

**U.18 Long Civil Rights Movement:
Heirs to a Fighting Tradition**

**Interview U-0584
Manju Rajendran
February 14, 2006**

**Field Notes – 2
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FIELD NOTES- Manju Rajendran

Interviewee: Manju Rajendran

Interviewer: Bridgette Burge

Interview Date: February 14, 2006
Two interviews total in the series.

Project: Heirs to a Fighting Tradition: Oral Histories of North Carolina Social Justice Activists

Location: Manju's home in Durham, North Carolina

HEIRS TO A FIGHTING TRADITION: Oral Histories of North Carolina Social Justice Activists” is a multi-phased oral history project which explores the stories and traditions of social justice activism in North Carolina through in-depth interviews with fourteen highly respected activists and organizers. Selected for the integrity and high level of skill in their work dedicated to social justice, the interviewees represent a diversity of age, gender, and ethnicity. These narratives capture the richness of a set of activists with powerful perspectives on social justice and similar visions of the common good. These are stories of transition and transformation, tales of sea change and burnout, organizing successes and heart wrenching defeats. These are the stories of the Movement.

All of the oral histories will be archived in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and will be a valuable addition to the modest amount of literature about contemporary social justice activism in the South. This is a project of the North Carolina Peace and Justice Coalition.

THE INTERVIEWEE: Manju Rajendran is a 26 year-old organizer from Durham, NC. She has helped with vision, design, development and outreach for the Heirs Project. Manju and her family immigrated to the United States from India when she was a child. As a biology student at UNC-Chapel Hill, Manju was awarded the Davis-Putter Scholarship for young activists. She has shown leadership in many organizations, including School in the Community, Youth Voice Radio, NC Lambda Youth Network, Hip-Hop Against Racist War, Southerners On New Ground, and the House of Mango, a living collective of young activists in Durham. Manju was a member of Breaking the Chains, an anti-imperialist coalition, and she has worked with the NC Peace and Justice Coalition. She is on the national advisory board of Not Your Soldier.

THE INTERVIEWER: Bridgette Burge graduated from Rhodes College in Memphis, Tennessee in 1995 with a degree in Anthropology/Sociology and a semester of intensive study of oral history theory and methodology. In 1995 and 1996, Burge and a colleague conducted fieldwork in Honduras, Central America collecting the oral histories of six Honduran women. She earned her master's degree in Anthropology from the University of Memphis in 1998. In 1999, she moved to North Carolina and served as North Carolina Peace Action's state coordinator, and later as North Carolina Peace Action Education Fund's executive director. In 2005, Burge began her own consulting company to provide training, facilitation and planning to social change organizations. The same year, with the support of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, Burge launched the project "Heirs to a Fighting Tradition: Oral Histories of North Carolina Social Justice Activists." The interviews from this project are archived at the Southern Historical Collection in the Wilson Library at UNC-Chapel Hill.

TRANSCRIPT—MANJU RAJENDRAN

Interviewee: Manju Rajendran

Interviewer: Bridgette Burge

Interview date: February 14, 2006; interview two of two

Location: Durham, North Carolina

Length: 2 cassettes; approximately 150 minutes (for both interviews)

START OF TAPE:

BB: Okay, it's actually February fourteenth and our break turned into a long, wonderful, off-the-record sharing of stories. Then we were too tired, so we broke until the next day. So now we are here, back at the same place, a beautiful day in Manju's room upstairs.

MR: Blue alcove, birds outside.

BB: Blue alcove, birds in the sky. (laughter) Yes. So we're going to just dive on in, okay? You ready? So you went back to India when you were nineteen, right? Do you want to tell me about the trip a little, and how long you were there?

MR: I had planned to be in India for six months to a year; I ended up coming back at six months. I had intended to see family who I hadn't seen since I was four and meet up with various activist organizations all over the country. I arrived in Bombay and was picked up by my aunt and my uncle, my mother's younger brother and sister, and their kids. I spent most of my time at my mother's house, like that was kind of my home base when I was in Bombay, in a suburb of Bombay called Kalyan.

