff if you were white—claimed that I owed him over 300 bucks for damage to his car. And they didn't throw me in jail then, but they fined me. So I paid it just to keep—our deal was not to stay in jail. Our deal was always to be out on the roads, to do canvassing. Our theory was that all these things were just efforts to get us off the streets. So I paid. It occurred to me after a while that I was an industry down there. I was a local industry.

**Clark:** Where were you getting the money?

**Rubin:** Well, from the Sholom Aleichem Club in Philadelphia. This was a Jewish group that at that time was paying my salary: \$9.45, ten dollars after taxes. And they were paying for me and also Barbara Blumfield(?) later on, Barbara Gail(?). You remember Barbara.

**Clark:** I do remember Barbara.

**Rubin:** We were going together, and anyway, we were both being supported by the same group. Now, I was there before her, but they—

**Clark:** When did she come?

**Rubin:** With the larger group.

**Clark:** In the summer?

**Rubin:** In the summer, but then she stayed later, too. Anyway, so they would be paying my fine, or my parents would be helping me out, and the Friends of SNCC group in Philadelphia would be helping me out. In fact at that time there was a support group among parents, parents of SNCC folks in Philadelphia. But it occurred to me that actually this was beyond keeping me off the streets.

**Clark:** This was making money.

**Rubin:** They were making money off of me!

**Clark:** Well, did you change after a while and not want to pay the fine?

**Rubin:** Well, I'm going to tell you a story that happened later on in the summer. We organized the [ASCS, Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service] election.

**Clark:** ACS.

**Rubin:** I'm sorry the AC—

**Clark:** Agricultural committee.

**Rubin:** Well, it was actually ASC; it was Agricultural Stabilization Committee and something else; there's (inaudible) one there.

**Clark:** It was in Benton or Marshall County? I know Benton County (inaudible).

**Rubin:** Well, it must have been Marshall County. And I'll tell you; when you hear the story, it must have been Marshall. We were encouraging for sharecroppers to vote in these elections. These elections decided who got money, basically, for not growing crops, cotton, lobbies(?), and subsidies. These committees are in every rural—or were in every rural county, set up during the New Deal. Everybody that farmed was eligible to vote for the committee that would make the decision about who gets what. Naturally the poor sharecroppers and other poor farmers were not allowed to vote, and actually didn't even have to register to vote. If you were a farmer, just go in and vote. Very simple, but they never did. So in Marshall County we organized, and we were getting these people to vote for the committee. That's what it was. It's the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation [Service] Committee. That's where the S is; service committee. Well, the day of the election, which was December 3, and I know that because you and I just looked at the—

**Clark:** Yeah, sixty-four.

**Rubin:** Sixty-four, the *South Reporter*. I wouldn't have remembered it if I had not seen it. Anyway, I was driving from place to place, again, by myself, just to make sure everything was going OK at the election site because they had place to place (inaudible) the election sites. And I want to say—well, I can't; I don't remember what town, but it was in Marshall County because I got tossed in jail in Marshall County. They arrested me for having a faulty headlight except it was two o'clock in the afternoon, and you don't need headlights at two o'clock in the afternoon. One of the deputies pulled me over and said, "You got a faulty headlight." No, no, I'm sorry. They pulled me over. They didn't say that; they just pulled me over and said, "Get out of the car." And he checked the car out and found the faulty headlight. That's what happened, or maybe he saw that I had a faulty—I don't know exactly. But anyway by this time I knew these guys pretty well because they had (laughter) beat me up and arrested me quite a bit.

**Clark:** Did you know who they were?

**Rubin:** Yes. It was Henry Roach(?).

**Clark:** Henry Roach?

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** He was one of the deputies there.

**Rubin:** He was the chief deputy. And one second; I wrote this down. Henry Roach is involved in another story that I'll tell you in a minute. I'm looking through my files here on my desk—

**Clark:** I can pause.

**Rubin:** —that I—OK. There's only three; it was Henry Roach, Ray Bright(?), and Glen Rose(?).

**Clark:** OK. Do you know if any of them are still living?

**Rubin:** No. I don't. I know Henry Roach is dead. I don't know if the other two are, or not. And the way I know this was in [19]94 I went to Holly Springs after the reunion, and I asked Flick; I said, "I can't remember the names of your deputies at the time." And he told me these names, so I have to take his word that it's true. I don't remember offhand, although maybe if I go through my files and papers, I'm sure I've listed them in my report because I was very good about writing daily reports, and I have all my daily reports from Holly Springs in my file here, and I'm sure I have their names. But he also told me, by the way, that there's a Charlie Brown(?) and Marion Love(?) who are black deputies in Marshall County. That was, at least, in 1994. Anyway, now that I'm thinking about it, either Henry Roach or Ray Bright stopped me. And he did this number, and he hauled me in, into jail, for a faulty [headlight]. And I was pissed, actually. I was over being afraid; I was angry because it was very clear that they just wanted to get me away from these [ASCS] elections.

**Clark:** ASCS.

**Rubin:** ASCS elections. And anyway, threw me in jail; kept me overnight, and I told Flick Ash and the deputy right off the bat; I said, "I'm not going to pay the fine." In every other case, I always paid the fine. I said, "I'm just not going to do it." In fact what I said is, "You're going to have to come up with something better." After what? I was there almost two years. "And you're still doing this stuff. You're going to come up with something better. I'm just not going to pay it, period!" And I'll never forget. Their prosecuting attorney, at least then, was the lawyer for Aviva Futorian's father's furniture factory in Tupelo, and we had met him because Aviva took us over to his factory, a Stratolounge(?) [furniture] factory, and we had met this attorney, wearing his hat as her father's attorney. Well, evidently from time to time he acted as the prosecutor of Marshall County. I don't know if I knew that or not up until this point. But anyway, Flick Ash sends him in to talk to me, and they were negotiating with me. At first the fine was—I'm going to make up a number because I can't really remember, but it was enormous. I'm going to say \$200. I mean, that's what sticks in my mind; it was just enormous. And I said, "No. I'm not going to pay it." And they

kept me in jail a couple of days, as I said, and they sent in this guy to negotiate. I can't remember his name, but I'm sure Aviva will remember it, and actually again, I'm sure if I looked it up in my files, I wrote his name down. And one thing led to the other. I was in jail two or three nights over this; I guess. I can't remember exactly, but in the end he said, "OK. Look. We'll reduce the fine to \$5. You can get out of jail." And I said, "No." It wasn't the money at this point. It was the principle. Actually, I wanted them to stop fining me all the time. I wanted them to know that I wasn't going to be so easy anymore. So they dropped the charge. In other words, what I said was, "I'll take it to court. You're really going to have to arrest me, and you're going to have to bring me before a judge. And you're going to have to do it right. I just won't pay it." Before, to avoid court, you paid a fine, like a traffic violation. But I said, "No. This time it's going to be in court." And at that time there was a lot of press around, and things in Holly Springs weren't going unnoticed. So they just dropped the charge. So I was pretty proud of myself. But it took me—

**Clark:** A year and a half?

**Rubin:** A year and a half.

**Clark:** (Inaudible)

**Rubin:** Yeah, to stop paying the damn fines.

**Clark:** Tell me a little bit about the work you did when you got there and how you were received by people in the community. You had come in after Frank Smith, who was black.

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** And here comes you. You're the first white person. I mean, did you have contacts and names from Frank?

**Rubin:** Yes. Well, actually I guess they were from Frank indirectly, but I never met Frank at that time. I didn't meet Frank until quite a way later, although I did take his place. But somebody must have given me these contacts.

**Clark:** Yeah. You had contacts.

**Rubin:** I had contacts.

**Clark:** So how did they receive you?

**Rubin:** I say that because that's the way SNCC worked. It was very unorganized. Very well; within the black community I never had any problems whatsoever, very friendly.

**Clark:** Did you stay in Marshall County mostly?

**Rubin:** I stayed at Rust College.

**Clark:** I mean, did you work mostly in Marshall County?

**Rubin:** Oh, in the county, itself, yes, (inaudible).

**Clark:** (Inaudible)

**Rubin:** No, no.

**Clark:** Not DeSoto, not Tippah.

**Rubin:** That's right.

**Clark:** You worked in Marshall County.

**Rubin:** In Marshall County, that's right.

**Clark:** And what kind of—what happened? What kind of response did you get? How many people? What did they do?

**Rubin:** Well—

**Clark:** Who were some of them?

**Rubin:** I did—from beginning to end, in other words, from the time I was there by myself to the time I ended up being part of the larger project, I'll give you an overview. I did voter registration work. I did bringing people—when I say voter registration: convincing people to go to register.

**Clark:** To go to register.

**Rubin:** Canvassing, we called it. I did canvassing. I brought people down to the courthouse in groups; I led a couple of demonstrations to the courthouse in Holly Springs.

**Clark:** How many people would go with you to register?

**Rubin:** Well—

**Clark:** At a time?

**Rubin:** Mostly very few, two or three, but let's see how many on July 30, [19]64, according to the paper here, about a hundred.

**Clark:** Yeah, that was a long list. That's probably the list for the whole month.

**Rubin:** Well, no. I'm not talking about the list. There's this one demonstration. Not everybody actually got registered.

**Clark:** Oh, yeah.

**Rubin:** Here, you see? This is a photograph that says, "Larry Rubin is photographed as he led the voter registration drive through last Friday." I'm talking about there was a demonstration, and Thursday, July 30, a week earlier it was about a hundred people. (Inaudible) demonstration, and not everybody got in to register to vote.

**Clark:** But they tried.

**Rubin:** But they tried.

**Clark:** What would happen to them when they went in?

**Rubin:** Well—

**Clark:** Were they given a test to take?

**Rubin:** Not at this time, when I first—in fact, let me give you the overview, and then let me go back to each piece because I'll forget this. So it was voter registration and these little demonstrations. Then it was I helped organize and set up the Freedom Library Project during that summer, during the Freedom Summer. Then I did, I helped organize a union at a brickmaking factory, and I helped run the—with you and the others, I mean, the Freedom House that people'd come every day and tell us about their troubles. And that's it.

