

Emily Gardner
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HNRS 300: Oral Histories of the Civil Rights Movement
Professor Julian Bond

Jeffrey Schwartz became active in the Civil Rights Movement as a teenager in protests in and around his community in Columbus, Ohio. After being inspired by the March on Washington, Mr. Schwartz volunteered with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in Hammond, Louisiana during the summer of 1964. During his time in Louisiana, he worked to help African Americans gain voting rights and trained people to take the literacy tests which were at that time mandatory in order to be able to vote. After his experience as a CORE volunteer that summer, he led a campaign on his college campus to raise awareness about voting rights issues, particularly about the Voting Rights Act. While working for the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Mr. Schwartz continued his activist work by organizing against the Vietnam War after its expansion into Cambodia. Over his career he has also fought for social change by helping to pass legislation concerning environmental and vaccination legislation. He is now the president and founder of the Social Venture Capital Foundation, an organization that gives startup funding and mentoring to new nonprofit organizations (The Social Venture Capital Foundation, Inc.).

The following is a collection of excerpts from the interview that took place on October 22, 2006 at 11:00 AM.

Emily Gardner (EG): Where were you born and where did you grow up?

Jeffrey Schwartz (JS): I was born in Columbus, Ohio and I grew up in Columbus, Ohio. I went to Ohio State...until my early twenties.

EG: When did you first become aware of racism?

JS: Oh I think pretty early on. Our family was very politically aware, so ever since I remember... I was born in 1943, and I remember hearing in 1955 my parents being upset about Emmett Till's lynching.¹ Race was a topic that got discussed in our house fairly early, and I wasn't very old before the issues of race [were discussed]... Another thing- big thing- was that we were a big baseball family... When Jackie Robinson broke into the major league [it] was a big deal in the late forties.² I was really young, but I remember conversations about how great it was, what Jackie Robinson accomplished, and so on. Very early on, that was part of my awareness. And in 1956, his last season, I actually got a chance to see Jackie Robinson when the Brooklyn Dodgers came to Cincinnati to play the Reds.

EG: Were any of your family members active in the Civil Rights Movement?

JS: My brother was. I have an older brother...Niki, who...helped get me involved in some early picketing in Columbus. There was a roller rink that was basically segregated in what was a neighborhood comprised of low- and moderate-income whites and African-Americans. The owners of the roller rink segregated admissions so there were certain days that were reserved for African-American roller skaters and other days that were for whites. They wouldn't allow open admissions. So, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) Columbus Chapter started picketing the roller rink – urging everyone not to patronize the place until they changed this segregation policy.. My brother said he was going to join the picketing so I wanted to go, too. Early on, he was one of my chief influences.

EG: What was your experience in education before going to Ohio State? Did you have any experiences there that inspired you?

¹ White men brutally murdered Emmett Till for allegedly whistling at a white woman. In the same year, a crowd of people witnessed a white man murdering an African American man named Lamar Smith in broad daylight. Law enforcement never brought the perpetrators to justice in either case (Eagles 70).

² Jackie Robinson joined the Dodgers in 1947 (Eagles 9).

JS: Yeah, I had a junior high school teacher who taught social studies -- I remember this very vividly -- in the seventh grade at Bexley Junior High School. His name was David Martin. One day, he told us about having been on a trip to in the Deep South (Alabama, I think). This would have been 1955 or 1956. Anyway, he said that he was waiting for a bus, finally the bus pulled up, and an African American person who had been waiting in line to get on this bus stepped up onto this bus, and then a white lady came up after the bus had arrived and started to get on after this African American young person. The bus driver told the African American young person that he had to go back and get off the bus and let the white lady on first even though he had been waiting in line, and the white lady wasn't even there when the bus arrived. The African American young man started asking questions about why, and according to Mr. Martin, the bus driver got up, hit the kid and threw him down the stairs of bus... I heard that story in the seventh grade and I said to myself, "Oh that's not right, that's just awful." Television came in about the time I was 9 or 10, and I would watch stuff on television about things that were going on like *Brown v. Board of Education*³ and the trouble in Little Rock when they started to integrate Central High School.⁴ So there were a lot of things I saw and heard even as a pre-teen that told me that there was something really wrong in the country... Of course in school I learned a little about slavery. not a whole lot, but a little bit, and the original constitutional arrangements that...basically allowed slavery to be maintained. So...that's part of my educational background.

EG: Do you feel like religion played any role in your decision to join the Movement?