I found my father after a couple weeks of being in India, through my Uncle Sabin, my mother's godchild. He knew the name of the company that my father worked for through a family friend, Gomadhi Aunty. I called Dad's workplace during the day and got through his secretary and said hello. We spent the next month in negotiations, trying to set up parameters for our first meeting after four years. I really wanted someone to be present and he was very uncomfortable with that. He said that he would not undergo supervised visitation. So I brought someone who I thought was neutral, a person from my mother's friend's church or prayer worship; they don't call it church because they're Pentecostal. Oh yeah, they all converted to Pentecost, Mom's immediate family, at around the same time that she converted from Catholicism. But they weren't in communication at the time. It's kind of amazing that they all communicated overseas without word, because Dad was still not allowing Mom to talk to them. I'm sorry, did that make any sense? Did you follow that?

BB: Yeah.

MR: Okay. So we met at a restaurant and Dad insisted to the fellow from the prayer worship, a guy named Jose Uncle, he insisted that he sit at a separate table, but he did allow him to sit in the same restaurant, which worked for me. We drank grape juice and we ate something simple. And it was good to see him. It was very tense and he looked very old. He had really aged in four years; it was amazing. He looked a lot like his own mother. I don't think he really looked so much like her before. But I did go to Karala and meet my father's side of the family in Eravankara. I just arrived at the village and said the name of my father's house. I saw a house that had my father's mother's line's name on it. There's the Nair caste, which was at one time predominately matrilineal. So my father's caste name was Unnithan, which is, I guess that caste is a higher caste. For centuries the property has been passed down

through the mother's line. This is the first generation when that will change, because of independence. It's kind of interesting that independence has brought this transition to a more patriarchal ordering of property.

BB: Sad.

MR: It is sad, sort of a sad irony of words. But yeah, I saw his family name on a house that said Kottakkakata and I went in. It turned out to be an uncle of mine, named Rajan, or a cousin of mine, actually. He was older, but he was my cousin, and he told me where to go. He, it turns out, is one of the few people who spoke with my father in (). Dad had been alienated from most of the folks there now. But yeah, I got to see my grandmother and ended up coming back and staying with her and my father's younger brother and their family, cousins, and all. I went to () and stayed with another of my father's younger sisters. I went back to Kayamkulan, my mother's birthplace, and stayed with her elder sister, Wilma. I worked with the National Fish Workers Forum.

BB: Is that a union?

MR: It's a network of fish workers' union all over the coast of India. It's like a federation sort of formation. National Fish Workers Forum is part of a larger, world Fisher Folk Forum. At the time, when I was working with them in a small fishing village called Valiathura, which is right outside the capital of Karala, Thiruvanthapuram. They were working on a big assembly of the fisher people's unions from all over the world. It was really incredible. So I was doing a lot of letter writing and letter editing and French translation, because the big assembly was going to be in Loctudy, France. I had been vegan for about a decade, but in that village I ate fish and it was really amazing. It tasted just like my

childhood, just lots of fish and rice and cooked, like boiled chini. What is that in English?

Cassava? Oh, it's 11:11. Make a wish.

BB: I can't think of one.

MR: Maybe you can let the baby make it.

BB: That was my first thought.

MR: It could be sort of a joint wish. (laughter)

BB: And how long did you work with them?

MR: For a little over the month the first time, and I came back through for a short period, like a week or two. I met with folks from the Science Forum in Karala and in (). Science Forum are this movement of scientists who are trying to go back to the land and support village-based, relevant technology, like creation of technology that makes poor people's lives easier, with collaboration with poor people about what sort of designs they need in their lives, what do they want, and using it as— **END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B**

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

BB: Okay, sorry it got cut off there. You were saying, trying to create sustainable technology for poor folks in collaboration with them.

MR: Yeah, and it's really just a part of bigger organizing campaigns. The idea is that people are figuring out ways to make their lives easier and are freeing up their time and are seeing themselves as powerful creators, like they can be... It's often combined with education programs and the idea is that it can be a piece of bigger organizing and it's been incredibly effective.