**Clark:** Well, did you conduct, in November of 1963, a freedom vote? You know how they had a mock vote?

**Rubin:** Yeah.

**Clark:** They had a freedom vote.

**Rubin:** No. I don't remember that.

**Clark:** There wasn't one there, huh?

**Rubin:** I don't remember. No. I don't think so.

**Clark:** I can't document that one occurred there.

**Rubin:** I don't remember.

**Clark:** We had a freedom vote in November of [19]64, but we did not have one, I think, in November of [19]63.

**Rubin:** I don't think so. I don't think so. Holly Springs really was only seen as sort of the outskirts of the movement, in part because that area was better than other areas in Mississippi in terms of the way people were treated. I mean, it was not the Delta.

**Clark:** What do you think accounts for that?

**Rubin:** Several things. Number one, it was not only majority black, Marshall County—some Delta counties were majority black, too, but historically Marshall County had always had a very strong, well-organized African-American community. There had been a black sheriff there during Reconstruction and black officials. I don't—

**Clark:** I think a black mayor.

**Rubin:** And I believe so in Holly Springs. And I'm not sure whether the Congress—the Congressman was black during—

**Clark:** Yes, I think so, during Reconstruction.

**Rubin:** Probably so, and—

**Clark:** Because the county was something like 70 to 80 percent.

**Rubin:** Exactly, 70 to 80, that's exactly right. And it being so close to Tennessee, not that Tennessee was any great haven of equality, but people tended to be more sophisticated because Memphis was close by. There was Rust College, which I think contributed a lot to what we're saying, and I think the reason Rust College was there was also because of the history of the place. And in general the black community was more sophisticated and more organized than most.

**Clark:** And they were landowners.

**Rubin:** And there were some landowners, yes. There were some rather well-to-do African-Americans; that's true, always, historically there. Anyway, going back to the question of the nitty-gritty of the voter registration work, when I first went, just as in Georgia, yes, they had these literacy tests, when I first arrived. And when you went to the clerk, what would happen is you would have to fill out a form. In fact I have, again, in my files, I have the form, and basically it said, "Prove that you can read and write and interpret a section of the Mississippi State Constitution to the satisfaction of the registrar." And what that amounted to was, if you were white, you write your name, and you read any little bit of thing that they said, generally the title; it says,

“The Mississippi Constitution.” If you were black you would have to copy a section of the Mississippi Constitution—on the form there was a long space for it—and then interpret it to the satisfaction of the registrar. Now, the registrar was generally pretty ignorant themselves. (laughter) They didn’t know what it meant, and generally they were correct. Generally the Mississippi Constitution, State Constitution doesn’t mean anything. It is very confusing. I’ve read the damn thing, and it doesn’t mean much. At best it doesn’t mean anything. But you had to interpret it. And whatever you said, of course the registrar said, “No.” Now, but the real answer to your question is what would happen to the people is they would get their names published in the paper. That’s really what happened for attempting to registrar, and they could count on getting fired. They could count on getting, at least, getting fired.

**Clark:** Did you know people who got fired?

**Rubin:** Oh, yes.

**Clark:** You did?

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** Fired from what kind of job?

**Rubin:** Well, working for white people. They all worked for white people. I can’t—again, if I look through my file, I can give you a (inaudible) example because I recorded all of this.

**Clark:** You recorded it.

**Rubin:** Yeah, for the Justice Department, but off the top of my head I can’t remember a thing, but I can look it up. But, and if you asked them, “What do you do,” they said, “I work for white people.” They maybe were domestics, sharecroppers. The majority of people in the county were sharecroppers that I worked with.

**Clark:** Were they? Did they get thrown off the land?

**Rubin:** I don’t know of anybody that got thrown, that literally got thrown out of their house, although it happened quite a bit a little bit earlier than when I got there, but they risked that, and they risked having their house burned down. They risked anything that the white community could do.

**Clark:** Now, if you were an independent farmer, you didn’t have the same risks.

**Rubin:** I suppose not, but somebody has to buy your crops, and I’ll bet you that person was white.

**Clark:** Right.

**Rubin:** And I'll bet you they stopped buying, and—

**Clark:** But this did not deter people.

**Rubin:** Well, yes, it did deter people.

**Clark:** It deterred some people.

**Rubin:** Yeah.

**Clark:** Right.

**Rubin:** It deterred a lot of people; that's why we were there. If it didn't deter people—

**Clark:** I mean, while you were there, more people risked it.

**Rubin:** More, more and more risked it; that's right. But yes, it deterred people, and I always felt very bad, and this goes back to Georgia. There was nothing much we could offer them. All we could say was, "We'll go with you to the courthouse. We'll go in a group, and if something happens to you, we'll notify—the Justice Department will know about it. Kennedy will know about it," or whoever. That wasn't much, and in fact people observed that even when the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and the Justice Department found out about it, nothing happened. Excuse me. But still, the movement grew, and people, more and more people registered to vote. They were very brave, unbelievably brave. It's impossible to talk about how courageous a local person in Mississippi was to go down and try to register to vote. They risked their lives, literally.

**Clark:** They risked everything, right.

**Rubin:** Everything. And many were killed throughout the South. Thirty-six people were killed during SNCC times. Now, Reverend Lee, there was a bunch of them, and there was no publicity except in an adverse way. They were killed generally in public ways so that everybody knew they were killed. That was the purpose of their being killed, so people would know about, to scare other people off of registering to vote. Anyway—

**Clark:** Did you—let me ask you this. Did you do any [Mississippi] Freedom Democratic Party organizing, mass meetings, precinct organizations?

**Rubin:** Yes, I did.

**Clark:** Can you tell me (inaudible)?

**Rubin:** Yes. Let's stick to voter registration for a minute. OK? Because this was all the same. The reason we were registering people to vote was in preparation for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. That's why we were doing this. That's why the big emphasis on Mississippi at the time. So I'll tell you about that part of it in a second, but going back to voter registration, the nitty-gritty work. Generally it was very boring. It was walking down these dirt roads, these country roads, knocking on people's shacks, and telling them what I just said, basically: "Please register to vote, and we'll do what we can to protect you." (Inaudible)

**Clark:** Did you have classes?

**Rubin:** I didn't lead them, myself, but yes. When the volunteers came, we did.

**Clark:** So in the summer.

**Rubin:** In the summer we did.

**Clark:** (Inaudible) there were classes, but before that, you didn't do any kind of—

**Rubin:** No, no.

**Clark:** —adult class, literacy class or how to take a test?

**Rubin:** Oh, yes. I did, yes, yes. I did, yes. Yeah.

**Clark:** You did some of that.

**Rubin:** I thought you meant—

**Clark:** In the churches?

**Rubin:** Yes, yes. Adult literacy in particular we did. Yes. I did, not much. I mean, I was only one person, and one scared person at that. I mean, I stayed scared. Anyway, that's basically the nitty-gritty work, and then bringing people down, and so on. Now, to answer your questions about both the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and the adult classes, once the volunteers got there, in that summer, we did it all. We had lots of classes, and we had lots of meetings, urging people to—and I forget how, now, but urging people to register as Freedom Democrats. I forget the mechanism. But we were building toward the, in 1964, the Atlantic City Democratic Convention. I remember watching the Democratic Convention in the Freedom House in Mississippi on television. And my parents were there. At that point my parents were in Atlantic City, supporting the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, and I saw them on television from Mississippi.

**Clark:** And you didn't go.

**Rubin:** I didn't go, no.

**Clark:** Yeah. I was in Atlantic City. I was there, yeah.

**Rubin:** Yeah. But I saw it. As a matter of fact, it was quite a thing. I was sitting with a bunch of local people and SNCC folks, and we were watching our leaders on television, Guyot and Auden(?). It was quite a thing. Anyway, so we had the classes and—

**Clark:** This was the freedom school.

**Rubin:** The freedom school.

**Clark:** Which was set up at the Freedom House. Is that right?

**Rubin:** And elsewhere.

**Clark:** And elsewhere.

**Rubin:** All over the county.

**Clark:** In churches?

**Rubin:** Yes, at least I remember, yeah. Now, I was only peripherally involved in that. In other words after the project was set up, I still continued voter registration and doing the things that I said. Also I had some dealings with Oxford, the college, Ole Miss.

**Clark:** What kind of dealings?

**Rubin:** Well, let me take a couple steps back. (laughter) As I said, my main role regarding the summer, that is aside from voter registration—when I say the summer I mean the summer project, [1964]. My main role in that had to do with setting up the Freedom Libraries with Staughton Lynd. Staughton Lynd was in charge of them if I remember correctly. Excuse me. And so I went to Oxford, Ohio, where the training was taking place. I went from Holly Springs to Oxford, and it must have been in Oxford that I picked up a big load of books that had been donated for the Freedom Libraries, and I loaded up a U-Haul, and I drove back through like the center of Mississippi. Why, I don't remember, to tell you the truth.

**Clark:** Was this Henry Reaves' (?) truck you were driving?

**Rubin:** No. No, this was a U-Haul and my car.

**Clark:** That was another trip. OK.

**Rubin:** Yeah. And—

**Clark:** So you were taking them somewhere besides Holly Springs.

**Rubin:** No. I was taking them to Holly Springs, but I say that because it's important to the story, and I cannot remember why I was going north, but somehow I must have had another stop to make. Again, if I look up my reports, I could remember it. But the burden of the story is this: I'm coming from the North with a bunch of books in a U-Haul truck; I said with my car in front of it. I don't think so now. Now, that I'm recalling it, I think it was just a U-Haul truck. And I was in Oxford, Mississippi. I was driving north from Oxford to Holly Springs with this load of books. Maybe I was picking up the people that were with me, from somewhere because when we got to Oxford—I didn't start from Oxford; I started from further south—we were arrested by Sheriff Blanton(?) in Oxford. And I was arrested for suspicion of carrying literature threatening to overthrow the State of Mississippi. I have clippings here about it. They took our picture in Oxford. Then we were kept in jail for a couple of days. Then we were let go, and when I arrived in Holly Springs we were arrested again.

**Clark:** They didn't take your books.

**Rubin:** No. But they did take several of my personal belongings. They stole them, and I didn't know that they stole them till I got to Holly Springs' jail because I opened up my briefcase that I was carrying. Now, back in Oxford, the suspicion of carrying books threatening to overthrow the State of Mississippi actually was not based on the books we were carrying because I pointed out the sheriff there was things like *The Bobbsey Twins*. In fact in the paper, in this article, they listed the kind of books that were there, and they had nothing to do with Mississippi. What I was arrested for—I mean, what they counted as evidence on that charge was letters that I had written to friends, that I hadn't mailed yet, that I was carrying in my briefcase.