³ *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided in 1954 and many people refer to it as a major victory for the Civil Rights Movement. While several of the border states saw immediate effects of the decision, the schools in the Deep South struggled through 1970 for significant changes to occur. Despite southern resistance, *Brown v. Board of Education* contributed moral support to activists in the Civil Rights Movement (Eagles 122-123).

⁴ Because of lack of state support of the *Brown v. Board of Education*, public school integration attempts often erupted in violence. President Eisenhower even commented that the appointment of Earl Warren had been a mistake and that the *Brown* decision was a foolish decision. Sources like the 1956 Southern Manifesto also indicated that any attempt at desegregation in the South would be resisted at the federal level as well as the state level (Eagles 15-16).

JS: Not very much. Our family was not formally religious. I'm Jewish by birth, and I think that some of the values of Judaism affected my views more than any formal religious teachings. I think most Jewish religious principles are most consistent with brotherhood and...valuing and respecting the "other." The historical experience of Jews as an oppressed people made me sympathetic to the plight of any oppressed people (including African-Americans). ... The Holocaust...wasn't talked about very much in my family, but I had some awareness of it growing up, and the idea that Hitler based his extermination of Jews and others on these bogus racial theories made me sensitive to racial supremacy arguments and movements.. My uncle Fred fought in World War II, so it had a kind of personal element for me. My activism wasn't really so much religiously motivated as motivated by spirit of some of the broader moral values and the ethical concepts inherent in the religious framework of Judaism.

Mr. Schwartz spoke briefly on how his love of folk music influenced him to become involved in the Civil Rights Movement as well.

JS: Folk music was another important influence. When I was about 10 years old, my dad took me to a Pete Seeger concert at Ohio Wesleyan University. That concert kindled a lifelong love of folk music, and that music was another significant influence. [See later discussion of Newport Folk Festival, Summer 1963.]

EG: Now are there any other experiences in your childhood that you feel influenced you? Do you want to describe to me about the racial climate and about where you grew up?

JS: Columbus, Ohio was a pretty residentially segregated place. I told you about this one roller rink – Roller Land -- that was sort of wacky. but as late as the forties the movie theaters in Columbus were still racially segregated segregated. Even the Columbus, Ohio you might think of it as a northern town [is] heavily southern-influenced by the Appalachian climate of southern

Ohio. Columbus is right in the center of the state. And there's a joke in Columbus that when they taught "The Three R's" in West Virginia it was "reading, writing, and the road to Columbus." There was a heavy sense that Columbus culture was influenced by this sort of southern tinge, and in fact for a long time the city had a big and active Ku Klux Klan. Also, the city had a large Germanic population. I think that was not necessarily conducive to sort of racial understanding. My dad worked at the Columbus Jewish Center (the Columbus Jewish Center was a recreational, educational and social gathering place for the Jewish community. In the 1950s, it had a policy that excluded African Americans from becoming members. White Christians could belong, but not African Americans. So the restrictive policy was racial, not religious. My dad was very friendly with a lot of the African American guys who worked at the center, and they liked him a lot, but they tended to be in maintenance jobs or bus driver jobs or other not non-professional jobs. When I asked my dad about why black people could work at the Center, but not be members, he said [it is] because people would be upset about the swimming. The Jewish Center had an indoor pool and an outdoor pool, and the idea that young black and white boys and girls would be swimming together was shocking to large parts of the Jewish community in Columbus in the 1950s. That was astonishing and terrible, I thought. My brother, who was five years older than me, got invited to a White House Conference on Children and Youth in Washington, DC. While there, he gave a speech about how there ought to be equal opportunity for young people everywhere. Niki listed the center, Columbus Jewish Center, as an example where there wasn't equal opportunity for all young people and when the story got reported in the local papers, and it caused a lot of "fuss." Let's put it that way. Those were some of the things in my growing up that contributed to my awareness about race and race issues.

Congress of Racial Equality- Hammond, Louisiana

A small group of white and African American young people founded the Congress of Racial Equality in 1942. CORE's work early on focused on desegregating restaurants and other public facilities in northern cities (De Jong 176). In August of 1962, the Voter Education Project gave a grant to CORE, giving CORE an incentive to include voting rights work in its activities in the South. In rural Louisiana the organization had three main strategies, including training local Louisianans in nonviolence, desegregating of all public facilities, and increasing black voter registration (De Jong, 175). CORE ran into a lot of resistance from the Ku Klux Klan and other opponents of the Civil Rights Movement during its work in the 1960s. Frequently police ignored CORE workers that reported incidents like burning crosses, violence, harassment, and general intimidation (De Jong 191).