BB: Did this originate in India?

MR: Mmm hmm.

BB: And it's relatively new, then?

MR: Mmm hmm.

BB: About when did it start?

MR: I think it emerged in the 80s. It was part of my decision to come back and to study biology at UNC. I feel like it's a realm where really huge decisions are being made that affect folks at all levels of society, but poor folks and women are getting systematically left out of that discussion. I also was with folks in Madurai, at a place called Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary. Tamil Nadu is a state; it's the other southernmost state in India. These states are sort of a modern thing. They were created around the time of independence. These language states are the lines between them are somewhat blurry. There's parts of Karala where the Malayalam sounds a lot like Tamil and parts of Tamil Nadu where the language sounds a little like Malayalam, and lots of foods in common and lots of history in common, kingdoms spilling over one into the other.

BB: So you were saying how this was a real influence on why you chose to study biology when you came back. I was going to ask you how your choice to study biology, if it was connected to movement work and how, if so. So yeah, thanks for explaining that some.

MR: Yeah, and also going to the Theological Seminary, it's through the Church of South India and they train pastors. They spend a year in the school and they spend a year working in slums. They spend a year working out at this rural institute and end up coming back to the school eventually for their final semester, but so much of their work is done out in the field and in working on similar appropriate technology stuff, working on bringing back traditional farming methods after the 70s Green Revolution kind of messed up agriculture in India in a lot of ways. People were really encouraged to use all these new fertilizers and start

doing mono-cropping, and in the more recent era, to welcome genetically-tampered seeds and stuff. But they've been really intentional about challenging that with well-researched traditional methods and combining those with more healthy aspects of modern technology, so that people aren't destroying the earth, but they are also embracing a way of life that they had been told was worthless.

BB: Gosh, it sounds so useful and relevant to North Carolina, to agricultural struggles here and issues of poverty and sustainable development in agriculture. Have you linked that work in any way with some activism in North Carolina, beyond studying biology? Do you have a vision to do that?

MR: I feel like I'm just embarking on that now. I feel like I only now have the opportunity for it. I'd been in several other groups; I don't know if I should mention that, when I was in India, I also met up folks with Narmada Bachao Andolan, the movement to save the Narmada river, and other organizations through the National Alliance of Peoples' Movements, which is the larger body connecting all these different groups that I just talked about. I went to Delhi. I went to Agra with my father, my first time traveling alone with him in my life, and was really influenced by my father and my relatives on both sides of the family encouraging me to go to college. I remember convening a group of people I trust from back home in North Carolina, mostly through letters, asking what they thought about this idea of me going to college when I got back. Were you a part of that? Did I know you yet?

BB: Some. We hadn't worked together as much through Breaking the Chains and the Southern Organizers' Convention yet.

MR: But yeah, I just got this overwhelming, "Yes, yes, yes!" So I decided that that's what the plan would be when I get back, that if I got good training in biology, I would figure

out a good way to make it useful when I got out. But when my energy and excitement waned in there, I'd also have to call folks who had encouraged me in the first place, and say, "Remind me why I'm doing this again. This is so stressful and so tiring and so hard." I just felt so isolated.

BB: When did you enroll?

MR: 2000. Yeah, and I really wouldn't have even gotten around to filling out the application on time. I had sort of a list of colleges that I wanted to go to, but I was really haphazard about that and so wishy-washy about whether I really wanted to clamp down and buckle to traditional schooling once more. I got a very encouraging and a very firm email from my first sweetheart with the application to UNC attached, saying, "If you don't fill this out tonight, you will miss the deadline because it's tomorrow and I need you to fill this out today." (laughter) So I blazed through the application and pleaded with them to meet with me. I actually insisted with them to meet with me. (laughter) And they said, "We just don't meet with incoming freshmen. That's ridiculous." And I said, "Well you know, I have a portfolio application and it's all primary material. I can't send you a copy of it. And you need to meet me! You'll want me." Yeah, it was kind of crazy, because I didn't apply anywhere else and I applied at the last second and somehow I got in and ended up spending the next four years, shoulder against the grindstone."