**Clark:** Is that what they took?

**Rubin:** No, no. That's what they charged me with. I tried to convince them that that wasn't literature, that literature had to be duplicated. This was just one copy. But they wouldn't buy that. No. What they stole was an address book of mine, which contained people that I knew around the country. Now, so I go to Holly Springs, and I dumped all these books, after they let us out of jail in Holly Springs—and that was some kind of traffic charge, which I paid the fine for. I mean, I had been in Holly Springs all this time. (end of digital file one; beginning of digital file two)

**Clark:** This is side two of an interview with Larry Rubin, and it's April 28, 2001, and we're talking about the books that were being delivered to set up the Freedom Library in the Freedom House in Holly Springs.

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** In the fall of [19]64.

**Rubin:** No, no. I brought them earlier. I brought them right before Freedom Summer.

**Clark:** Oh, you did. OK.

**Rubin:** So that would make it—

**Clark:** June?

**Rubin:** June of [19]64. Yeah. Yeah, but that was during the time when the training was going on in Oxford—

**Clark:** In Oxford.

**Rubin:** —Ohio. So it was June.

**Clark:** It was June.

**Rubin:** Yeah. So what I did when I got to Oxford was literally dump them in a basement, in a basement room in Rust College, and I did help organize them during the course of the summer, but I wasn't very—what's the word? I wasn't very persistent about doing that.

**Clark:** Well, there were a lot of other things going on in the summer.

**Rubin:** Exactly, (inaudible).

**Clark:** So we organized them after the summer.

**Rubin:** That's right.

**Clark:** Is what ended up happening.

**Rubin:** That's right. That's right. Anyway, we're still back in the summer. So this was about the same time as the three civil rights workers [James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Mickey Schwerner].

**Clark:** June 21.

**Rubin:** Yes. And a little later on, Wayne Yancy had been killed.

**Clark:** August 1.

**Rubin:** Yeah. August 1.

**Clark:** August 1, [19]64, um-hm.

**Rubin:** Now, it had to be by August that they still hadn't found the—is that right?

**Clark:** They still hadn't found them.

**Rubin:** They still hadn't found them in August. That's right. OK, right, because I'm going to tell about July 30. Around that last week of July, Senator Eastland made a speech on the floor of the Senate about my—what they called “Rubin's Little Black Book.” See, that's the way they refer to it in the papers. Now, that's a lie. It was not a little, black book. It was a little, reddish-brown book, but I guess it sounds better to call it a little, black book. But it was an address book, and Eastland made this speech not only about me; there was a couple of other people, all Jewish. And his point was that the civil rights movement in Mississippi was led by Communists, mainly me and Joynyee Rabinowitz(?). In fact when he said that, I got more scared that Ivanhoe would be mad at me than anything else because he was leading the movement; I wasn't leading the movement. I wasn't the leader at all. But anyway, Eastland read my address book into the Senate record along with the speech, talking about all these Communists were—

**Clark:** He read your book, all the names and addresses?

**Rubin:** Yes. I have it right here. Actually I can't say all, and I can't say all the ones he read were actually in there. He embellished quite a bit. He threw in some names that I know weren't. I never did see the book again, so I don't remember exactly, but the truth is I did have some left-wing associates that were listed in the book. And it was stupid of me to be carrying this address book around, but I had been out of the state for a while, and I was carrying some personal effects in case I needed to call somebody on the road. So he gave the speech; he was not just reading the address book, but a speech and the addresses. And it was all—the burden of the speech was there was a bunch of Communists running the civil rights movement, the so-called civil rights movement, and therefore you can't trust these Jewish Communists. Well, he didn't say Jewish; he said, “New Yorkers.” And so obviously if they say that, “Three civil rights workers [Goodman, Chaney, and Schwerner] have been killed,” it's a hoax. And he didn't say it quite this way in the speech, although he got very close to saying it this way. When he said elsewhere, and in the speech he'd said it almost this way, but not quite, “The three civil rights workers were laughing it up on Moscow gold in a New York hotel room.” So he hit all of the stereo[types]: the Communists and it's Jewish, obviously because it's New York. Anyway I was never as frightened in my life because before, at least I could move from place to place, and the whites didn't know me, to see me. But now they did because my picture was all over the press, and I got beaten up a couple of times.

**Clark:** Where? By whom?

**Rubin:** Well, one time in Holly Springs. No. I'm sorry. I'm confusing an incident. I got beat up before this happened in Holly Springs. I'll tell you about that. One time in Holly Springs, walking down the street, not the (inaudible) I was about to tell you that. Walking down near the courthouse, and then once on a country road; you know how they do with the cars; they sort of push you over, and they throw you out.

**Clark:** This is not sheriffs or police?

**Rubin:** No, no.

**Clark:** These are other folks.

**Rubin:** That's right. That's right. I told you I got beat up by the sheriff earlier. The incident that I started to tell you; I'm confusing two stories at once. Let me finish with the car (inaudible) story. Then I'll go back to the incident that I had confused. Also my worry was that the black community would reject me because being called a Communist was very powerful stuff, and I remember a reverend asking me if I was a Communist, one of the preachers. And I waffled. I said, "Well, it depends what you mean. What do you mean by that?" The real answer was no, I was not a Communist, but I didn't want to say that because then I felt I'd be feeding into the McCarthy-like atmosphere. So I waffled, and in the end he said, "Well, that's too bad." He said, "I was hoping you were a Communist because I never met one, and I wanted to ask you some questions." (laughter) So I learned that the black community was so alienated from the political mainstream of America that this whole McCarthy period sort of passed them by. They just didn't believe anything anybody said, so they just weren't affected by the McCarthy period. Now, I don't mean the black community all across America because there were some rather dramatic splits and problems, but I'm talking about in the rural South; it didn't seem to—

**Clark:** They didn't know who Paul Robeson was?

**Rubin:** Exactly. They didn't one way or the other. So you couldn't red-bait Paul Robeson because they never—it didn't mean anything one way or the other. Anyway, so the bottom line was I just continued working, although I was drafted. That's one of the reasons I left. We were talking before that I was back and forth. A week or two after this thing came out in the paper, I got a notice from my draft board, first that my student deferment had been taken away was one message. And that I was classified 1A, second, and the third, that I was drafted. And so I had to go to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. That's why I left because I was drafted, and I had to report to the draft board. In the end they undrafted me.

**Clark:** Why?

**Rubin:** Well, this was, it was a little bit before Vietnam. In fact this was during the Dominican Republic time. What happened was I went to Philadelphia, and I went through the whole process. I brought my little, bitty bag there, and it was kind of

funny. There was about 300 guys, and there was—first, oh, you all sat in a room, and you had to fill out a form, and there was a loyalty oath at the end of that form, at that time. So I raised my hand, and I said to everybody, “You know, if you don’t sign a loyalty oath, they won’t take you. And what they’ll do is they’ll investigate you for about six months, and then they’ll take you, but you’ll save six months,” because that’s what they did. If you didn’t sign it, they didn’t draft you, and in other words, they investigated you to see were you loyal enough to serve. So that pissed the sergeant off, whoever. I say sergeant; I don’t know, whoever it was in charge. Then the form, itself, said, “Race.” So I wrote, “Human.” And then it said, “List arrests.” And I just listed all the arrests I could remember, and it took up most of the paper. I mean, I was writing over other questions, and anyway, we went from there to another room where we went to medical specialists, the eyeball specialist, and then the rear end specialist. (laughter) They look up your rear end. And I swear I was the only person in that entire group that could speak English, could hear, and see. Everybody else, they were all Puerto Ricans. Nobody could understand a word anybody was saying, and they were all bumping into things and being blind and deaf. I was playing it straight. In fact, I got so bad; somebody came down and told the group of draftees, they said, “None of this is going to help you.” Said, “We have a guy upstairs with cerebral palsy; he can’t salute. We have somebody helping him salute to be inducted.” I was playing it straight except that each [room] that we went into, they would look at this form, and they would come to me. And inevitably the doctor or the sergeant, whoever, would come over and say—the only thing (inaudible) was that I had put “human” instead of checking white. “Why don’t you to say white?” I had just now came from Mississippi. I’m fighting against this kind of thing. I’m not going to do one thing down there and another thing up here. And they kept saying, “Well, just for identification purposes. You get killed, we should identify you; it’ll help identify you.” “If I get killed, I don’t care if you identify me or not.” (laughter) “I don’t give a shit.” Anyway because of my attitude on that point, well, in the end, everybody saw a psychiatrist. He was one of the specialists. He was considered the same as the asshole specialist; you went to see the head specialist. In other words, they just ask you some routine questions, but I didn’t take it as routine. I didn’t act crazy actually, but I did refuse to change the form. The psychiatrist, in fact, the first thing he said is, “Oh, an intellectual,” when he saw my form. I refused to change it. And he asked me some questions, and I said, “Look. I got to tell you. I’m a patriotic boy, and I don’t want to give you any trouble, so I want to tell you there is no way you can discipline me.” You want me to close this?

**Clark:** Can we close the door? Yeah.

**Rubin:** OK. Yeah, we can finish.

**Clark:** Yeah.

**Rubin:** Anyway, I’m on what I was doing when I was not in Holly Springs. So I said, “Look. I got to tell you. I’m undisciplinable. There’s nothing the Army can do to me that hasn’t been done to me over the past three or four years in the South. I

mean, I've been arrested. I've been beaten up. There's just nothing you can do to me, so if I don't want to follow an order"—the way I said it was, "It isn't that I'm a hero." I said, "I'm not, but I am an organizer, so if I don't want to follow an order, I'm going to make it that the whole platoon doesn't follow it, and you're never going to know who did it." I said, "We'll shoot the sergeant." Now, I had no idea that actually that would really be happening in Vietnam a few years later; they'd shoot second lieutenants. I said, "We'll shoot the sergeant, and you'll never know who did it. It'll be everybody." I was just making it up, really. In fact I feel guilty about having said that because later on, such things really did happen in Vietnam. Anyway, so he said, "Well, don't get on the bus. Don't go right now." And it was me and another guy who had a heart murmur, got out of it, at that time. But we had to go, then, to super-specialists. So I had to wait for three weeks. That's why I was in Philadelphia, to see yet another specialist, a psychiatrist. And I told him the same thing. And he said, "Well, we'll give you a 1Y," which was an undesirable discharge. And I said, "No. I won't take a 1Y. If you want to get rid of me, you're going to have to give me a 4F. I won't take a 1Y." For one thing, a 1Y was renewable every ninety days.