Mr. Schwartz volunteered with CORE in Louisiana for its Freedom Summer in 1964. He spoke with me about his experiences working on voting rights in a town called Hammond.

EG: How did you become involved with CORE in Louisiana?

JS: In August 1963, I went (with my brother, Niki) to the March on Washington. It was very moving. I had spent the early part of that summer in Massachusetts where I had odd jobs and was doing various things... I went to the 1963 Newport Folk Festival and the Freedom Singers⁵ were there, and Joan Baez and Bob Dylan, Odetta, and Pete Seeger and others... Having gone to this concert where they were talking about what was going on in the South in 1963, I felt deeply affected. "What good is it to listen to the music or sing about freedom, but not do anything?" I asked myself. Later that summer I went to the March on Washington, and there was one period in Dr. King's great "I Have a Dream Speech" where he said, "It's great that we've all come to Washington and spoken out for freedom, equality and jobs, but now it's time...to go back to

Louisiana, go back to Mississippi, go back to Georgia, Alabama, and so on...and keep the work going. Keep on going.” I thought, “Well there’s not much to do in Columbus,” which was wrong- there was. But...I just didn’t know it at the time. But I said to myself, “It seems like I ought to doing something in the South.” I had learned that summer that CORE was going to be having a Freedom Summer the next summer (CORE and the other groups). When I got back to Columbus, I talked to my mom about wanting to go. I was 20 years old, and CORE had a rule- you had to be 21 or you had to get your mother’s or parent’s permission. My mom said no, that it was too dangerous to go. I said, “Look I’m 20 years old, and...in one year when they have this, next year, I’ll go, and I won’t need your permission. You know, what good will it do to say no to me now?” She said okay. I was sort of naive about these things, having not really ever been involved in civil rights work in the South before. I thought, “Mississippi’s pretty dangerous, but maybe Louisiana won’t be so dangerous” So I decided to apply to the CORE program in Louisiana rather than the Mississippi Freedom Summer program. I applied and got accepted and I was on my way in the early summer of 1964.

EG: What were your day-to-day activities as a volunteer for CORE in Louisiana?

JS: First, we had to learn something about the voter registration literacy tests that were given in Louisiana at that time. One of the key purposes of the Freedom Summer was to highlight the ways that the southern voter registration systems excluded African Americans from voting. Therefore, it also excluded them from having the kind of police protection and public services that white voters could count on. Without a vote, African Americans were excluded from juries and basically had no official voice in the community – the kind that they would have if they were voters. In Louisiana there was a complex voter registration literacy test, [which] prospective

⁵ The Freedom Singers were created by members in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Founding members include Bernice Johnson Reagon, Charles Neblett, Rutha Mae Harris, and Cordell Reagon (Love

voters had to take and pass in order to register to vote. So our first task was to learn how the test worked and then...hold registration coaching or teaching sessions with African American people who were willing to try to register. Our job was to teach them how to take the test and not be upset by it. We would go door-to-door, canvassing African-American neighborhoods in small towns like Hammond and Ponchatoula and Amite, Louisiana, in southeastern part of the state. We would go door to door, introducing ourselves, explaining why we were in their town this summer, asking people were they registered voters. We would ask, have they considered registering to vote, would they like help registering to vote, would they like to learn how to take the test, would they like help going down to the courthouse together...There was a lot of physical intimidation by white power opponents and the officials of these small towns (including the all white police forces). So if we could get groups of African American citizens to go down together to the courthouse to take the tests, they were less likely to feel intimidated... We also went to African American churches on Sunday, explaining what the Freedom Summer was about, encouraging people to ask questions and join those seeking the right to vote. The voter registration test was very interesting and underhanded. I'll just give you one example of this... For instance, there's a question that says, "Write forwards backwards." So, if you were black and you wrote "sdarwrof" literally inverting the letters of the word "forwards," they would say, "No, that's wrong" because you were supposed to write "forwards backwards"- that is, they would say, you were supposed to write both words. On the other hand, if you were black and you wrote "forwards backwards" (both words) they would say, "No, you were supposed to invert the letters." That was one of several questions where no matter how you answered it, you were going to be wrong. That is, if you were black. If you were white, it didn't matter if you wrote "Ishkabibble" - you basically would pass. That's the way it worked. So in the early part of our

