

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

**Interview U-0566
Claudia Horowitz
May 13, 2010**

**Field Notes – 2
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FIELD NOTES-Claudia Horwitz

Interviewee: Claudia Horwitz
 Interviewer: Bridgette Burge
 Interview Date: May 13, 2010 (Interview 4 of 4)
 Location: Stone House, Mebane, NC

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: Claudia Horwitz is the founding director of stone circles, a nonprofit organization that helps individuals and organizations integrate spiritual and reflective practice into their work for social justice. Based in Durham, North Carolina, stone circles creates opportunities for training, retreats, conversation, organizational development, and interfaith exchange. Claudia’s previous work includes developing youth leadership, supporting struggles for economic justice, and strengthening nonprofit organizations. She is the author of *The Spiritual Activist: Practices to Transform Your Life, Your Work, and Your World*, (Penguin Compass 2002) is a practical guide to individual and social transformation through spirit and faith. Claudia has a master’s degree in Public Policy from Duke University, is a Rockefeller Foundation Next Generation Leadership Fellow and teaches Kripalu yoga.

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.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW: May 13, 2010, Claudia didn't feel well at the last interview, expressed concern that she wasn't very coherent (I thought she was) and so she wanted to record once more. Since we had generally covered the chronological points that I had in prepared in my interview guidelines, I sent her an email yesterday asking what she would like to talk about. She mentioned the arc of moving toward justice and the "come to Jesus" moments when she's had to make some tough decisions. I would also like to hear her reflections from the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) 50th anniversary events that she attended a few weeks ago at Shaw University. At about noon today, Claudia will be on a national conference call to plan for the US Social Forum this year.

TRANSCRIPT – CLAUDIA HORWITZ

Interviewee: Claudia Horwitz
 Interviewer: Bridgette Burge
 Interview Date: May 13, 2010 (Interview 4 of 4)
 Location: Mebane, Orange County, NC
 Length: 2 track; approximately 1 hour 13 minutes

START OF INTERVIEW

CLAUDIA HORWITZ: You ready?

BRIDGETTE BURGE: Yep. Now I'm going to record thirty seconds or so of just quietness.

BB: Okay. Today is May 13th, 2010, and this is an interview with Claudia Horwitz with Bridgette Burge as the interviewer, and this is the fourth interview in a series as part of the project Heirs to a Fighting Tradition: Oral Histories of North Carolina Social Justice Activists. And I said that this is our fourth interview, and we are again at The Stone House in Mebane, North Carolina. And Za, whose a very, very, very good dog, is with us again, which is lovely.

CH: Yea, Zakie!

BB: How are you doing today Claudia?

CH: I'm doing pretty good. I got a little power nap from 12:30 to one, and I just had some salad from the garden, which always makes me feel better.

BB: Nice.

CH: When I feel like there's a lot of tragedy in the world, like I've been thinking about the personal tragedies-- Do you need to do a test?

BB: No, this is good.

CH: I've been thinking about these personal tragedies that are swirling around me, like the guy that does our maintenance work, his mom just died. She was really sick, but the end, I think, came quicker than they were expecting. And we just had a woman here on retreat, but her marriage is breaking up. And then this friend of ours' baby, toddler, is on life support and is probably not going to make it, and she's two years old. And then there are these global things that are happening of the, kind of the anti-immigrant crucible in Arizona, the oil spill, I mean whatever, we could go on and on. And I've just been thinking about how personal and universal tragedies are different and how they're the same, and I don't have a lot of wisdom on that, but I've just been interested in it, so that's kind of what I've been thinking about.

I guess there's something connected, kind of how we go on, you know, the resiliency of people feels like the thread to me right now. I think the other thing that's interesting to me is that with these personal things, you know, they're horrific in their own way, and there's something about them that feels part of the mystery of things that we can't explain, and then these more global atrocities are human made, you know, human created, and we have control. And I think there's something about that. It's like: Why don't we control the horror that we can control, since there's always going to be things we can't? So I've just been thinking about that lately.

BB: Mm. Can you hear it? No, you can't hear it coming out of that, right?

CH: No.

BB: These are like very extra, an abrupt transition to talk about technology after you just said that.

CH: That's okay.

BB: But yes, these are like super excellent earphones.

CH: Yeah, he uses them on the plane. Can you hear me?

BB: I can hear you super well.

CH: Oh, okay, great.

BB: Yes, it's great. Okay. What is it that Alice Walker talked about? It's this beautiful line sometimes about how do we get to where we do the work with the broken heart, and how do we get to where we can, when our hearts break, they break wide open and instead of close. So it's powerful.