**Clark:** Right. You can be called up again.

**Rubin:** Yeah. And also I didn't think I was (inaudible). I didn't tell him that, that it was every night. I don't think I'm undesirable. But when they got rid of me, it's a 4F. So make a long story short: I got a 4F on the grounds of moral turpitude.

**Clark:** Good one.

**Rubin:** I have no idea what that means, but I was morally inturp, moral turpitude. (laughter) And I went back to Holly Springs. So that's how I got out of the Army, but I continued working, continued organizing. Anyway, let's see. I listed the things that I did. Did we cover—oh, no. I remember what I started to tell you. When (inaudible) first came to Holly Springs, I had been known in the community, as I said. And this was before the Communist business came out, but after I had delivered the books. We had done something in the countryside. We had gone on a plantation—they called them farms; we called them plantations—to do voter registration work.

**Clark:** Among sharecroppers?

**Rubin:** Among sharecroppers. I cannot remember when or where, but again, I know I wrote it down at the time, and I have it. That night when we were going up to that little rib place. You remember, around the corner from the Freedom House, sort of up a little hill on a street? I forget the name of the place.

**Clark:** Ms. Modena's?

**Rubin:** Could be. I just cannot remember. A farmer jumped out of his truck and grabbed me—this is right at the beginning of the summer—and beat the shit out of me.

And Ivanhoe was right there. He called the press all across the country, and me getting beaten up was the first news from Freedom Summer.

**Clark:** Oh, yeah?

**Rubin:** Yeah.

**Clark:** So this would be June. After you delivered the books?

**Rubin:** Right after, yeah, early June. I have the clipping here, a report of a civil rights worker getting beat up. And the farmer claimed that he didn't do it, that he hadn't beaten me up. And when the story came out the next month, they reported in the paper, which is part of this article, and they reported it as fact, that we had reported that I was beaten up, but that I wasn't. So anyway, that was the story that I confused, that didn't have anything to do with the Communist thing, but it had a lot to do with me being in the community. All of those things were about voter registration and about the Freedom Library, which my part was delivering the books. Now, I was supposed to do more, but I fell by the wayside, doing other things. There was one thing that I'm probably the most proud of in terms of what I did down there, and that is I helped organize the brickmaking factory in Marshall County. I helped unionize it. That union still exists, I am told. I am told that the brickmaking factory is rather large now, and that the union is still there. I don't know that firsthand, but somebody from the Teamsters told me that it was. And this was—well, the end of the story was October, [19]64; the beginning was that summer when somebody came into the Freedom House; now, as I'm talking, I'm looking at my report of that day. (brief interruption)

**Clark:** OK. We're on.

**Rubin:** OK. "On Tuesday, August 18"—and I'm reading now from my report of that day—"three workers at the local brick and tile factory came into the office to ask whether we could help them get vacations with pay, longer breaks, and a few other things. They receive currently \$1.25 an hour and apparently the minimum required by federal law," which I think what I meant was, that was the minimum requirement by federal law at the time. "There is no promotion for Negroes, no sick leave, and inadequate health insurance for a job, which involves working in heavy dust. The union had tried to organize the plant but was not permitted to talk with workers by management. We suggested they get in touch with Memphis unions, which could tell them the name of the appropriate union for their kind of work. We offered our complete help in their efforts, pointing out that it was Mississippi's segregation, which makes wages so low, even in these relatively high-paying positions." Then it says, "To return Thursday evening, August 20." And in the meantime we had done some work to try to find out really which union in Memphis was good for this, and we discovered the laborer's union was. We put the workers who were Joe Elliot(?), Mr. Gibson(?), and those two became the leaders of this movement. And it was Hardy Frye, Mike Lipsky(?) and Frank Tutorka(?) and myself. What we did is—now, I'm

stopping reading from the report. Now, my memory is refreshed. What we did was we got them in touch with the laborer's union in Memphis. To make a long story short, the laborer's union said that they would attempt to organize, but they were afraid to come into the State of Mississippi, so they would do it long-distance. They would explain to us and the workers what needed to be done.

**Clark:** (Inaudible) away from the mic. I know the mic's supposed to have clear space around it; that's all.

**Rubin:** OK. And they would sort of give us hints and tips from far off. The workers were very, very afraid. They were afraid of losing their jobs. They were afraid that fellow workers would fink on them, you know, would inform on them. But we, Frank Tutorka and Lipsky and Hardy Frye and myself, and really just about everybody else on the project—I mean, Charlie Cobb and Ivanhoe. I don't know if they remember it, but they were. But according to my report, those were the four sort of point people. And we worked with them. We, what we called "held their hands." That is: we did all we could to bolster their morale and their courage. At one point they went to Memphis and met, actually, with the union organizer there. Anyway, to make a long story short, they were able to sign up just about every black worker in the plant. I believe at the time the plant had a hundred employees, if I'm not mistaken. It was small. Today, I'm told that it has 3000. Anyway, there were meetings in churches. We handled the campaign as if it was voter registration. In other words we had meetings in churches, and we went to people's homes, and so forth, most of the work being done by the workers themselves, just like, really, most of the work for voter registration was done by the local people, themselves. I mean—

**Clark:** Were there white workers in the plant?

**Rubin:** Yes. Yes, there were. There were about twenty. If there were a hundred workers, there was eighty blacks and twenty whites. Those proportions are correct. None of them signed up. None of them ever came to meetings. The church that we were meeting in, which if I'm not mistaken was Reverend Cotton's church. Do you remember a Marshall County guy named Reverend Cotton?

**Clark:** Um-hm.

**Rubin:** I believe that that was his church. It got burned down.

**Clark:** St. Joseph's? What was the—when did it get burned down?

**Rubin:** Well, it had to be between August and October. August was when they first came to us. That's what I just said. And then October was the election. So it was sometime that summer. I don't remember the name of it. I believe that the reverend's name was Cotton. I might be mistaken about that, too. Again, I—

**Clark:** Did it get rebuilt?

**Rubin:** I don't know.

**Clark:** You don't know that part.

**Rubin:** No. But that's something to look into. In fact the whole history of this union is something to look into, and because—if I'm right, and it's still there, it must be in the archives of the union, itself. I mean, unions tend to keep pretty good records. Anyway, a church got burned down, but people kept signing the cards. You know how in a campaign, you sign cards in order to get an election, and you only need 30 percent to get an election. Let me put this story aside for a minute because there's another story that I want to tell you that feeds into this. You told me the date when the civil rights workers were found. You said it was August 21?

**Clark:** Oh, I don't know when they were found. I know when they disappeared.

**Rubin:** Oh. Oh.

**Clark:** They disappeared on June 21.

**Rubin:** Right.

**Clark:** I don't know when they were found.

**Rubin:** Well, before they were found and after Wayne Yancey was killed, did I tell you they wouldn't let me into the hospital with his body?

**Clark:** No. You didn't tell me anything about Wayne.

**Rubin:** OK. Things are coming back to me. I'm just going to make a note, and I'll get back to that. Anyway, after Wayne was killed and before Schwerner and Goodman and Chaney were found, a deputy sheriff came to the Freedom House in the middle of the night—and that was Henry Roach—and he banged on the door, and he said, "Rubin, get out here!" And I went. I felt the way Ron Carver(?) said he felt last night, that I was going to die. He was describing when he was in jail, and he just knew that they were going to kill him. That's how I felt. But I went out because number one, I thought, "Well, my time was up. This was it." You know, there's nothing you can do about it. And number two because we didn't want to show fear of the police in the neighborhood, and this guy was making a big racket. Anyway, I went out, and he took me in his patrol car into the woods. And I just, I knew that my time was up, and it was just—

**Clark:** But you went anyway.

**Rubin:** I went, but it's hard to describe. It's like when you're so sure that your time is up. It isn't that you're not afraid. It's just like inevitable.

**Clark:** Like, “This is what you have to do.”

**Rubin:** Yeah. Yeah. And he took me into the woods. And we didn’t say anything; he didn’t say anything. And he pulled over into like a little piney branch clump; really, it was a little clump of trees off the road. And he said, “Rubin, you and Bob have been organizing that factory.” Now, I had nothing against lying to these people. You just say whatever you need to say to the sheriff, but in this case—I don’t know—I just figured I was going to die anyway, so I said, “Yeah.”

**Clark:** He knew, anyway.

**Rubin:** Well, he knew; of course he knew. But he turned to me, and he said, “Well, my brother works there, and you keep that up.” He said, “That’s the right thing to do.” (laughter) “And you’re right.” And actually what he said was, “You stay away from those voter registration stuff, and you stick with this union organizing stuff because that’s what’s needed.” He said, “My brother works there.” I think he said he makes such and such. “And he needs more money.” And he said, “I want to assure you that all the white people are going to sign the cards, too. They’re not going to come to meetings, and they’re not going to do anything, but in the end they’re going to vote for the union.” (laughter) I said, “What? You stupid asshole! You could have killed me. I could have died of a heart attack here. Why did you go through all this? Pulled me out in the middle of the night.” And he said so that it would look like he was harassing me. He wanted to have this conversation, and the sheriff knows everything. So the sheriff knew he came over and spoke to me, but this way it looked like he was harassing me, so it was OK, and—

**Clark:** So you think he had to keep this conversation secret.

**Rubin:** Yes. Exactly. Exactly right. And that’s why he did it this way, to keep it secret. In other words, it was very public the way he did it, but it seemed like it was just part of their normal harassment of us, so it was OK. And sure enough, in the end that’s what happened. I don’t know if everybody voted for the factory—I never saw the exact results—but the vast majority did, including most of the whites.