training, we learned about the test, about how rigged it was, and how to prepare the men and women we were encouraging to try to register for the frustrations that they would face. We were dealing relatively poorly educated or uneducated African American people, helping them not feel bad if the system was going to say you failed, making sure that they understood it wasn't their failure, that it was about the perniciousness and intention of the creators of the system, that it wasn't a fair test at all. Most of them already knew these things from their own life experience, that being African American in the south in the sixties wasn't a fair experience, but even so the system would help you doubt yourself instead of causing people to be angry at the system itself. So, part of our job was to help illuminate that and encourage them not to submit to an unjust system, but to join with their friends and neighbors and challenge the system. We hoped that these efforts would lead to national public outrage and new lawsuits by the Justice Department to challenge the constitutionality of the tests and the entire voter registration system. So another important part of our job was to communicate to others, friends and relatives and family back home, about how bad things were, and try and raise northern awareness about the problems in the South. Another big part of the job was to help build indigenous black leadership. There was a lot of discussion at the outset of the summer about whether or not our group should be led whites or blacks or some combination of the two. What emerged was general agreement that the leadership of our efforts ought to come from the African American people, and we ought to be part of their troops, not trying to be leaders ourselves. *iEG: How did the public react to all the volunteers in Louisiana? Describe to me any resistance that you met.*

JS: There were...lots of forms of resistance. We stayed mostly in the black community. As long as we were in the black community, the forms of resistance were pretty subtle and mild. That is, you would talk with African American households where they would say, "Look, you

know, you guys are here to just cause trouble, leave well enough alone... You know, this is going to be a problem. We don't want to go down and try to vote- it'll just make white people mad, and it won't change anything." There was that kind of message from parts of the black community, and then periodically the police would send a police car cruising through the black neighborhoods we were canvassing to sort of shadow and intimidate us and occasionally ask, "What are you doing here?," "Let me see your identification," and "Why don't you go back to Ohio, boy?". Before the Civil Rights Bill passed that summer⁶...the only place where we could really eat as an interracial group these small towns was in the black cafes and nightclubs. So in early July, after the Civil Rights bill passed, an inter-racial group of us went to one of the restaurants partly to integrate the cafeterias, but partly to get a change of food. At the first place we went, they kept us waiting along time even though there was hardly anyone else in the place, while there was a long conversation about whether or not they were going to serve us. We said, "Look, the law has just been passed, and it says you have to serve everybody. We're not going to cause any trouble- we just want to eat our lunch and go." After a long conversation they served us... We came back to same place two days later, and this time, they wouldn't serve us. We said, "What's going on? You served us two days ago."...and the counterman said, "Yeah, the law says we have to integrate. Well, we integrated when you guys came in here, so we don't have to serve you guys anymore." That was their notion of what "integration" was. They were integrated so they didn't have to serve us anymore. Then at the end of the summer, the entire group took a trip to New Orleans for rest, relaxation and debriefing... A group of us went into one of the clubs (or I should say, tried to get into one of the clubs) in Bourbon Street. One of the bouncers stood outside and told us we were not welcome there-- civil rights law or no civil rights

⁶ The Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed on July 2, 1964.

law. He got really up in our faces about it. One of them said while looking at the whites in our group, “You know, you’re the ones we really hate...because these guys” – pointing to our black colleagues – “wouldn’t have the courage to come down here without you, or the brains.” It was really insulting and sickening ...

At the beginning of the summer, during our central briefing and orientation, we learned about the principles and practices of nonviolence, what we were supposed to do if attacked or threatened. Then we were dispersed to different communities in Louisiana. Some of our folks got arrested, some got beaten up, some got hurt pretty bad...But our small sub-group in Southeast Louisiana came off relatively free of violence, until one night when we were coming back late from a voter registration workshop we had done at a church near Amite, Louisiana. We were driving along a dark, two lane country road. I was in the backseat. We had rental cars and you had to be 21 to drive, so I wasn’t driving... We had been told in the orientation to be careful not to drive on back roads at night...that this would be courting trouble. And, by this time in the summer, we already knew about the 3 civil rights workers who had gone missing at night in Mississippi (Cheney, Schwerner, and Goodman). But, anyway we had stayed too late at this voter registration clinic and it was dark, and the only way back was one of these unlit, back roads. We had also been warned to be careful about cars that try and pass on these back roads because that could be trouble. Anyway, Joanne, the woman driving the car, said, “Uh oh. I think there’s somebody coming up behind us.” I wasn’t sure what she was talking about. She sped up to try and prevent the car from passing us. The other car was going too fast and came alongside us. We heard this sort of loud “pop! pop!” sound. I didn’t know what it was. Joanne started to swerve, and the other car went past us and she pulled off the road and said, “I think they were shooting at us.” The other car sped down the road. We couldn’t tell how far, and we weren’t