BB: And just graduated!

MR: And finally got it over with.

BB: You graduated this fall, right? When was it?

MR: This past winter.

BB: Congratulations.

MR: Thank you.

BB: What's next for you?

MR: I'm using this as a year of completion, like a year to complete all these things that I've procrastinated about for a long time, writing projects mostly and art, thinking. But it's funny. I wonder how things would have been different if I had just plunged in and, well, I don't know.

BB: Just plunged in what?

MR: [author pauses] I feel like I got a lot of newfound discipline and useful learning, useful skills about how to study and how to write. But I feel like I lost a lot of gumption, a lot of spirit, in the last couple years. It's hard to be social. It's hard to be really in the thick of movement work when you're being a full-time biology student. I feel like that has a lot to do with my spirit, a paring down of what I'm working on.

BB: Are you still involved in some things that are movement work?

MR: Mmm hmm.

BB: What are they and do you consider them part of a larger movement?

MR: The most recent big thing that I worked on was the Not Your Soldier Action Camp through NC Peace and Justice Coalition and a bunch of other groups around here, in collaboration with a group of national organizations. The local groups were Lambda Youth Network, Spirit House, Jovenes Lideres en Accion, and who am I forgetting? Is there anyone else locally?

BB: That sounds right.

MR: And then there were a whole slew of national organizations that pitched in, but primarily Ruckus Society, the youth wing of the War Resisters League, the National Youth Student Peace Coalition.

BB: Student Peace Action Network?

MR: No, the National—oh I always forget their acronym—NYSPC. Code Pink.

BB: So what was the camp about?

MR: It was a counter-militarism training camp for young people. Most recently—well, I guess that's not the most recent thing. The most recent thing is that I'm working with four friends, Kriti Sharma and Christine WestPall and someone named Zachary and someone named Aiden, on something called Welcome to Durham. It's like a mapping project and a history project about useful information about how to be a good participant in Durham, a context that will help someone who's trying to do right by Durham's future. We just felt like we needed it personally, so we're trying to create a tool in the form of a series of discussions with Durham long-timers, folks who've been here longer than we have, folks who've had a hand in Durham's politics and Durham's economy and Durham's design structure, so like a series of discussions and then maybe like a zine that comes out every two months or so, actual physical maps that are overlain with history and stories and stuff. Our first research day is this Saturday.

BB: So it's just getting off the ground, really? Have you had a discussion group yet?

MR: Have we met?

BB: No, well have you had a discussion group where you talked—

MR: Oh no, not yet. You'll hear about it.

BB: Oh, good.

MR: People will hear about it; everyone will hear about it, but we're hardly there. We just had our first meeting to discuss the idea of doing this last week.

BB: So do you identify yourself, do you use labels like "activist" and "organizer" or a different word?

MR: I feel like I have what it takes to be a good activist. I feel like I am hankering after knowledge about how to become a good organizer.

BB: How do you understand the difference?

MR: I think being an organizer is about... [pause] An activist is someone who... [author pause] I feel like activism is a really broad term that encapsulates so many acts of resistance, so many acts of making change, whether it's only momentary or lasting. It shakes up the current social order. It proposes a new way of being. It rails against the unjust. I feel like I can do those things with some fluency at this point. But I feel like the work of organizing—and by that I mean really using your whole self to help others with their whole selves come together in a concerted, strategic way, transform society forever for better—that feels like a tougher challenge and I don't really know where I fit in in that. I feel like I have so much to learn and I feel like so many things that I hear about being called organizing don't fit this definition that's inside my head. I don't know. I mean, sometimes it's just like a semantical game. And I don't want to say that any piece of this is not necessary, like I feel like those momentary flashes of resistance are so important to our strength and our inspiration and keeping our imaginations alive. I just really want to be part of fighting for gains that we can feel, tangible wins, things that really make our day-to-day lives survivable, because I feel it's really hard to survive right now, you know?