**Clark:** Now, did the election get held while you were still there?

**Rubin:** Yes. It got held on—let’s see. I have the exact date. It was in October. There was an editorial in the local paper on October 1, saying, “Vote no.” No. I’m sorry; I take that back. I don’t have the exact date, but it had to be around October 1 because that’s when the editorial in the paper was. I’m looking at the editorial now, and it doesn’t say, “An election shall be held at such and such a time,” but it says—this is the editorial: “The employees of Holly Springs Brick and Tile will save about \$57 a year out of their paycheck by voting no in the election to be held”—oh—“today”—it does say, so it was October 1, 1964—“voting no in the election to be held today to decide whether or not to have a union. This does not

include assessment and initiation fees. The assessments can be to any amount. Initiation fees usually are from \$25 to \$50 per man” —which is actually a lie. All this is a lie. “In our opinion this would be like taking five hours out of this week’s paycheck and throwing it away, for that is about what the union will get from each employee. Outsiders cannot solve problems that can be easily worked out among friends.” (laughter) It says, “We believe the union will endanger our industrial program in growth.” It says, “The Holly Springs Brick and Tile Company employs more colored citizens”—that’s what it says—“more colored citizens than any other factory in the county. It would be a shame to see a union stifle this factory, jeopardize future expansion or a new factory that would mean more jobs for our colored citizens.” It’s, to me, amazing that there would be such an editorial in a paper. I mean, there’s union elections every day, and it never gets into the paper because it’s always considered a private matter. But just to show you how the power structure in Holly Springs was so intertwined, front page editorial of a local paper about a union election. Anyway, they voted for the union, and we had been told by just about everybody, the leaders in the black community and of course the whites, that black and white would never get together to work together, let alone to form a union. I mean, these are people who were literally killing each other over voter registration. I’m not saying these exact individuals because I don’t know, but I mean in general. But they did get together, and they got together because it was to their self-interest to work together. This was the beginning in [19]64 of SNCC changing its—I don’t know “changing;” maybe that’s too strong a word, but a beginning to emphasize work among both poor whites and poor blacks. Another example we already dealt with, which was the AS[CS]. I always get it wrong, the Agricultural Stabilization [and Conservation Service] elections. That was another example of that. There was also freedom unions being organized.

**Clark:** What were those?

**Rubin:** Could you stop that for a minute, and I’ll—the freedom union, what they were calling it—and I’m now looking through a book, *Black Protests*, which is a collection of firsthand documents, starting actually in 1619 to I think around 1968. And the editor is Joanne Grant, and it ends, the end of the documents are showing how the movement was beginning to deal with economic issues, not just what I call “cultural issues,” issues of integration. And one of the articles, in fact the last article—no, the next-to-the-last article is called “Mississippi Freedom Labor Union, 1965,” and it says, “(Inaudible), the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union report, which was published in 1965, (inaudible) sharecroppers in the Mississippi Delta organized a strike for higher wages.” I’m just reading from the book because I wasn’t involved in it: “Many Delta families were evicted from plantations for union activities and subsequently lived for many months in a tent city near Tribet, Mississippi. To press the federal government for aid, seventy persons occupied a barracks at the Greenville Air Force Base. A report of this action is hereby given.” And people from SNCC, all over Mississippi, were organizing unions among sharecroppers here, a few years later among woodcutters. There’s an article here by Charlie Cobb talking about the economic base of Ruleville. A few years later, Bob Zellner, who was a white SNCC

leader, went back to this area and helped organize woodcutters and tells the story that he had a meeting of the Woodcutters Union in Sheriff [Lawrence] Rainey's office in Neshoba County. Sheriff Rainey, to make a long story short, was in charge of killing the three civil rights workers. I think his brother was sheriff at that time, or maybe his brother worked for him, and his brother gave them permission to have the meeting in the office. My point is that SNCC in late [19]64 and early [19]65 was emphasizing organizing poor whites and poor blacks. They were taking a class position to the issue of segregation and inequality, and they were saying the real purpose of segregation, which we knew all along, but we didn't say it this way, the real purpose of segregation was not to keep the races separate; if it was, it didn't work because the races weren't separate. The real purpose of segregation was to oppress blacks, was white superiority, was white supremacy. And the reasons for that were economic, to make a very long story short. I've always felt that that change in focus of SNCC was what led to, was one of the factors anyway that led to SNCC's being dissolved. I'm not a conspiracy theorist or anything. I'm not saying the FBI or the corporations came in, but I am saying that once SNCC changed its focus—one second, I want to get rid of this dog—when SNCC changed its focus, a lot of things began to happen, and within a few years SNCC was no longer there. I think what was happening, to make a very large generalization: segregation had always served the purpose of keeping the southern economy going. In other words, the southern economy, rural southern economy always depended upon having a mass of very poorly-paid workers that would always be available to do these tasks, picking cotton and so forth. And that's why they needed segregation, just to continually create a group of people that could be oppressed and so forth, and that's why there were segregated schools because they didn't want these people to learn much, to become educated. But while we were there the situation was changing, and Aviva's father was one of the changers, bringing in factories from the North. And while we were there we could see the changes. It was becoming less agricultural and more industrial, and the factories coming in, and also the military coming in. There was a big, if I remember correctly, base being opened and defense contracts and so forth.

**Clark:** On the Coast?

**Rubin:** On the Coast, yes, yes. I can't tell you exactly because I wasn't that aware of it, but I just know in general it was happening.

**Clark:** Now, it's casinos.

**Rubin:** Now, it's casinos, yes. God bless them. Anyway, of course what happened is actually it never became as industrialized as they had thought because industry skipped over the South, basically. It started there, but then they realized that if they go a little bit further south into Mexico and also into Asia, they could get even cheaper labor. So they sort of skipped over the South. But we didn't know that at the time. And at that time (phone rings) segregation was holding the South back; they needed—(brief interruption) Are we—can I start?

**Clark:** Yeah. You're on.

**Rubin:** OK. Anyway, I think that by the time we got there it was already true that segregation no longer was serving the economy of the South, with these factories coming in, and that's what we were talking about. They needed more educated workers. They needed workers that could work together collectively better, to produce whatever products there were. And for that and for a number of other reasons, the economy no longer required this mass of—I'll use the term—oppressed people. So in that sense, what we were doing was helping the creation of the new economy; that is the freedom schools and the voter registration, getting more people involved. Everything that we were doing, actually, was helping the creation of a more industrialized, more modern economy except when we messed with the economics of it. The new economy did not want unions there and other such. And so at the end of the height of the civil rights period in the South, we were in the same position as we were at the beginning. In other words at the beginning it wasn't clear to the people in the South that they no longer needed blacks not to vote, not to be educated, and so forth. So there was a lot of violence against what we were doing, and at the end there was a lot of violence against what we were doing because although we were shifting our focus, we were once again on the cutting edge, on the radical edge you might say and very threatening. Anyway, that's my macrotheory. I wanted to just tell a few other anecdotal things, and then I'll be through. We mentioned before about Wayne Yancey being killed. He was a—

**Clark:** You know what? This is about to end. I'm going to stop this tape and put a new one on.

**Rubin:** OK.

**Clark:** All right? (end of digital file two; beginning of digital file three) OK. This is tape two of Larry Rubin, April 29, now, 2001. And we're talking about Holly Springs, and we're continuing the discussion.

**Rubin:** Shortly after the summer project started with all the volunteers there, Wayne Yancey, an African-American, young man from [Chicago]—

**Clark:** Chicago.

**Rubin:** Chicago, thank you, from Chicago was killed in what the police called an auto accident, but which we believed and had a lot of evidence for, was a killing, that the police ran him off the road on purpose.

**Clark:** Highway 78?

**Rubin:** Yes. Yes, that's the road that goes north to Memphis.

**Clark:** He was coming back from Memphis.

**Rubin:** That's right. That's exactly right. I had forgotten that detail, but that's right.

**Clark:** Well, I know because he took me to the airport. He had taken me to the airport—

**Rubin:** Oh!

**Clark:** —that day.

**Rubin:** That's right!

**Clark:** I was leaving.

**Rubin:** Oh, my God, yes.

**Clark:** I was leaving, and he and Charlie Scales took me to the airport in Memphis, and on the way back, he was in an accident.

**Rubin:** Oh, my God. You know, I had forgotten why. That's right.

**Clark:** So I know it was on the way back from Memphis.

**Rubin:** Yes. Oh, Jesus.

**Clark:** And I've heard various theories about this. So you think this was not just a regular accident?

**Rubin:** Well, of course we don't know for certain, but no. We believed—see, Wayne had gotten into the face of some of the deputies there. He was a very, as you know, aggressive person, and he had been involved in a few incidents. And he just wouldn't take any crap from anybody. And we believe that the deputies ran him off the road on purpose and killed him. It was a car accident, but either rammed his car or something. It wasn't *just* an accident. Might be wrong, but this is what we believed. You know, I had forgotten that, but you were there in Memphis. It's taken the wind out of me, remembering this.

**Clark:** Yeah.

**Rubin:** Oh! Anyway, later that day they brought Wayne—well, first of all they called. I guess the police called the Freedom House and said that Wayne's body was in a certain place. And we had a hell of a time to get anybody to go get him, but finally somebody went out to pick him up. And it was on a pickup truck, and they put his body on the back of this pickup truck. And they brought this truck right across the street from the hospital in Holly Springs, and I went over. Again, I was by myself. I

went over to see him, and he was just lying there on the back of the pickup truck. And no doctor had checked him out. No doctor had examined him.

**Clark:** Was he dead then?

**Rubin:** Well, we didn't know. There was no way of us telling. That was the whole point. And I ran into the hospital to ask a doctor to come out, and no doctor would do it because he was black, and it was a white hospital. And I went crazy. I started to scream in the hospital. And I started screaming, "Hill-Burton!" That's the federal law, the federal funding law that if you get federal funds for hospitals, you can't be segregated. But nobody listened, and I just went bullshit, but it came to nothing. And really we don't know whether he was dead or not. The truth is. But I guess without a funeral home—I can't remember exactly what happened after that. But that incident where no doctor would come out, even to examine him, to tell us was he dead or not, that was the most horrible thing that happened. I mean, after all the things that happened in the South, that incident, to me, was the most horrible. And I had forgotten that that's why he was on the road. He had taken you up there. Anyway, that's one thing that I wanted to say.