sure if they were coming back or not. I hopped out, she hopped out, and the other person we were with hopped out. We looked at the car and sure enough, the back tire on the driver's side had been shot and was flat. So I got out and did a very fast change of tire. I claim it's the world's fastest record for Jewish tire changing. I was highly motivated to try and get that thing changed in a hurry because I didn't know if they were coming back or not. I changed the tire and we got going again. Joanne told me [in a conversation years later] that she thought they had chased us after we got back on the road and later on were still pursuing us. I don't really know, but it was enough that they were shooting at us and you could see the bullet hole in the hub cap as well as having shot the tire flat. In real time, we decided instead of going back to our home community in Hammond, we would go back to the CORE summer project central office. So we drove back there and reported the shooting, and they had FBI people come out the next day. But the FBI people weren't at all interested in really investigating the shooting. They believed we were the problem, and suggested that we were making this story up. We showed them the bullet hole in the hubcap and they said, "Well you could have put that in there yourself, or that could have been there before." They never really looked into it at all. The FBI in the South during that time was part of the problem, not part of the solution. They were local southerners who were really in sympathy with the opponents, not with the Civil Rights Movement.

EG: What motivated you to stay in Louisiana after facing this violence?

JS: Part of it was we were asking African Americans who lived there year in and year out to take risks for their own freedom and for a better country. How could we, once we faced the violence and attempted intimidation that they had to live with day in and day out, how could we walk out? Besides...the truth is there wasn't much longer to go in the summer. That's one of the things I felt most ambivalent about... I had come to Louisiana thinking I was doing some great act of

bravery or courage, and service...and I came to realize that the real bravery was in the African American people who had to endure this climate of oppression day in and day out, [and] who had to stay after we had left and deal with the consequences of that summer. It was hard; there were retributions of all kinds. People were fired, people were put in jail, churches were burned, [and] people's houses were foreclosed. There were lot of forms of retribution that occurred -- to almost anybody who was part of supporting the civil rights summer. The families we stayed with were the ones who protected us. Not vice versa. They were the ones who fed us, took care of us. So I came to have deep admiration for the courage and the determination, of the families we stayed with. I felt (and still feel) like I have some continuing debt to them more than that they should feel indebted to me.

EG: How were you impacted by your coworkers and the families you stayed with? How did they affect you at the time, and later in life?

JS: We were incredibly moved by their courage, by their kindness. They didn't harbor any resentment toward us because we were white. They appreciated us. In fact, at the end of the summer...the entire CORE team was taken to a very fancy African American restaurant in New Orleans called Dookey Chase's. We walked in, and this was the type of place where diners were all dressed in their Sunday finery. The men dressed up in suits and the women dressed up in fancy dresses and hats and white gloves. We walked in wearing blue jeans and CORE tee shirts and boots dusty from our canvassing on the unpaved streets of the small communities we had been working in. (The streets were paved in the white parts of town but not the black parts of town.) Anyway, we walked in to Dookey Chase's, and the whole restaurant stood up and gave up a standing ovation...When we would do day to day canvassing, many of the black people would say, "You know, we're really glad you're here. We're too afraid to go with you right now

but we know we need to do this for our children. We're really glad you're here and keep up the good work." Some people would say, "Yeah, I'll go with you. If you have the courage to come down here and do this, then I have the courage to step forward..." We saw moments of eloquence and grace, and deep personal caring for us and for the community, among people who were not very well-educated and who had few financial possessions, few worldly goods... But almost most every house had a picture of Jesus, almost every house had a picture of Jack Kennedy... They regarded him as a martyr at that point because he had finally stood up for civil rights... And, of course, many houses had pictures of Dr. King. At nearly every house in the black community we were treated with great respect and protection, and [we] felt very well cared for by our hosts who had invited us to come into their homes and stay with them.

EG: How were black volunteers treated differently than white volunteers by the public of any race?

JS: Well I think that...some of the worst violence was directed toward the black leaders because the message these opponents of civil rights wanted to send was, "You are violating your place," "You're getting uppity..." You know, black leadership for civil rights was the last thing that the white community wanted to see, so there was great hostility toward the black leaders of our group. But there was also hostility toward the whites... Part of the southern mythology was that African Americans were basically content with their lot. Even if they weren't content, at least they weren't likely to stir up this trouble by themselves. It was the infusion of the white students who brought the press, the media, and the spotlight to these communities... So there [were] special kinds of hostility directed to both groups for different reasons.