BB: Can you think of people who are good at organizing or activism today in North Carolina, who are strong in organizing and activism today?

MR: I really admire the work that Durham CAN has been doing—CAN stands for Congregations, Associations, and Neighborhoods—they were able to get the living wage here, with close support from other groups.

BB: What was the living wage they won?

MR: For city workers and county workers in Durham. We're the only southern city that has made this gain.

BB: And the amount?

MR: I forget, somewhere around ten or so dollars. Don't quote me on that; I don't remember. But it's somewhere around ten or fifteen. I think there's a difference, like I think that one has ten and the other has fifteen.

BB: So how did they go about winning that victory in ways that you think of as strong organizing? Were there specific tactics or approaches that resonate?

MR: I admire that they take a long-haul approach, that they make plans well in advance and that they spend several years building relationships before they launch a campaign. I admire that they bring together such a diversity of groups. I admire that they bring in so many people to making change, who haven't thought of themselves as change-makers ever before. But yeah, I guess I'm just so, [pause] just really searching for work that feels right on all levels. I want work where I can be doing what I think of as really strategic, useful, organizing that challenges the places where I need to grow and supports me in all my complexities. It feels like that's a tough balance to achieve, like in a lot of activist spaces, there's so much attention given to who we are, like who arrives at the table and honoring the

different parts of themselves. It feels like in a lot of really effective organizing campaign stuff, those selves get left behind in favor of those tangible wins that I so badly want.

BB: What do you mean by that, when you say “their selves” or bringing “their whole selves”? Can you say a little bit more about what you mean?

MR: I mean wanting spaces where it’s okay to be queer and a woman and a person of color and being poor. You know, that these different aspects of ourselves can be drawn on for strength and not be a deficit, that we would pay attention to the dynamics of oppression that happen inside of our movement work, but allow that to improve the work, not subsume it. Does that make sense? Am I making sense here?

BB: Yeah, to me. Is this line of questioning okay? I don’t want it to feel like a quiz.

MR: I’m just nervous, because I really don’t want to--. I don’t know. I don’t really know anything about this stuff. I just feel so young in this, like I feel so inexperienced and I feel like there’s so much going on out there that I’m just learning about. I feel like there are ways that the movement is happening that I, from my very small perspective, cannot understand. There’s just bigger forces and patterns at hand, really exciting ones. I feel like there are divine forces acting in our favor. So I don’t want to disparage any part of the work, because I feel like it’s all necessary and I feel like if people are really acting from the heart, I want to trust that it’s all useful, that it’s all going to fit together in just the right way and we’ll come out at the end of this better and that the end will be endless. But I’m also struggling with a lot of doubt about pieces that seem really unhealthy or pieces that seem really disempowering. I feel really burnt by a lot of my movement experiences and just realizing that only recently, realizing how I need to recover from some of the stuff that’s gone on and

some of the failures, and really reflect on how to do it better, try to not lose hope during that reflection time, try to really channel this towards wisdom.

BB: So would it be premature to ask or to talk about what some of those failures and challenges in the movement work have been? Do you want more reflection time? I ask because I'm very interested in the challenges of the movement and I feel like they're related to very painful things, especially around oppression on lots of levels, sort of one of the great creative challenges to movement and activism work. So I'm interested in drawing that out from the heirs, who are sharing their stories, but I don't want to do it if it feels premature or too raw, or just in any way not good for you. [pause] Can you offer alternatives? Do you want to talk about what sustains and nurtures you in the movement? (laughter) Totally opposite.

MR: I really love the network of good people, that I just have so many wonderful friends and so many visionaries in my life. I feel really blessed by that. I love the wide array of people. I love the lessons that I'm learning from people of every age, people of every lifestyle. I think that's my favorite part, the connecting with people and bringing people together in new, and not always initially easy ways. I love making art that inspires, being part of that process. It feels like there's a lot of people who give voice to the struggle in so many different kinds of art.