**Clark:** What about Charlie Scales?

**Rubin:** Charlie, I don't—

**Clark:** He was in the car with Wayne.

**Rubin:** Oh, yes, yes.

**Clark:** And a lot of things happened to Charlie, too, I understand.

**Rubin:** Yes. I do remember that. I don't remember any of the specifics, but I do remember in general.

**Clark:** Yeah. Somebody told me he had a nervous breakdown.

**Rubin:** Oh! Right after that?

**Clark:** Shortly after that. They were trying to blame him.

**Rubin:** Yeah. Well, I do remember that, that they were trying to blame him. I don't remember the specifics, but I'm sure it's true. Oh! Jesus! Oh!

**Clark:** So that's what you remember about Wayne.

**Rubin:** Yeah.

**Clark:** And then they had a funeral.

**Rubin:** Yeah. And the local community gave him a funeral. They honored him. In the paper, in the *South Register*, I have the article about it. Of course they just said it was an auto accident, one of these outside agitators, I think they called him.

**Clark:** I was told that it was a head-on collision on Highway 78.

**Rubin:** I think it was, but I don't think it was an accident. I think the cops did it. But I was so traumatized. If I knew the details, I have forgotten them by now. But I do remember it was a head-on, but I believe that our idea was that the cops did it. I can't tell you how exactly, now, but—

**Clark:** Ivanhoe and Cleve were both around.

**Rubin:** Yes, yes.

**Clark:** Cleve has some specific memories (inaudible).

**Rubin:** Now, did he say what I said, that it was a killing?

**Clark:** He wasn't sure.

**Rubin:** But it was a question.

**Clark:** Yeah.

**Rubin:** Yeah. If we all got together and concentrated on trying to remember this incident, I'll bet you we could piece it together between the three of us, Ivanhoe and Cleve and myself. Boy!

**Clark:** It seems to me a piece that's unresolved in a lot of people's minds.

**Rubin:** Yeah. He's listed in this book. I have it up here. There was a book—excuse me. This is a book by Doug McAdam on Freedom Summer, and the focus in a way is wrong. The focus is on the volunteers, and Doug McAdam, I guess, was a volunteer. He's a sociologist or something. To read this book, it doesn't really put the emphasis where it should be, which is on local people for really doing it all. Since then that part of history has been corrected, which is why I feel more free, also, to talk about my own role because the context has been established elsewhere. But anyway, he does deal with Wayne Yancey, and he says—I'm trying to find the—here; here it is. He's quoting somebody, oh, Evelyn Lake(?) wrote home, challenging her parent's objections to her plan to stay on in Mississippi. Then it says, talking about, oh, Pam Parker!

**Clark:** Yes.

**Rubin:** That's who it is, Pam. Yeah. So Pam Parker: These problems began the day she left the project to begin a vacation with her parents. She describes what happened, "My folks had a station wagon"—this is back North, I guess. "My folks had a station wagon, and they were all in the front seat, and I was in the back seat, lying down. We were driving up to New Hampshire, and I totally freaked out that we were going to crash. There had been one civil rights worker killed on our project in an automobile accident, Wayne Yancey, and that was intense, dealing with his death. So I always thought that my freaking-out was a reaction to the pressure and fear of being in Mississippi and having come out and things having lightened up." In other words, this was an effect of Wayne Yancey's—but they do call it an accident here. But he is not mentioned; just, he's very rarely mentioned.

**Clark:** As one of the casualties.

**Rubin:** As one of the casualties.

**Clark:** I know it. I know it because it's been considered an accident.

**Rubin:** Yes. When I always talk, I always talk about four civil rights workers being killed, four civil rights volunteers, or I don't mean volunteers, but workers, one of them Wayne Yancey. And I always explain it's a question, but I really believe it was not an accident. Wayne was very aggressive, and he played an extraordinary role for the short time he was there. And I really believe that the cops wanted him dead; wanted him out of the way. And anyway—

**Clark:** Do you know exactly where the accident occurred?

**Rubin:** I did then. I don't remember now, but I know it was on [Highway] 78.

**Clark:** It was in Mississippi?

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** Not in Tennessee.

**Rubin:** No. And it was in Marshall County.

**Clark:** It was?

**Rubin:** Yeah.

**Clark:** Well, yeah. When you come in, you go through DeSoto, and then you're in—

**Rubin:** Marshall County.

**Clark:** Um-hm.

**Rubin:** Because I was in the office when they called us, and it was the Marshall County Police or deputies.

**Clark:** So the sheriff's office would have some knowledge of it.

**Rubin:** I'm sure. I'm sure they would. And the report in the paper, in the *South Reporter*, describes what happened and where. But aside from looking at more details in the brickmaking factory, organizing, this is another huge hole in the history. And I'll bet you there's somebody around that remembers the whole thing, and maybe Scales is still alive. I don't know. He would.

**Clark:** Yeah. I don't know where he is.

**Rubin:** But if we could find him—

**Clark:** Yeah. I don't think he's around anymore. Whether he's living or not, I don't know, but I get the impression he's not in the area.

**Rubin:** Oh, oh. Well, anybody can be found.

**Clark:** Well, and I was told that after that accident, he was never the same.

**Rubin:** Oh. Well, I'm sure that's true, but it's been so many years later.

**Clark:** Yeah.

**Rubin:** Anyway, that's one thing I wanted to say.

**Clark:** It's another branch.

**Rubin:** Another branch.

**Clark:** To pursue

**Rubin:** Yes. And I wanted to tell three other stories very quickly.

**Clark:** No hurry.

**Rubin:** One is about integrating the Presbyterian Church. We didn't deal with public accommodation integration in Mississippi. I had been involved in that a lot in Albany, Georgia earlier, but primarily because of the focus on the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, we were determined to just do voter registration. As a matter of fact, I'll never forget this. When Ivanhoe first came, the first day I met him, Ivanhoe said, "We are going to register to vote." And he gave a number such-and-so-many thousand. He knew how many blacks were eligible but not registered or

approximately. He said, “We are going to do that.” And he said, “We are going to work four hours a day, seven days a week.” And he said, “I’m not going to take any vacation. I’m not going to go away from (inaudible). I’ll take a vacation after it’s over.” That was a very unusual approach in SNCC. Most of the SNCC leaders—in fact all of them would never have said things like that because they were much more spiritual and much more, in a way open, in a way ephemeral about the goals. They wouldn’t say, “We’re going to register such-and-so-many.” Bob Moses would never have said it. He would have said, “We’re going to improve the relations here, and we’re going to deal with the fear and overcome the barriers.” Words like that. Not Ivanhoe, he was a New York kid, and he had this goal, and he wasn’t spiritual, and God had nothing to do with it. “This is the job!” Boom! And that made him very unusual and very effective. I don’t know whether we met the goal or not, but I’ll bet you we came close to it. And if we didn’t meet it, it wasn’t Ivanhoe’s fault because he worked us, like a job. And we were, really, the only project that took that approach, and it was because of Ivanhoe.

**Clark:** Also he wouldn’t let any women do it.

**Rubin:** Oh, that’s right. That’s right. Now, I think in his mind was, he was just for effectiveness. He just didn’t want to deal with certain issues.

**Clark:** Right. He felt women’s presence in any of this would be way too provocative.

**Rubin:** Yeah.

**Clark:** And I remember that we were not allowed, white women—I think even black women. Women were not allowed to go to the courthouse with people to register them to vote.

**Rubin:** That’s right.

**Clark:** Because I remember one time we drove by in a car while you guys were bringing people in and took pictures.

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** You know?

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** We were not supposed to be there. We were not supposed to be there. We knew we were breaking the rules. (laughter)

**Rubin:** I remember. I remember that. I remember that. Yeah. (laughter) But I think in Ivanhoe’s case it wasn’t male chauvinism.

**Clark:** Oh, no. I never took it that way.

**Rubin:** He just decided, “I’m going to deal with this issue and not that issue.”

**Clark:** Right. And if women are present, it changes the dynamic.

**Rubin:** That’s right. That’s right. Others took a different approach that, “Well, we’ll deal with the issue of women, and we’ll overcome the provocative nature.” Of course you don’t register as many voters.

**Clark:** Also I think you had more violence the other way.

**Rubin:** Well, yes. That’s right.

**Clark:** I think this also kept the violence down.

**Rubin:** I think that’s very true.

**Clark:** He had modest goals, but they were very specific and very focused in how you were going to reach them and who was going to reach them.

**Rubin:** That’s right. That’s right.

**Clark:** And it was clear, and you kind of knew your place and your role.

**Rubin:** Yes. That’s right. It was a job.

**Clark:** Yeah.

**Rubin:** And exactly. There was one, you might call it, exception to all this. Again, like most things I don’t know how it originated. I don’t know how it came about, but somehow Ivanhoe got involved in integrating the Presbyterian Church. Ivanhoe was a Presbyterian. I don’t know exactly why. Maybe Ivanhoe does. Well, I’m learning that (laughter) a lot of people don’t remember, but he and I went to the Presbyterian Church and were turned around. They wouldn’t let us in. I remember walking up the steps. It was a big church, relatively big church.