CH: Yes, it's funny. I thought a lot about that last week, just how if you're really going to live powerfully in the world, you have to be able to live broken hearted. And then just noticing how many different kinds of broken heartedness there is, you know? And I know you and I were talking briefly about the SNCC conference. About a month, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee celebrated its fiftieth anniversary of its founding at Shaw University in Raleigh. What's amazing about that, well many things, but many of the folks involved in SNCC, if there's a seventy-fifth anniversary, many of them won't be alive anymore, so I'm not saying this is the last time. I'm sure they'll do another one in ten years, but it was just very powerful to sort of see the arc of history. And you know, SNCC, I didn't realize it had only been, it was only in existence for ten years, from 1960 to 1970, because its impact was so much greater than that in terms of what it sparked and spawned on multiple levels, an organizing model and electoral models, and so many other things. But the resiliency of people in that part of the movement, you know, it was a marginal part of the civil rights movement that I think in some ways had the biggest impact. And you can't quantify any of that, but one of the things that Tom Hayden said on one of the panels was that we have to stand with the demoralized in

the place of demoralization, something like that. So I feel like that sort of ties into this. It's being willing to really go right into the belly of the beast where people are suffering. And the amazing thing was he actually named three groups that he felt like right now, today, are the people that we should be most in solidarity with. And he named immigrants, prisoners, and Muslims. And I just thought that is so clear, just to say these are the groups that are feeling the heat, the most of repression. So I think I've felt a little bit pastoral the last few days in that way that we are with people when they're in these really broken places in these incredibly hard life transitions. And I think it's a role I play a lot in people's lives. And I've just been sitting with the question, too, of how to do that well and still keep my finger on the pulse and keep connected to the more collective struggles that are going on.

BB: Is that because sometimes you feel pulled in so deeply that you disconnect from the collective work because you--? What is that about, you think?

CH: No, I think it's just--. In some ways it's just a sheer question of time. You know that immigrant rights groups are planning a big action in Arizona for May 29. I'm not going to be able to get there. I know a lot of people won't be able to get there, so I've been thinking: Could we do something in solidarity here? And it's just a couple weeks away, and I'm going to be on the road a lot between now and then, and then these tragedies have arisen, and I feel like I've gotten pulled a little bit into that. And then I pull my head up from my workload and, [Laughter] you know, everything else, and I remember, "Oh, I want to do something for that, and I want to be part of something." So I think it's just an ongoing question of the various levels that we pay attention to and where we can be effective and how much time it requires. And I think what was really powerful--. There were so many powerful things about the SNCC gathering. You know that was obviously pre-technological era. They had one Watts telephone

line in the main offices. And I think it's easy to form a perception that we now have--. And we do have access to so much more information, so that's true, but the level of connectivity that they had, the amount of visiting they did to each other in the field offices, the ways that communication worked with that one telephone line, they know so much about what was going on. And they had to know because when someone was in trouble, either being threatened by the police or they were staying with a family that was being threatened because they were staying there, or violence was erupting in a particular rural isolated community, what they did was to phone it in, basically, to a main office so that more people knew what was going on, and that support and reinforcement could happen in whatever form it was going to happen. And so it's just not losing sight, I think, of some of the basic needs that underlie organizing, how relational it is. I think that was a big theme for me, and the other one is just they never incorporated. They never became an organization. And they raised a ton of money. It wasn't--. They weren't this radical fringe anarchist organization, non-organization. They weren't like that. They had incredible infrastructure and they raised millions of dollars from Northeastern liberals. That's how they were able to pay all the field organizers and open up all the offices. So they were very practical. I think they knew what they--. They knew the resources they needed to do what they were doing. They were very practical about it, but they never fell into some of the traps that creating a 501(c)(3) organization can create. And I don't want to over-romanticize SNCC because I don't think there's any value in that, but I think there's a lot more to learn from that slice of the movement than has been told. And a really profound thing a young African American historian said on one of the panels, Peniel Joseph, he said, "We can't let the civil rights movement become a bedtime story," [reacting to nonverbal reaction from interviewer] I know, "where there's a beginning, a middle, and a nice, neat ending." And

things like that have just very much stuck with me.

BB: Hang on a sec. I'm sorry.

CH: That's okay--.

BB: There's, on--.

[Tape is turned off. New track is started and tape is turned back on.]

BB: Okay. You had one more thought about SNCC. Can you remember it? [Laughter]

CH: Oh, yeah, just--. Oh my god, there's so much that could be said about that gathering. I'll say two more things. Harry Belafonte was there, and he spoke at lunch. And he said--. And I was only there for the first two days, but he was the only speaker that really spoke to what is needed now. I think there was a lot--. I mean there was a lot of analysis and everything, but I think he was able to really very powerfully--. I mean he called people out. It wasn't just that he was lifting up the question of, "What are we doing now?" But he framed it in this way--. I mean it was fascinating. He's obviously such a revered part of the movement, and he's older. I think I had kind of lost track of how old he was at this point. I think he might be close to eighty. And people broke out into song when he got up there to speak, which was great, and then he just said, "I don't know why we're spending so much time talking about the past and how great we were. We all know that. We have to be talking about now." And so I think there's something about when someone with that level of credibility names that. So that's sort of a disjointed thought, but I mean I could connect it all, but it did--. It just seemed important.