EG: About the media, did you feel that your efforts in Louisiana were portrayed accurately at the time or that racial conditions that summer were portrayed accurately in the media?

JS: I think for years and years and years the mainstream media hadn't paid much attention to these problems of racial segregation. Occasionally there would be a story about a lynching or something else, but basically for a long time the media was basically pretty indifferent to this story. I think one of the benefits of that summer was that it caused media attention and, of course, the murder of the three guys in Mississippi⁷ caused huge media attention. ...When it became apparent that it was the police in Meridian who had been part of this, the Ku Klux Klan or White Citizens working hand in glove with the police, I think that opened some eyes in the north. But, there wasn't much coverage of day to day of things in the communities where we were working. There wasn't anything in the papers, and there wasn't anything on the TV stations unless there was some big event...

Ohio State University

After spending the summer of 1964 in Hammond, Louisiana, Mr. Schwartz returned to Ohio State University to educate his peers about the necessity of voting rights legislation.

JS: When I went back to Ohio State, there were some stories that appeared in the local papers and in the University paper about both the work that I had done there and about follow up efforts to educate the University community about the voting rights issue. One of the things we did when I came back was...we were trying to get the Voting Rights Act passed in '65...and so we created an "I'm Illiterate" campaign. On the center of the oval, at Ohio State, we gave the Louisiana literacy test...administered it free to all the white and black students on the campus who wanted to take the test. We would grade it the way the Louisiana registrars would do with one big exception. We would flunk all the white students and pass all the black students just to

⁷ Klansmen killed James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner while they were registering black voters in Mississippi. In 1967, Samuel H. Bowers was convicted of violating the civil rights of the three civil rights workers as he allegedly approved of the murders as the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan (Mohr).

show them what it was like, only in reverse. Every white student who flunked the test, we gave an “I’m Illiterate” button to, asked them to wear it, asked them to explain that this was the situation in Louisiana, and then to organize to help get the Voting Rights Act passed. ...Obviously there were a lot bigger forces than that one little thing that helped get that law passed – like the Selma-Montgomery March and the beatings at the Pettus Bridge. But that little effort prompted stories in the local newspapers. And I think every- almost every- returning student from that summer had stories to tell about their experience. Some of those stories showed up in press in the aftermath of that summer.

EG: Can you describe how that campaign was organized? How did you educate the students about the Voting Rights Act?

JS: ...In this particular case what we did is we set up booths on the central part of the campus...and we put up flyers to explain to people what we were doing and to invite people to come to come to...these booths and take the Louisiana literacy tests. That was a big part of what the process was: it was getting people to actually experience the unfairness of the tests themselves and to see there wasn’t really about learning, about literacy, or about having the knowledge necessary to vote intelligently. In one part of the test, it asked the applicant to interpret parts of the Constitution. So, they would ask people to interpret the meaning of the First Amendment Free Speech Provision -- if you were white. If you were black, they would ask you to explain the “Privileges and Immunities” Clause...or some other arcane provision of the Constitution that most constitutional scholars would have trouble with or that you could argue about... Students and faculty at Ohio State took the test and they were outraged. “You mean you can’t vote just because some bogus guy gives you a test of bogus questions that nobody can answer? And if you circle the correct answer instead of underlining it you get...nixed?” That

was a big learning experience, I think, for students who weren't aware of what was going on in the South at that time, and it helped "bring it home." Later, we had a rally and mini-march to demonstrate support for the Voting Rights Act. We got people to write letters. We had one good senator at the time – Senator Stephen Young, and one conservative, Democratic senator that was on the fence on the Voting Rights Act. His name was Lausche- Senator Frank Lausche.⁸ We called him Senator "Lousy." But, Senator Lausche eventually voted for the bill.. What we did is we all wrote letters to Senator Lausche, and we took time out and we had singers come to a concert and a rally, and then had a march to the nearest post office and everybody dropped their letters to Senator Lausche in the mailbox urging him to vote for the bill and to end any filibuster. Then, of course, there was a huge march in Columbus...after the Pettus Bridge incident in Selma.⁹ When the march to Montgomery got interrupted in Selma with the police riot on the bridge there...were huge marches all over the country, and Columbus was one of the places where there was a big march... That was a big part of what created a momentum for the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

EG: Did you face any resistance by the students, faculty, or administration?