I love the creativity. I love the problem solving, like I really like taking a puzzle apart and putting something together. I love the collaboration of it. I like being part of this big, sparking, fantastic mind. I feel like the challenges mostly have to do with when those different parts that I talked about sustaining, fall apart, like when the art isn't given a space to inspire us or pull us together or guide us, when we get so absorbed in the logistics that we

don't notice the pantheon of heroes we're working with, don't notice the opportunities for connection. I think things fall apart when people are so absorbed in their incredibly effective on-the-ground campaign that they don't recognize how it's part of a bigger movement, part of a larger legacy.

I read this book called *In Dubious Battle*, by John Steinbeck, one of his less-read works. It's kind of a messy one. It's about this organizer named Mack, who is working with some migrant laborers. I think it was in California, probably. He is really struggling, because he knows that this campaign is not likely to win and people will likely get hurt along the way. But if they can survive it, this will surely make them stronger. He's convinced of it from his experience that these people will come out at the end of this much stronger. He feels like because of that, the whole movement will be made stronger, that the labor organizing in this region for the next decade will be improved, decades will be improved for this struggle having been fought, even if they don't win. I read it when I was pretty young and am still processing years later, just finally getting to a point when my intuition is pretty good about what will work and what won't, and trying to learn to give voice to that. I had a really amazing conversation with someone named George Friday. Do you know her?

BB: Yeah, she's one of my heroes. Sheroes.

MR: She helped me think about that, about trying to bolster my strength and confidence to the point where I can actually make my intuition useful to people. I feel like I have enough experience at this point to have good hunches about what will succeed, though I need so much more. But I just feel so shy about it.

BB: I wonder why.

MR: It's been a hard couple of years. [pause] I'm working on a couple exciting things.

BB: You are?

MR: Yes. Lambda Youth Network, an organization that I feel really helped me survive the harrowing teenage years, has frozen their programming for an indefinite period of time. So a group of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer folks and straight allies got together this past weekend and started talking about autonomous ways we could create queer programming for mostly youth of color in Durham, to kind of feel the void that will be created by Lambda's passing or Lambda's hiatus, let's say. We came up with a lot of cool ideas, stuff around creating an emergency network, like an underground railroad sort of thing for queer youth who are in scary living situations, an adult allies network of transporters that can help get kids from place to place, a queer youth dance team, new party spaces, new field trips, a lot of exciting stuff. I went to a meeting at Theo's [Luebke] house with educators and folks interested in education to talk about a bunch of ideas, ranging from mentoring to starting an after-school tutoring center, to starting a new school in Durham, stuff around using social justice work as material for helping educate young people and support young people in becoming leaders. And basic stuff around survival, like helping kids find a safe space and find sane space and find basic things, like food and shelter and clothing. It was a tall order for a meeting and we ended up coming up with a bunch of great ideas and agreeing to meet again. I feel like I have a lot of stuff to be excited about and I don't know why I'm so tentative and nervous.

BB: How about a break?

MR: Mmm hmm.

[tape interruption]

BB: Okay, we're back. We're going to have the space heater on and we're going to fold clothes while we talk for the next few minutes, so the sounds might be a little different. So has spirituality played a role in your activism and movement work, for you personally?

MR: Yeah, definitely. I feel like I'm stronger for my prayer. I feel like my spirituality gives me space for some of that reflection I'm really hungry for. I want more of it. I feel like it would—should we start over? Was that distracting?

BB: It's okay.

MR: I feel like it's a really personal thing that helps me be a better person in public. Does that make sense?

BB: Do you practice a specific tradition?

MR: My father grew up Hindu and my mother grew up Catholic. My father calls himself a non-believer at this point. That is, at least in part, shaped by growing up in communist, atheist Karala. But Malayali Hindu communism is a unique thing. It is one that embraces so many cultural aspects of Hinduism while still being fiercely material.