And I guess the only other thing that feels really relevant to me right now is just the conference very much highlighted the role of white organizers. It wasn't the primary story, but it was in the mix of the story that was being told. And I think that was really inspiring to me,

that from the beginning that was such a clear intention for SNCC. And of course that's what ended up leading to its end was a lot of folks becoming more aligned with the Black Power movement, Black Nationalism. That needed to happen, too, you know? So it's all--. It all makes sense, but I think it was really important for me to see just a level of respect and mutuality between white and black organizers, and to some extent between women and men, although I think there's a critique there of women. There were some women who boycotted the conference, apparently. I think it was a small number, but some of the women that had been involved in SNCC, and I think it was because, you know, like most movements, there are the stars, even in SNCC. And there's probably more of them in SNCC than a lot of places. So anyway, I think there's a lot of questions there. I don't know enough about it to say more.

BB: How much came up about Ella Baker?

CH: Oh, quite a bit, yeah, quite a bit. I think she was--. I'm not sure. I think she's probably one of the few people that I have heard nothing but positive reflection and assessment of her as an organizer. I think it's very rare. There's just so little critique that ever gets made of her, I think justly. I think she just was a pillar of something.

BB: What were some of the calls to action in the present day that Harry Belafonte raised?

CH: Well, he's working a lot on prisoners' rights, and so he named that. He didn't get into a lot of specifics, and because I was only there for the first two days, I think might have gotten more into that afterwards, and I didn't--.

BB: Anything else you wanted to say?

CH: I don't think so.

BB: Okay. That's good. That's great. So do you want to talk about the, some thoughts

about how you've experienced the challenge of being a white woman and stepping into your power in appropriate ways, taking up different levels of authority and leadership?

CH: Yes, I do. I think the challenge of being a white person, first, in the work is about, for me, I'll say, is about being conscious of the multiple levels of relationship. I'm going to start that over because that's not really what I want to say.

BB: Take your time.

CH: It's funny. It's like I have the thought, but I don't know that I've really articulated it. And actually, I'll say I'm really aware of talking to you about this, Bridgette, because I feel like we might see some of this a little bit differently, and there's this tiny part of me that fears a little bit of--. It's not really judgment because I don't think of you at all as a judgmental person, but something. So I just wanted to name that. That's interesting. It just came up for me.

Okay. So I think as a white person who is taking up leadership in social justice work, I think there is a two-pronged challenge around race and oppression that never goes away and never can be ignored. And I think it's about being able to do two things well at the same time. And one of the things is to be fully aware and present to the dynamics of race and oppression and how they play out from the most subtle to the most gross levels. I think that it is easy to get complacent about, "Oh, we're all a beloved community," or, "We've done xyz diversity trainings." I mean these are the things we think of as--. We know we want to be conscious of all this, and we know that one or two or three trainings isn't enough, but I think we actually can subconsciously lull ourselves into feeling like, "Well, it kind of almost is enough, like I think I've kind of got that part down, and I'm respectful, and I have some kind of racial justice analysis, and I need people to trust me on that." These are just things that I've heard other

people say, and I've certainly thought myself.

So I do think on the one hand that there's no respite there, that we might want there to be, and the desire is real, and it's actually a really important longing, but the reality is there's no letting go of a fierce kind of ongoing attention around it. I think the other prong is to be able to recognize when a piece of work is being limited in its ability to flourish or move forward because it is stuck in a place where some conversation or assessment around identity or identity politics is holding it hamstrung. And this isn't just a tension for whites in leadership. I think it's a big tension for folks of color, and I have a number of friends of color that I've talked with about this a lot. And in some ways, I think it's probably harder for them to name it.

BB: Can you give an example?

CH: Yes, sure. The one that's coming to mind is so big, it would take a little while to explain. I don't know that that's worth talking about. What do you most want an example of?

BB: That piece where a process or a project or a good, important piece of work can get stuck around identity politics. I'm not sure I understand exactly what you mean. You could do, if it feels more comfortable, to make up a hypothetical situation.

CH: Oh, okay, sure.

BB: If that feels easier to give an example of that, that'd be good.

CH: Sure. I've been in multiple situations where at group processes, conferences or trainings, where the leadership is multi-racial, and something is offered in the context of the agenda, and either because it's offered with a little bit less thought than it could've been or an assumption about where the group is around a racial justice analysis, it's offered without naming, let's say, a particular power dynamic that is part of--. Let's see. This just gets really convoluted. [Sighs] I haven't ever tried to explain this in this way. Okay, let me try it again,

and I think I'll get a little more specific. I think it might be easier.