JS: There was not much resistance. No resistance by the administration to that that I can think of. Most of the students were, I would say, either supportive, actively supportive, or initially (who were just) naive. I think there were a few bigots. But there wasn't much of a problem in the student population.

Post-Civil Rights Movement and Its Impact

⁸ Senator Frank Lausche served in Congress from 1957-1969. Prior to serving as Ohio's senator, he served as the governor of Ohio from 1945-1957 (US Congress).

⁹ On March 7, around 600 protestors gathered at the Edmund Pettus Bridge that spans the Alabama River on the eastern flank of Selma. State troopers and other law enforcement attacked the protestors with night sticks and tear gas. In response to the violence in Selma, Martin Luther King said that "...We have witnessed an eruption of the disease of racism which seeks to destroy all America (Searle)."

Mr. Schwartz described his activist experiences after his involvement with the Civil Rights Movement. He took the lessons and values he learned with the Movement into other causes that he worked on afterwards. At Ohio State in the Fall of 1964, he led a demonstration for free speech. This demonstration was in response to a policy that allowed the Ohio State University's President decide which speakers could (and could not) come speak on campus. Most of the time anyone who the President deemed as too liberal were not allowed to speak, but right-wing speakers such as the John Birch Society were allowed. After college, Mr. Schwartz went to law school and upon graduation began working for what was then known as the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW).¹⁰ While working for HEW, he joined with others in the Department to protest the Vietnam War. After President Nixon's decision to expand the war and to begin bombing Cambodia, Mr. Schwartz and his colleagues staged a government lawyers' day of protest by taking the day off of work to picket and protest. As Environmental Counsel to the House Commerce Committee, he was also involved with helping progressive environmental legislation get passed, including clear air and safe drinking water legislation. After building and selling a multi-disciplinary consulting firm, Mr. Schwartz created the Social Venture Capital Foundation (SVCF). The SVCF donates money to different non-profit organizations, specifically supporting social change projects aimed at increasing equality of opportunity for young people (The Social Venture Capital Foundation, Inc.)

Mr. Schwartz and I discussed one particular project supported by the SVCF that teaches children about the Civil Rights Movement.

JS: The Foundation supports an after school arts action program in Baltimore's Reservoir Hill section called Kids on the Hill. One of the videos that Kids on the Kill has done is all about

¹⁰ HEW was eventually was changed into the Department of Health and Human Services and a separate Department of Education was formed.

slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. The kids create the video, learning the history of the Civil Rights Movement, and thereby come to better understand their own histories. Another of the projects that the SVCF has funded is called Critical Exposure. It empowers young people of color to use photography to organize their communities to improve their schools.”

After a period working as Director, Nonprofit Organizational Development for the Fannie Mae Foundation, Mr. Schwartz formed a social change consulting network called Kela Associates.

“Now, through Kela Associates, I’m working with the Kellogg Foundation¹¹ now on an initiative to help create pathways of opportunity for young people who have dropped out of high school or even junior high, to create ways for them to find jobs that pay a living wage, provide an opportunity to support a family and be able to find career pathways for them. Most of the beneficiaries of this would be minority young people.”

Mr. Schwartz then discussed what he ascertained as the impact of the Civil Rights Movement on Hammond, Louisiana, where he volunteered with CORE in 1964.

JS: I’ve continue to care a great deal about what is the unfinished agenda of the Civil Rights Movement. We have legal equity now. I went back to Louisiana years later ...to Hammond, Louisiana, just to see what the town was like. When I arrived in town, a police car pulled up behind me and my heart started pounding because even though it was 30 years later...my heart started pounding, I looked in the rearview mirror...It was an African American policeman (which, there weren’t any in 1964...) I learned later that two of the five members of the City Council of Hammond are African Americans. So yes, some big changes happened. But we still have disproportionately poorer health care results in the African American community, lower levels of health insurance, poorer access to health care to quality health care. If you look at who

¹¹ The Kellogg Foundation is one of the world’s largest private grant organizations today and awards grants in the United States, Latin America, the Caribbean, and seven countries in South Africa (The Kellogg Foundation).

are the kids that are dying in Iraq, it's mostly African American and Hispanic kids who see the army as their best economic opportunity. You look at who gets arrested more frequently, who gets more harsher sentences, who gets the death penalty...The system is still geared to be more prejudicial toward African Americans. It's also true throughout all of our informal systems. We don't yet have pathways to equal opportunity for the impoverished segment of the population that's been most adversely affected by slavery, Jim Crow, and the legacy of segregation and denial of education.