BB: Okay. Let me switch the tape.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE B

BB: Okay, now it's starting. So that side of the family, everyone goes to temple and celebrates—

MR: The Hindu festivals, but they are all members of the Communist Party of India, Marxists, and are strike keepers and organizers in their workplaces. Everyone's a union member, whatever profession they work. This is Dani's.

BB: Martinez-Moore? Oh, I love it. You said during our break yesterday that your parents, what were the words you used, radical lefties? Do you remember how you described them?

MR: Yeah, I don't remember what I said. Mom grew up Catholic, but she has always been very progressive in her Christianity, and her conversion to Pentecost and her transition to a mostly Black, non-denominational church in Durham is all part of this increasingly liberation theology faith, a Christianity that she sort of divined. I mean, when I was growing up, the fact that my father was so repressive about my mother's Christianity and tried so hard to keep us from practicing Christianity, made Christianity this sort of secret tool of resistance for us. So I don't know. I feel like I practice some kind of hybrid that makes everyone in my family angry with me. I feel like I really have gained a lot from Hinduism and I've gained a lot from Christianity and I've gained probably just as much from this scientific, critical, non-believer attitude. All of these things have shaped me into being a more loving person and becoming more humble and trying to grow. I feel like all of it's definitely shaped my movement work, in terms of just the way I think, my philosophy on life and my commitment to personal growth and collective survival and serving others.

BB: You've been involved in so many conferences and rallies and training and workshops. There's just so many! Is there one that really stands out for you, like a moment in

your life of activism? It can be a rally or a conversation or a reflection, or one that really stands out as a powerful, poignant moment for you, one that comes to mind?

MR: I feel like there were a few poignant moments in my work with Hip-Hop Against Racist War. We just had this amazing energy between us, the folks in the core collective, and this real spirit of creativity and passion, love of Hip-Hop and excitement about using hip hop to help young people, who wouldn't otherwise be drawn to the work, view themselves as part of a justice movement.

BB: Will you say what it is, Hip-Hop Against Racist War, and when it started?

MR: It started when folks like Bryan [Proffitt] and Dasan [Massenburg] and Yolanda [Carrington] and Stanley [Richards] were dealing with a situation around an incident involving racism and heterosexism at NC State University. They got together and they were able to challenge the administration and get them to put out a statement to their liking and challenge some of their hateful messages that were being put out there. They sort of honed this technique of using hip-hop rhymes to get a message across. They took a group of folks to DC.

BB: Students?

MR: Mmm hmm.

BB: This was about 2001, huh, 2002?

MR: Yeah, 2001 sounds right. I got involved the following January. We started having shows where folks were combining political messages with all these different aspects of hip hop and we called it edutainment, this form of artwork that really was attractive to people and helped school people about what was unjust in our society and what we needed to challenge and how. We started using hip-hop-based chants at rallies and marches and protests

and stuff. I had really hoped that we would start doing consistent trainings for young people using hip hop as an education tool. Stanley did that with some young people he was working with through Public Allies.

BB: What's Stanley's last name?

MR: Richards. Pierce and Aden do it through the language arts (), Pierce Freelon and Aden Darity. Bryan and Dasan have done some of that stuff, (), but it's never been a consistent thing and it was something we had been planning on when we ended up taking what we thought was a hiatus and has turned out to be sort of our demise.

BB: Is there anything else you want to talk about when you think about recording a brief sketch of your oral history, are there things we haven't talked about that you want to include? You're smiling.

MR: Let it be remembered that she loves mangos, that she read a lot of books, that her favorite movie she recently saw was *Mumbai se Aaya Mera Dost*. Three cheers for the color orange. And that among her goals was to learn to bake a proper seven-inch-tall, three inches of that being frosting, southern coconut cake. (laughter)

BB: That's a beautiful goal in life. I'm invited to an achievement party?

MR: Absolutely, in high aspirations.

BB: Well thanks, Manju, for your beautiful story and for sharing it with us and the world, who knows how this might be used, and most especially, for the work that you do.

MR: Thank you for the work you do.

BB: Ah, thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Emily Baran. March, 2006.