So I was part of a multi-racial leadership team that convened a conference around transformational practices in social justice work, and the emphasis was on illuminating how various practices are being used on the ground in grassroots organizing, different kinds of reflective and spiritual practices. And there was actually quite a strong racial justice analysis undergirding that. It wasn't fully articulated, so that was a mistake I think we made as a leadership team. And when one of the practices was being introduced by a biracial team, a white woman and an African American man, there was something about the way the practice was offered that really triggered a very small group of folks of color in the room, four or five people. And it was legitimate. Their concern and analysis was legitimate. The event was so triggering for them that it ended up becoming a much larger conversation than in some ways it really needed to be. And I think a lot of the folks of color in the room that I talked to, not part of that smaller group, but some of the folks on the leadership team and many of the other participants got really frustrated, as did many of the white folks.

And I think it's a place where we haven't yet learned how to acknowledge the pain that is just right underneath the surface and the minute anything seems like it could be racism or it could be appropriation, that that is a time to flag something and to just to really acknowledge and draw attention to it. And at the same time, my hope for us is that we can be whole enough people with our eyes on the prize that it doesn't have to bring an entire process to a grinding halt and have to shift it 180 degrees, which was not exactly what happened in this situation, but it happens a lot. It happens all the time. The reality is we're always going to make mistakes where racial justice is concerned. It's just part of human nature. White folks are ignorant still,

even the smartest of us, we're going to be ignorant. And we're going to be at different places in our analysis and our trust of each other's analysis. So I think for me I get really frustrated with our inability to just even at least see that dynamic so that we can make wiser decisions about where we want to put our attention, instead of--. I think sometimes the default position is, "This was a trigger. Something around identity was breached in a way, and now we have to deal with that." So I think we're getting better at it, and I think trust is a big underlying theme of it.

And I guess what I would say, and this is the part that I think is probably, I think a lot of people would agree with this but I think it's controversial to say it, it'd probably be controversial for people to hear it. I think at some point you have to decide what work you're actually interested in moving forward. And if the work that you're really interested in moving forward is making sure at every single step there's a huge dialogue where everyone feels okay about common understandings of race and analysis and oppression, that's fine. Just know that that's the work you're moving forward, and if there's another piece of work you want to move forward, it's not at all to imply that any of the other pieces get lost. I don't think they should get lost in any way, but is there a way to work through what arises around race and racism and still keep the work moving forward. So that's not very controversial, necessarily. I think there's a lot of pain attached to oppression, and it's a big question for me around how we heal from that in an ongoing way and how we keep moving multi-racial coalition work forward as a parallel journey.

So there are times where I want people, from my own perspective, I just want people to be more strategic, not that I don't want them to feel the pain that they're feeling, but I wish we could all step back and see the effects of our own process on the bigger group and the bigger

piece of work. And honestly, I mean, I don't--. This is nothing new. I think this is the core of what happens on the left, and why progressive organizing, while amazing on so many levels, I think this is often the rabbit hole that we go down. I think we haven't done enough. We haven't been diligent enough with doing our own work around race and oppression, and we haven't learned enough tools for--. I'm sort of losing my train of thought. Maybe you could ask me a question or we can talk about something else? I don't know.

BB: Well, it feels very exciting and I noticed myself going to, "Well, we've got to design this and that, and what about this and that."

CH: [Laughter]

BB: It's exciting.

CH: Yes.

BB: And if we had, if every person had a white caucus or a people of color caucus and they've got a mentor and they've got their spiritual practice, and we've got eight things in eight places where they know it'll be tended to, so the urgency might not totally every time have to--. Like people can say, "Okay, right now I will go with the flow of this agenda and container that you've created because I know my wounds, I've got other spaces for healing for them to be attended to." Or, "Our group agreement in the beginning was--." You say just what you said so beautifully. "We see this happen so enough, and can we make an agreement that if something triggers so many of us, we've got thirty minutes and we're going to do it, and at that time, either go into the couch room and keep doing it if you're still stuck, and you know you've got your eight groups, but we're going to honor the--." You know, things like that.

CH: Yes, yes, yes, totally. I think that's insightful, like what are the formats that would help us.

BB: And just the way you said it in three minutes about how that comes up all the time in these big--. But I have to say, and I've been with you in moments when those have come up in different, the Garrison Institute stuff and other moments, and I have such a sense of gratitude and awe and I try not to let it be envy, but how you so gracefully, and it doesn't--. Like you're--. I'm so conflict averse, and it triggers so much fear for me when there's raw pain, particularly around race. I'm not as scared around gender or around class, but race like really scares me. [Laughter] And I kind of--. All those triggers shut me down, but you can really hold that. And I've seen you be yelled at before when people, tears streaming--. You know what I mean? [Laughter]

CH: [Laughter]

BB: And you, through your practice, and it's like, "How do we get there? How do we get to a place where Claudia can, at least on the surface [Laughter] in a leadership role in a group, hold that?"