**Clark:** It is, big, brick church.

**Rubin:** And there’s white steps. I just remembered that. And we went up, and they turned us around. But then, and again, I don’t know exactly how this happened, but I do remember it happening. There was a debate among the Presbytery of the church as to whether or not to let us in, and we were getting reports from these meetings, the deacons—they called them the Presbytery. The National Presbyterian Church had voted to integrate, and it was a question of whether the local would follow the

national. I guess there was no sanction if you didn't. Anyway, first we got the report they wouldn't let us come in. And then we got a report that they would let Ivanhoe go in, but not me because I was a Jewish Communist. Then we got the report that they decided they would let me in because I needed church the most. (laughter) And we went. And they sat us not in the back of the church. I thought they were; that that's where they would sit us, in the back of the church to insult us. But they didn't. They sat us right up front of the church, so they could keep their eye on us, which was much more frightening. (laughter)

**Clark:** Everybody could see you.

**Rubin:** Everybody could see us. And there was no incident. Nothing happened; they let us in. But I had a decision to make when everybody in the church, one by one, got up and went in front of the church to receive a blessing or maybe it was communion, and I had to decide whether or not to do it. And I was really torn. I mean, during the time that this was clear, that this was going to happen, I went through great mental anguish. Should I go up? Would I insult them more if I didn't go up, or if I did? And I decided not to because I wasn't Presbyterian. And that was my thought, "I just, I can't do it." And so I didn't go up, and everybody else in the church did. And later on I found out, again, from these reports from the Presbytery, that that was the right—that people admired that. And we got invited back. We never went back, but people said that when I didn't go up, they realized that I was sincere, that I was there for sincere reasons and not to pretend that I was something that I wasn't. So I was proud of myself for making that decision. The third anecdote has to do with I was arrested with Ivanhoe Donaldson. I can't remember now the circumstances of our arrest. But they brought us into the office with Flick Ash and his deputies in Holly Springs. And this is when I really came to admire Ivanhoe. I mean, I admired him before, but when I really realized his courage and his ability to maintain his own sense of dignity under very violent situations, his courage. They sat us down side by side in chairs with the deputies and Flick Ash ringing the room. And Flick was yelling at us, and he raised his hand like he was about to hit us, and his billy club. And Ivanhoe jumped down on the floor with one knee on the floor and one leg bent. He was kneeling, and he pointed his finger in Flick's face, and he said, "If you hit me, I'll sue you for a million dollars. I'll sue you for every penny you're worth." Something like that. He said, "You'll have to sell your wife." That's exactly. Well, for a black person to mention the wife of a white person and a sheriff at that, and in that way, "You're going to have to sell your wife," I said to Ivanhoe; I was sitting there next to him. I said, "We're going to die now, Ivanhoe." (laughter) "This is the end." (laughter) "Shut up. They're going to kill us now." But actually nothing happened. Flick stopped. The way I remember it, he stopped his swing in midswing and never did hit Ivanhoe; I guess he was so shocked. I mean, the way I remember the look on his face is total shock. And they just sent us back to our cell. Nothing happened. But I was always—well, sometimes I was like a wise guy. I would just talk wild, but never insult the sheriffs. But mostly I was just very quiet and scared and just did what I could to protect my sanity. But not Ivanhoe. He just got up there, right in their face, I

mean, and there was no way of defending ourselves. We were surrounded. But he just was like that.

**Clark:** But that was a defense.

**Rubin:** Yeah. As it turned out, it was a defense. Yes. That's right. That's right. But I don't think he did it as a defense. I think he just did it because that's the way he is. I don't think he thought it out.

**Clark:** Well, I think, also, he knew that you can only—it takes two to participate in oppression.

**Rubin:** Well, that's right. A good way of saying it, yes. That's right.

**Clark:** It takes two to participate, and because he was black, and you were not, it was important that he did that; had a very different dynamic to it, him doing it, than if you had done it.

**Rubin:** Absolutely. Absolutely right. And that's right. And he just would not participate in oppression.

**Clark:** Yeah. He would not participate in his own oppression.

**Rubin:** Exactly.

**Clark:** Right. And that was the most important thing that anybody could do—

**Rubin:** That's right.

**Clark:** —was to not participate, and once you did that, it really did rattle them.

**Rubin:** That's true. Now, Bob Moses was famous for that, but his approach was never like Ivanhoe's. His approach was to be very calm and talk very slowly, like this, "Why did you say that? I don't hate you. Why are you expressing hate to me?" That's how Bob Moses would do it. Ivanhoe did not participate in his own oppression in a more New-York way, although Bob Moses was from New York, too. I was really in awe of Ivanhoe after that. And I told this to Ivanhoe, and last time I mentioned it, he doesn't remember this. He doesn't even remember taking—

**Clark:** It was probably such a moment of passion. It's just like why doesn't John Kerry remember what he did in Vietnam. (laughter)

**Rubin:** It could be, or it might be that just, Ivanhoe did this all the time, and he can't distinguish one incident from the other.

**Clark:** Right. He's told me that, actually. He's told me that it's hard for him to distinguish what he did in a certain place versus what he did somewhere else because—

**Rubin:** Yeah.

**Clark:** Yeah.

**Rubin:** Yeah. I can see that. I can very well see that. Maybe if we really talk to him, he'll remember, but last time I mentioned it, he did not even remember. Anyway, that's—

**Clark:** I wonder if Flick remembers it.

**Rubin:** That's a good point. Somebody should say this to him.

**Clark:** Oh, I'm going to ask him about the incident.

**Rubin:** Yes. "You're going to have to sell your wife." That was the main thing. (laughter) "I'm going to sue you, and you're going to have to sell your wife." (laughter) Oh! That's interesting, whether he does. I'll bet you he would. (laughter)

**Clark:** He might remember it, yeah.

**Rubin:** The other—

**Clark:** Tell me this, though, about Flick. Were you ever beaten by him? Do you know anybody who was actually beaten by him?

**Rubin:** Him, himself?

**Clark:** Yeah.

**Rubin:** That's an interesting question. No. His deputies, yes.

**Clark:** His deputies.

**Rubin:** But no. I never thought about that before. Of course it sort of mashes together, but no, actually I don't, and I don't know of anybody that was. You're right. I think when I've told the stories over the years, I've said, "the sheriff." I've said Flick had beaten me, but actually I don't think so. I think it's a trick of memory that you just mash all these guys together, but when push comes to shove, no. I do not think he did. So I think I have badmouthed him unnecessarily (laughter) in other situations.

**Clark:** Well, he did arrest you.

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** And he was the cause of your arrest.

**Rubin:** Yes. And I'm sure he condoned us being beaten by the deputies. That's absolutely true. And to us it made little difference who (laughter) it was at the time. We weren't really checking out nameplates. Anyway, speaking of Ivanhoe, shortly after the incident with the books, I think it was before the Communist business, but when we were arrested in Oxford, Mississippi, for carrying these books, we were arrested on suspicion of carrying literature to overthrow the State of Mississippi, it was the front page of the Oxford paper, and they put our pictures in, actually two pictures: one of us lined up in front of a truck with Sheriff Blanton(?), I think his name was, a little, short fellow. And so they had all six of us lined up there with him, in front of the truck, the U-Haul. And then it showed him opening a box of books as if it was contraband. Anyway, as a result of that, a group in Ole Miss [University of Mississippi] in Oxford, [Mississippi]—that's Ole Miss, right?

**Clark:** Um-hm.

**Rubin:** Invited a group of us to speak at a class, and I got the word from this sheriff that if I ever set foot in Oxford again, that they would kill me. Now, this happens all the time. "If you come here again, we're going to kill you." And I had gotten those threats before, and I always ignored them. I don't know what it was, but this time I was really frightened. I just couldn't do it. I mean, my stomach let loose, and my legs were shaking, and I was scared. Ivanhoe started to yell at me, "You have to go." And I was more afraid of Ivanhoe than the sheriff, but in the end I didn't go. I—

**Clark:** Did somebody go?

**Rubin:** Yes. Yes. It's funny. A lot of people sort of congratulated me for standing up to Ivanhoe, that that was brave to do. (laughter) But I've always felt, I mean, I was a coward in that situation. There's just no other way of saying it. I didn't go. I did give them my car, and a group of our students, of the volunteers, did go down, and they gave the talk, and in fact they were stopped by the police, and the police did ask for me, and I wasn't in the car. But I gave them my owner card; it was in the car, and they saw that I had owned the car. And that made the papers, and it talked about—I have the article here somewhere. I might be wrong, but I think the headline said, "Invaders Address Ole Miss Class." And it said that I was the owner of the car. So maybe I did save my life; I don't know. They were after me. But even so, I was a coward, and it's just a fact. And so—

**Clark:** Maybe it was a good decision on your part.

**Rubin:** I guess. I mean, I don't know, but I've always felt ashamed of it, and I still do, but that's just the fact. I think that's it. Yeah. That's the end of my activism.

**Clark:** When did you leave Holly Springs?

**Rubin:** Well, it must have been early [19]65 because the election was in October. I was in Philadelphia for that draft business. Then I came back. It must have been early [19]65. I don't remember exactly.

**Clark:** Where did you go?

**Rubin:** Back to school, back to Antioch, Antioch College. In fact, a short time later—the reason I figure it's the end of [19]65—again if I look at my papers, I can tell you exactly—is about six months later, it was time for a co-op job. Antioch was work-study. And I was looking around. I said to people, "I want a job where I'm not doing any harm to the world, but where they're not going to shoot at me. I want a nice, safe job. It doesn't have to be much, but at a desk somewhere." So I went to work for the National Student Association here in Washington. A short time later, (laughter) it was revealed that the National Student Association was a CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] organization, and I helped reveal that. I got involved (laughter) in that, and it ended up, I had to hide out for three months. I got involved with Drew Pearson who helped break the story. I had to go underground (laughter) for—

**Clark:** Really?

**Rubin:** Yeah. (laughter) So I went from this situation in the South where at least you knew who the enemy was and who was shooting at you, to this situation here in Washington, which was just as frightening, was even more frightening because it was invisible; you didn't know what was happening. So that was—

**Clark:** How did you feel leaving Holly Springs? Cleve has talked a little bit about this kind of like a post-traumatic stress—

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** —that hit people after they left.

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** What did you go through upon your departure?

**Rubin:** Well, it was just like that. And I realized that when I was driving, for example, I always drove very slow, and I always looked in the rearview mirror because that's how you had to drive in the South. And when I walked down the street—and I say when I walked, and I didn't know that I was doing it until I had to consciously tell myself I wasn't in the South. When I walked down the street, I would always walk along the walls of the street instead of out in the center of the sidewalk, something that we always did in the South as a means of protection. And whenever I

was stopped for a policeman for anything—in Washington here, you literally, at that time, got stopped for jaywalking. It was a whole thing they stopped (inaudible). But I would freak out. And also I had dreams. In fact I still every now and again have them, but not as often. I had two dreams. One was that I was still in jail, and I was always in Terrell County, Georgia, and that everything about my life was a dream. In other words, I woke up, and I was still in jail. And then going back to school and everything, that was the dream. And the other was that I had killed somebody, that I had killed a white Klansman or a racist of some sort and gotten away with it, and that there was a sheriff down there, who all these years knew that I had killed this person, and was after me and every now and again would bring me to court. And I would always beat it. I have no idea what the meaning of that is. I mean, I have an idea what the meaning of the first dream is, that I was still in jail. But the second, I don't know. But every now and again, I still have that dream.