EG: Is there one thing that you learned, or anything at all, from the Civil Rights Movement that has stuck with you?

JS: Yes. There are many things. One of the most important is the power of unconquerable optimism... It's what's behind the song "We Shall Overcome"... No matter how terrible things are, the song reminds us that we are determined to overcome. The African American people have overcome slavery and have overcome the Jim Crow laws. I hope one day in the spirit of America, we will overcome the legacy of all that. Approaching every problem with the spirit of unconquerable optimism I think is a critical lesson. I've learned it and applied it to my own life when things were bleakest for me and my family...when my daughter, Julie, was seriously injured by a childhood vaccine, developed an uncontrolled seizure disorder, and then at age 3 passed away, I was desolate. But something in the lesson of the Civil Rights Movement helped me say, 'Well look, other people in the world have suffered, and they don't let that stop them from doing what needs to be done.' The fact that nobody did enough before my daughter got these shots to create a safer whooping cough vaccine is not a reason to despair. It just means that my friends and family and I have to step up now and do what needs to be done so the next group of people will have safer vaccines and healthier kids. So, I'm proud of the work that we did in

forming Dissatisfied Parents Together and pushing for safer vaccines and for better information for doctors and parents about the risks as well as the benefits of vaccines. I think that was a lesson learned directly from the Civil Rights Movement – to organize when change is called for, rather than despair. I think the idea that a small group of people who are dedicated and determined can make massive changes was and still is absolutely true. Some of the legislative successes I've been involved with in the environmental arena were not because there was a massive American groundswell for safe drinking water legislation or protection of the stratospheric ozone layer. But we understood that if you were properly positioned with the right forums, the right alliances, the right way to articulate your message, and a just cause immense social changes are possible. Those are two good examples of what I learned from the Civil Rights Movement.

EG: Now is there anything else that you want to add about any of your activism in the Civil Rights Movement that I have left out or that I haven't asked you about?

JS: Yes, there is one other thing I'd like to mention. I am now working for a group called DC Vote. DC Vote is advocating for a modern civil rights-voting rights issue. In the District of Columbia, we have a huge population that's denied voting representation in Congress. Many of the residents of DC are African American citizens. who pay taxes and go to war, and yet in 2006, they still don't have voting rights. And I've found it odd, sorrowful, and ironic that in the 2004 election instead of Ohio citizens going to Louisiana to try and get voter rights, Louisiana lawyers were coming to Ohio to try to assure that African Americans who went to the polls could get their votes counted. It was very clear that there was active discrimination in the way voting machines were placed, in active attempts to create long lines in African American districts and discourage people from voting...and we've seen already in the 2006 election this situation in

California where the Republican candidate in California writes a letter to 14,000 Hispanic and Latino folks saying it's a crime to vote your papers are not in order. This was a clear attempt to discourage Latino voting. So we still have voting rights issues today... My gift to the silent auction that DC Vote sponsored recently was a picture I took when I was a kid. My dad took me to Cincinnati to see the Reds play the Dodgers. That was Jackie Robinson's last year playing baseball. After the game, Jackie came out (unlike these days how the baseball stars are mostly untouchable, in the 1950s they would come out and sign kids' autographs.) Jackie came out and signed autographs, and I got a picture of him signing autographs for a racially mixed group of young people. He was truly a hero of mine and of the country's. My gift to the DC Vote is a framed picture of Jackie Robinson signing these autographs with a quote from him which says, "The right of every American of first-class citizenship is the biggest issue that faces us today." He said that years ago, and it's still true. We still have...a fight and I'm reminded of that wonderful old freedom song¹² "We Are Soldiers in the Army." I hope we enlist a new generation of young people determined to ensure equal rights for all. As the song goes, we've got to hang on and keep on keepin' on as long as we can to make the changes we can. It's not going to come in my lifetime- everything I'd like to see. I'm hoping that my children, Molly and Michael, have picked up these values. I'm happy to say that my daughter right now is a junior at NYU, and she's doing her fall semester at NYU in Ghana. Her major is third world studies and I like it that she's thinking about conditions in the third world. I'd like to think that she's part of the next wave of the Civil Rights Movement. We'll see. That's for her to decide whether she is or isn't.

¹² Singing freedom songs for civil rights activists proved to have a unifying impact and also helped create a psychological barrier between the demonstrators and the violent forces they fought. Cordell Reagon recalls that he witnessed a Freedom Rider sing "We Shall Overcome" when a guard beat him and made him bleed. After the singing started, the guard became ashamed and walked away, ending the beating (Love 95).

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