CH: Totally. Thank you for saying that. I think it is a lot about practice. We just did the Ripples training out here last week, a couple weeks ago, and there were things about it I would change, but I think it went really well, and I think one of the things I noticed in myself, and I said this at the end to the group, is that I'm not really scared of anything in a group. I've done enough group work. I've gotten a lot of training and I do have a strong practice. And that doesn't mean I don't have my moments. I have. In the situation I described to you earlier, I definitely had a moment of a little bit of meltdown on the side. And that's fine. I think that's part of it. [Laughter] Like, go meltdown, take care of yourself, come back. But I'm not fearful of people's pain, for the most part, and I have a lot of space for it.

I think what's really interesting as a white woman, and I'm really, I've been sitting with

this recently because I was talking to a friend in New York about it a few weeks ago, and I was mentioning how a lot of times I feel like I fall into a little bit of a Cinderella archetype. And I know I have a strong voice. I know I'm a strong leader. I know there are a lot of venues where I show up in a strong way, but there are situations where I tend to feel a little bit more like I'm in that Cinderella place, where I'm doing a lot of the backstage work. Of course, that's my own internalized thing, and I like a lot of that work, so Cinderella is probably not the best metaphor, but--. And so it's not that actually I mind doing the backstage work. It's more sometimes feeling so disrespected by what's going on onstage, and the players around me. And I was mentioning this to this friend of mine, and she's very steeped in re-evaluation counseling (RC). And she said to me that that is, it's a key pattern for white Jewish women. And that's something I didn't really want to look at, I still don't really want to look at, but I think she's got some wisdom around this. And I've just been sitting with it. Actually, she said it even more strongly. She said, "It's anti-Semitism."

BB: [Non-verbal reaction]

CH: I know. I was surprised. I don't want to talk about this for too much longer, but this is a core philosophy of re-evaluation counseling is that the ways people react to each other have a lot to do with identity and the patterns that are embedded in identity. So if you're an African American woman and I react to you in certain ways and relate to you in certain ways, there's a role of racism in that. So in any way that I might be disrespectful to you, racism is playing a part. And I think on that level it's easier for me to see that, in a way, when it comes to race. And it was much harder, it's still harder for me to see it in religious terms, but I'm open to it, so I'm just sitting with it. And I think there's lots of other interesting--. You know, there's the mother archetype, and that's not just for white women, obviously, at all, but women in

general in movement work, I think people can put you into a particular set of roles that are about filling certain needs in a group. And I don't even think those have to be a negative thing. It's just where's the awareness around it? Anyway, I think this is a whole other conversation.

BB: So, anything else? You'd started off with the question about how, some learnings or reflections or insights you've had about how white women in movement work step appropriately into their power and their leadership. Any other insights around that, lessons learned, advice for those thirsty for it?

CH: Which we'll get to.

BB: [Laughter]

CH: I don't know. I don't have any advice. I think, you know, I just--. I think it's so much about awareness. If we're talking about the intersection of identity and leadership, everybody has questions around that, no matter what your gender and race identity are, they're going to present particular questions in leadership roles. And I do think that awareness is, it's just--. It really comes down to that, in some ways. There was something in the way you asked the question that made me think of something. Hold on.

I think there's a paradox in taking up leadership, period. And I think the paradox is about being open and responsive and being clear when you need to be clear. And again, I think any identity, any combination of identities, is going to have their own relationship to the challenges of that paradox. It's a dynamic tension to be open and receptive and really honoring of what is bubbling up in a group or an organization, and at the same time, to also be able to offer clarity around what the task is for a particular group at any given time. And I'm using that word task very symbolically. So white women have their own relationship to that paradox and the archetypes that function for white women, which this is a pretty fascinating thing to

consider, there's the kind of--. In one schema, you have, there's the maid, the mother, and the crone. And this is one interesting way of thinking about how women show up in their leadership roles. Do they really lead with the maiden energy, that young, frolicking, almost seductive energy? Do they lead with the mothering energy, the nurturing, caretaking? Or do they lead with the crone energy, the elder, the wise woman energy? And of course, ideally, in our most holistic places, we actually want to be able to access all three of those because they all have something to offer at different times, and any group of people needs all three, and we need all three, but we're going to have one that's more dominant. So I think that's just one way.

I mean there's a million ways to think about it, but it's one way to be aware of, "Okay, what am I leading with right now, and how is the group--?" I mean groups use their leaders in really interesting ways, and they use their leaders in ways that we're really conscious of, that are very on-the-surface and clear and overt, and then they use leadership and leaders in other ways. There's so much projection that happens. All the issues that people don't want to deal with themselves. I mean this is human nature, right? If we have something that's arising in us, and we don't really want to pay attention to it, our tendency is going to be to project it onto somebody else. So for example, an African American woman and a white woman in a relationship, just hypothetically speaking, in a working relationship, issues arise, and you can imagine how much anger could arise in the context of a woman of color trying to do social change work in the world, let's say in some organizational context that is hierarchical and challenging in some way. But I think what I'm trying to say is still, the point is still there, and it's still really important, which is we have things that surface and if we don't want to look at them ourselves, we project them onto others. And I think this is why I think one of the tasks of leadership is to be continuously becoming a cleaner, clearer version of ourselves so that those

projections don't stick, because it's not like--. The other person isn't really doing anything wrong. It's just, it's part of a growth process. I see it all the time in myself when I do those projections, and they can be positive or negative. "I want to be like that person. I want to be that person." Or, "Here's this emotion I'm feeling. I don't want to deal with. I'm putting it onto that person." Anyway, so--.