**Clark:** Really?

**Rubin:** Yeah, that I had been in jail, caught by the sheriff. Part of the dream is I bury this guy. And then he had to let me go. I mean, the details vary, but anyway that's—

**Clark:** Well, it sounds like you realize that you dealt a blow to white racism, and you felt somebody was going to retaliate.

**Rubin:** Maybe, maybe.

**Clark:** That there could still be a retaliation for what you did.

**Rubin:** It could be. And when I was a kid, and I was born in 1942, and I always dreamt that I was in a concentration camp, which is a common dream among Jewish kids my age; I mean, at that time. But I would always end up killing Nazis. I mean, it would always be mixed up with John Wayne movies about World War II. This is very common, but after the South I didn't have that dream anymore. I had these dreams about the South.

**Clark:** Now, you said you left when, in [19]65?

**Rubin:** I can't remember precisely but—

**Clark:** Winter?

**Rubin:** Winter, early [19]65.

**Clark:** You went to Antioch.

**Rubin:** Yeah.

**Clark:** But then you were in what? DC for the summer?

**Rubin:** No. I must have been at Antioch for six months, and then DC, it was [19]67. I was in DC [19]67.

**Clark:** That National Student stuff?

**Rubin:** Yeah.

**Clark:** Was in [19]67?

**Rubin:** Sixty-seven, yeah.

**Clark:** Oh, OK. So you stayed in school for a while.

**Rubin:** Yeah.

**Clark:** Did you graduate then?

**Rubin:** Well, (laughter) actually I didn't graduate until 1998. I kept dropping out to work for the movement and then work for NSA and other things. Every time when I came back I got (inaudible) credit for what I had done, but in the end, I was—in [19]70, after the NSA stuff, I also went back to [Antioch]. I went from Washington back to Antioch after the CIA business. And I became the editor of the paper there. I remember Martin Luther King was killed while I was editor of the paper, and I had to write that up in [19]68. But of the business with the CIA in Washington, I got very interested in news coverage, and in news. And in fact one of the persons that helped break the story of the CIA in Washington was the *Dayton Daily News* correspondent in Washington. When I went back to Antioch and I became editor of the paper, he was back in Dayton, and he hired me as a reporter, as a cub reporter. So in 1970 I left Antioch, and I became a newspaper reporter in Dayton. And then I went to work for the UE [United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America] as an organizer, and that's what I was telling you before. I was in, first assigned to Indiana, which was close by where I was. (phone rings) Excuse me. And I went to work for the UE, after the *Dayton Daily News*, I went to work for the UE for nine years altogether, and I never finished. I had only four credits to go to get a BA in History, and a few years ago I just decided to finish it, and there was a thesis. The thesis was on *The Reasons for Emigration of Eastern European Jews at the Turn of the Century*. And I did a lot of—it took me two years from the time I decided to finish, and then I graduated, just for my own satisfaction. It didn't affect me.

**Clark:** Did you, when you left Holly Springs and went to Antioch, did you continue to do work on behalf of SNCC?

**Rubin:** Yes. Yes. We didn't have a formal Friend of SNCC group, but particularly being in Yellow Springs, Ohio, which was very supportive of the civil rights movement, I did a lot of work with SNCC. SNCC used our facilities at Antioch for a

number of fundraisers. I helped organize Freedom Singer Concerts in Yellow Springs. There was a couple of other people in Yellow Springs at the time who had worked in Mississippi, and we continued our support quite a bit. Now, I'm jumping back and forth here, but in the end of [19]65—was this before? Yes. Before the National Student Association and before I had made the decision of getting this safe job, I took Stokely Carmichael's admonition, that whites should organize whites, and blacks should organize blacks, seriously. And I went to work for Anne and Carl Braden in Kentucky for SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference]. And I worked for them for about six months as an organizer in Appalachia. My main job was to scout around the communities and to see which communities would lend itself best to what became the GROW [Grass Roots Organizing Work] Project. This was at the beginning of GROW, which Bob Zellner led. I forget; GROW was Grass Roots Organizing [Work]. Anyway, I was organizing among poor blacks.

**Clark:** What was that like?

**Rubin:** Well, I didn't run into any violence, but it was tough. I was once again by myself. It was just like in Holly Springs at first, with very little direction, and just sort of general: pick out where projects should start. And I just got to know people in the community. I didn't really do anything in terms of—

**Clark:** Who did you live with?

**Rubin:** I think I stayed—well, part of the time I lived with the Bradens in Louisville, but I think I just stayed in motels and so forth. I don't remember living with families. It wasn't that developed yet. In fact my only accomplishment was I did this long report on Pike County, and I said, "This is a great county. It'd be a piece of cake to bring GROW here, to start in this county because it had a very well organized AVs, Appalachia Volunteers and other groups." And sure enough they started a project in Pike County. It was led by the McSurelys, Al and Margaret McSurely. Remember this?

**Clark:** No.

**Rubin:** Well, it ended up, their office was burned out, and their files were stolen by the FBI, and fifteen years later they win a court case, based upon their being harassed. They got quite a bit of money from the federal government. But was I wrong when I said that Pike County was a piece of cake. But it was after that that I made the decision, as I said, not to put myself in danger for a while. And then I jumped right back into danger. So I said before that I went back to Antioch, but there was this hiatus. So let me refigure the times. If I left at the end of [19]65, I went to eastern Kentucky, then, not right back to Antioch, and that was six months, so that brings us to the middle of [19]65. I must have gone back to Antioch in, say, the spring of [19]66. Is that right? No. Spring? Winter of [19]65, Kentucky six months, so that brings us to the spring of [19]65. I must've gone back to Antioch like the spring of [19]65, spring or summer, [19]65.

**Clark:** So you left. You had a couple of different times when you left Holly Springs. One time you said the end of [19]65, and then you said the beginning of [19]65.

**Rubin:** Oh.

**Clark:** So I'm not sure when you actually—

**Rubin:** It must have been the beginning. I think I did say the end, yesterday, and I wasn't thinking.

**Clark:** I think it was the beginning of [19]65.

**Rubin:** I think it was the beginning of [19]65.

**Clark:** Yeah because you were not there during [19]65, in Holly Springs.

**Rubin:** No. I think, in my own mind I had confused Kentucky; this is how the memory works. I knew I was still organizing.

**Clark:** Yeah. Right. OK. That makes more sense.

**Rubin:** Yeah. That was at the beginning of [1965]. I was wrong (inaudible).

**Clark:** And when you left Holly Springs, you weren't still living at Rust College at that point. Were you living in the Freedom House?

**Rubin:** Yes, yes.

**Clark:** Yeah. Once the Freedom House got set up, that's where you lived.

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** Did you ever live with any families?

**Rubin:** No.

**Clark:** In Holly Springs?

**Rubin:** No. I didn't. (end of digital file two; beginning of digital file three)

**Clark:** Side two of Larry Rubin, second tape, April 29, 2001.

**Rubin:** Yeah. You were right. When I was talking before I said a few things incorrect. It was the beginning of [19]65 I left, but I was still an organizer. That's why it was mashed in my mind. I didn't go back to Antioch until after Kentucky, and

I stayed at Antioch for six months. This brings us to the middle of [19]66, and the end of [19]66, and the blowup at NSA was in [19]67. That's correct. Now, I know that that's right, and as I said while the tape was off, in my own mind, I knew I was still organizing; I just forgot where (laughter) in [19]65. But to me that was my reaction to what is called, "the whites getting kicked out of SNCC." At the time I didn't feel we were getting kicked out. At the time I felt a strategic decision had been made to have whites organize whites and blacks organize blacks, and in my mind the distinction between SCLC and SNCC was very vague and really not there because Anne and Carl Braden worked very closely with SNCC at that time. There were some troubles earlier, but not then. But yeah, now, I have it together. (laughter)

**Clark:** Yes. Talking it through sometimes helps bring it into focus for where it was. You know, when you said you had targets of how many people you wanted to register to vote in Holly Springs?

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** Let's just go back to that a minute. Did people actually get registered before the Voting Rights Act?

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** They did?

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** They were accepted.

**Rubin:** Yes, in Holly Springs they were, yes.

**Clark:** They were?

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** Yeah. Do you know like in what kind of range of numbers?

**Rubin:** I don't.

**Clark:** (Inaudible) in the twenties, in the thirties, or in the hundreds?

**Rubin:** I don't know. I'm not even sure that I knew then.

**Clark:** No. I don't think any of us knew this. We knew what we did to get them there.

**Rubin:** Yes.

**Clark:** Right, how successful we were before the Voting Rights Act, I don't know. Were you there when any depositions were taken for the federal registrars to come in?

**Rubin:** Yes. And I helped take a couple. And I had done this in Georgia. In fact, I have some of those depositions on tape, in Georgia, so I was familiar with it. But yes, in other words, I heard the stories of people, what happened to them. Maybe Ivanhoe knows the numbers. I don't know.

**Clark:** Yeah. I don't know that anybody knows the numbers, actually, before the Voting Rights Act was passed because they could still just—they were still giving you the test and still denying you. You had a poll tax to pay.

**Rubin:** Exactly.

**Clark:** All of that until the Voting Rights Act.

**Rubin:** That's right.

**Clark:** In [19]65.

**Rubin:** But it was—and in Holly Springs this happened, too. They didn't always follow it strictly. As I said earlier, when I first came they did, and they still had the tests that I described. But later on they sort of let it go.

**Clark:** They let the test go?

**Rubin:** Yeah, sometimes, anyway.

**Clark:** Yeah.

**Rubin:** Yeah.

**Clark:** OK. Is there anything, final words?

**Rubin:** No. I think I am finally talked out. But I just want to thank you. This not only helped me clarify what I did, when, which is a constant process and which we are always forgetting. But it's been a marvelous catharsis. I've never spoken about Holly Springs at this length except by phone to [USM, University of Southern Mississippi, Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, Volume 624, *An Oral History with Mr. Larry Rubin*, conducted by John Rachal on November 11, 1995] before. But that focus was on the adult—

**Clark:** USM.

**Rubin:** USM, oh, I'm sorry. That focus was on adult literacy projects. I didn't cover the whole range of things.

**Clark:** OK. Thank you.

**Rubin:** Thank you.

(end of interview)