BB: That was great. It's really interesting and insightful and fascinating. [Laughter]
That's great. It's so hard, isn't it? It's so hard to--. It's so complex. That's what I mean.

CH: It's really complex. There's so many different ways to talk about it.

BB: Right [Laughter] Pick one now and go with it.

CH: [Laughter] Yes.

BB: That's beautiful. So, yesterday in an email, I was asking you for some ideas about questions, and we don't have the printout or the email here, but I thought it was great. One of them was something about the "come to Jesus" moments when you have to make big choices or it's a big challenge, or I'm not sure what you meant, but just the title's fabulous. [Laughter]

CH: [Laughter] I know. I'm like appropriating that from the Christian tradition.

BB: [Laughter]

CH: So I think there are, for activists, I think there are these series of what I think of as "come to Jesus" moments, and it's definitely a phrase that I've learned from Christian friends, and I love it. And I actually mean it with a lot of reverence, so I think that it--. But I also get how I'm using it in this in a different way, so I can see there could be multiple reactions to it, but I think there are these moments where, for me, the essence I think of a "come to Jesus" moment is where you see a way that you're operating that you no longer can continue to--. Oh, my god. I'm like--. I'm not really--. Let me try it again. Sorry whoever's transcribing this and

editing this today. [Laughter] I'm not really--. I'm having a lot of do-overs. Okay, let me just think about it for a second.

Okay, so when I think about the essence of what I think a "come to Jesus" moment is, I don't know the traditional context in Christianity. What I think of is that it's a moment where people recognize something in Jesus, and it's the time for them to in some way turn their life over to that, to align themselves with that expression of God, and to make the decision to live a different way. That's my understanding of it. That could be way off. And so I think we have those moments in activism. In the lives of activists, these moments arise, and I think they're really powerful because I think those moments are about recognizing that things cannot continue as they have been, or that you cannot continue as you have been in the world. And it's a way of saying that something is not working for you anymore, or there's a behavior pattern that you are not going to run from anymore. It's not saying things are going to change, like right away, because I don't think that really happens very often. I do believe there are like lightning bolts that do happen, but I think it's much less frequent, but I think of it as a moment of recognition. And it's a recognition often of a piece of wisdom, and I think sometimes it's very rooted in historical context, and sometimes it's just the product of a particular moment in a situation where something unfolds.

I mean here's a very, I almost want to say mundane, except it's not mundane at all, but here's an example, be it sort of a more basic example, is the first time a white person decides to challenge racist language among their other white friends. So let's say you've been going along, and you've had this life, and you've been a decent person, and in general you haven't been--. You've been a decent person, and then something happens, and maybe you go through some process where you get opened up around difference and you learn something about

racism or you learn something about diversity, and then the next time you're with your uncle and he says something offensive, that's a "come to Jesus" moment, right? You have to make a decision there, and it wasn't a decision you had to make a year ago. A year ago, you might've noticed that the language was offensive, but it's your uncle, and you don't really have any idea how you would say anything, so, "Pass the potatoes," you know? But now, a year later, you've thought about this more. You've been working more with folks. You're building an understanding, and this is one of those moments where internally, and I think there's different levels of consciousness of it, but it's almost like internally this is going to make you or break you, like your ability in that moment to in some way address the comment, the offensive comment that's been said, is going to say something about who you are in the world, and you have to make a decision. So that's an example of something.

And I think they happen all the time, and I think they largely happen where whatever our habitual ways of being or working have been get challenged, and we need to look at what it is we're actually doing, and are we willing to keep doing that, if it's not really working. So I think they play out personally, like when you have realizations, for example, in an abusive relationship that you have a "come to Jesus" moment and you realize you can't stay in that relationship anymore. And that doesn't mean you're out a day later. It means you start looking for the way out, and you start looking for the support and the help and the protection. That's that on a personal, interpersonal relationship level, obviously with bigger societal implications. And then I think they happen in organizations where organizations and coalitions have to decide who they're going to be. I feel like in some ways there's something about this post-Obama election time that's been another "come to Jesus" moment for the left that we're still playing with because it's very tricky. And so I think, to me, the "come to Jesus" moment

for me is how are we going to actually offer support to this president in the things he's doing well and be able to challenge him in the places where the administration is screwing up and actually not honoring the values that he campaigned on. There has to be both, but I don't think we've really reckoned with it overtly, so we're not actually doing it very well. So that is what I mean. Is that--?

BB: Yes, that's--. Yes.

CH: Clear.

BB: Can I--? Would you be willing to talk about a personal and recent "come to Jesus" moment for yourself?

CH: Yes, definitely. It's so interesting, these interviews. There's a very therapeutic element to them and like right now I'm sort of like, 'Oh, I could tell that story, which would be very personal.' And then I'm like, "But is that going to be useful to people?"

BB: I have full faith that it will be, in case you were asking.

CH: Okay, no, that's good. Yes, this is very personal, but I think I could talk about it. So in terms of my own "come to Jesus" moments, I've had many. I remember having one the first time I practiced yoga at Kripalu, which is the yoga center in western Massachusetts where I did my teacher training. I definitely felt like there was a door that opened, which is probably another way to describe these, actually. They're threshold moments. And that if I didn't start to walk through the door, I was going to regret it the rest of my life. So that was one that just as an example of something that happened a long time ago.

More recently, since we started here at The Stone House almost three years ago now, my leadership has been a really fascinating cocktail of different ingredients, some of which are awesome and visionary and really empowering, I think, for staff, a lot of autonomy, a lot of

excitement and a lot of integrity, particularly in terms of following things through and building with people. I mean it's been slow, but anyway. There's been some really challenging behaviors on my part as well because I have been so overwhelmed. I think that this was so much bigger than I knew it was going to be when we decided to buy this place and turn it into what it has become, what it's still becoming.

And the realities of the management challenges and the financial challenges, coupled with all the possibilities and how you continue to wade through all the possibilities, created so much anxiety for me. And I have managed that anxiety in a number of different ways, some healthier than others. And I've tried a lot of different things. You know, it's very humbling to realize that. And in December, I got to a place where my anxiety level was just so high and the toll that it was starting to take on other people here was really problematic. And I could see some of it. I'm not someone to turn a blind eye to stuff like that, but I was blind to some of it. And it was obviously taking a huge toll on myself, as well. And it got to a place where, for a lot of different reasons, different things that happened, I got to a place of real, just real vulnerability and real, almost like a breakdown, really, where I just wasn't functioning anymore. And I ended up leaving for a while, three weeks or so. I mean I made really good decisions around that, even through the haze of what was happening for me internally and mentally. And I tried to do it with the least amount of impact on people here, but it had already gotten so bad that there wasn't much I could do to completely cushion it or prevent impact.

And as a result, there was conversation between staff and a couple board members. The board sort of presented me with this--. It wasn't really an ultimatum, but it was a really clear directive, in terms of my need to take better care of myself and to be able to show up in the role. So that was the beginning. I mean that's all part of this moment, but the real "come to Jesus"

moment for me in it was just making the decision that I could stay, that I could come back and function in my executive director role. And I'm really glad that I got to that point where I had to ask myself that question because I think part of me wanted an out, part of me wanted to escape, part of me wants to go live in an ashram somewhere. That's real.

Part of me wants to not be a director anymore, like doesn't really want to manage people, doesn't want to have this level of burden around fundraising that I have, which is huge. Really, I'm getting to a place in some ways where what I really want to do is write and teach and help people in their work without having to run an organization. But I did have this moment in January, and luckily I have two really great coaches in my life, and conversations with them and a couple of friends, and it was really clear to me that I did want to stay here, not forever, but--. And I was able to come back and things have been really different since then for me. And I was able to apologize to one staff person in particular, the person I'm closest to here, and that felt like just important, you know?

So, that's that kind of moment where you recognize the toll that something has taken and you recognize the toll that something has taken on yourself, the people around you, the bigger work you're trying to do, and you make a decision that you actually have to be able to do it differently in order to keep going. And then once that switch flips internally, I think that the actual action and behavior flows from there, slowly. It's slow. I think there's no--. This is why it's different from accepting Jesus because I do think, for a lot of people, it seems like that's a very--. It is more of a lightning bolt thing, but I don't think this is, necessarily, usually. I think it's a slow unfolding.

BB: Thanks.

CH: Yeah.

BB: The other thing that you had mentioned, and we've talked about it briefly, was the arc of one's life. Are there insights around that that you want to name?

CH: Yeah. It's funny, it sort of picks up right from what I was just saying, in a way. I mean I think that--. There's a question for me of how we make decisions about the chapters of our lives. Of course, there are many things that unfold organically and then there are things that we think about ahead of time and we take action, you know, steps in a particular direction that we want to go in. And I think for me there's an interesting question that's beginning to emerge about what is my best use in the world. And then there's this immediate secondary question, best use for whom? Is it my best use in terms of what's going to make me the happiest? And then do I trust that that will have the best possible impact rippling out? I think that's true. Do I also have to consider my role in the larger collective story because I am connected to all these other individuals and groups of people and the flow of humanity and the arc of history? And that's true, too. So it's another one of these paradoxes or dynamic tensions.

BB: Under, if the question is: where does your joy need that? Where does your joy need that second piece?

CH: Totally. I think that is a big part of the question, for sure, and where you feel like you have room to make different decisions than the ones you've made, or new decisions. And I'm just--. I'm really interested in the number of "shoulds" that still pop up in my head, a person with actually a relative amount of freedom. I have a lot of freedom compared to most people on the planet. I have no economic concerns whatsoever. I have no immediate family members I have to care for. I'm still relatively healthy enough. There's just very few things I can't do, if I want to do them. And of course, there's a funny burden that comes with that amount of choice, always, but it can be paralyzing. And that's not really my issue. It's more--.

I think it has something to do with hitting midlife because I'm going to be forty-four in July, so in a couple of months, and when I turned forty, I mean forty is it's own funny thing, as a woman turning forty without kids and not married, partnered, et cetera, that was the story of turning forty. I think there's something about approaching forty-five where you know that your life is at least half over, most likely. And so I've been--. I haven't been dwelling on that, but I've been aware, in a good way, and it's kind of like, "You know what--?" And who knows, obviously, right, how much time any of us have. That goes without saying, but there is something really great about midlife.

And I had a friend, mentor say this to me, particularly for women, where it's like you just do not want to get caught up in bullshit anymore, like you just don't want to--. You want to be very clear about how you're using your time, and you want to step in more deeply to what you know to be true about who you are and what your best use is and what brings you joy and where that's valuable to the world. And I think this goes back to being a woman, and I'm sure there's a role of whiteness in this, too, but where there's so many, still, so much socialization around what women should be and how they should be. And I think we've undone a good amount of that and a lot of it still exists and I think it makes it harder to sort of chart your own course. And in some ways I'm like, 'God, I'm already so off the grid anyway, of mainstream womanhood in America, right?' [Laughter] But I don't really see it that way. I look at the people whose lives are even more alternative than me, or the people that I really look up or I feel like are really creating a path for themselves that is really authentic. And that's ultimately what I'm really interested in right now is what's my authentic path. And I know it's not being an executive director, for example. So then once you know that, you have to make decisions about what's the transition look like, and what's the timeframe around that, and who are you

mentoring to step into what, et cetera. I think that the most heartbreaking thing for me, just in terms of like a person's trajectory, is to see older folks who are either really bitter or really complacent because of the lives that they haven't led and the things they haven't gotten to do. In some ways, I feel like the more privileged people are, the more this becomes an issue. There's like some weird entitlement and then lack of fulfillment of the entitlement that I just find really fascinating and really heartbreaking. I feel like there was something else in my head when I wrote the question. I want to see if I can think of that. But maybe you have a question. I don't know. [Whispers:] Are we almost done with my interview?

BB: Yeah, that was really it. I mean that was the last one, so my last question was going to be: is there anything else that pops up in your heart, head, spirit as a--?

CH: I don't know if we talked about this before. I feel like we might have, but I think the last thing maybe I want to say something about is--. Again, I search for the words. There's a Buddhist phrase I heard a long time ago, before I even really started a meditation practice. And it's just very simple – to see all beings with compassionate eyes. And it just stuck with me because it's so beautiful and simple and, wow, if we all just did that, right? But I think I'm really aware of the challenges and the beauties of living into that and how my ongoing quest for that, how that's brought so much goodness into my life and so much amazement and some challenges, too, really juicy challenges, but there's ways in which I feel like I've just become a really big tent under which many different things happen or many different people gather or many different ideas float around. And there's ways that I'm starting to feel very stretched by that. And I think--. It's not quite being a bridge, but I think about almost like a figure with just their limbs being pulled in different directions. That's not really it either. I might not be able to get to this. Let me try one more time. It's just--.

It's sort of almost like being a rubber band, a little bit, where you put yourself in a new situation and you stretch, and then you're in another new situation and you stretch some more, in another new situation, and you stretch more. And I feel like I've been doing that non-stop for so long, in so many different, so many different ways. And I think a lot of people have, probably in ways they don't realize. For me, Northerner moving to the South, raised Jewish, living in the, more of a, the Christian part of the world with these practices that are very rooted in Eastern tradition, running an organization that has very multi-racial staff and a real commitment to that, with many different things happening in the organization, and just like, stretch a little more, stretch a little more. My Myers-Briggs type is--. Its an INFP, for whatever value that is, but I'm constantly operating outside of my type, so like I'm an introvert constantly operating as an extrovert. I'm an intuitive, but I'm always needing to sense with my senses, like, "Okay, what's going on around here?" I'm more of a feeler, but a lot of my work here requires just approaching things more from a thinking perspective. And so there's another stretch, like operating so much out of type, it just takes a lot of energy. Even--. I mean it's almost ironic, but I grew up in this like very upper middle-class lifestyle, and I'm not living that lifestyle anymore, which for the most part is fine, you know? But there's that stretch there, too, and then re-engaging with my family and the class crossing that happens a little bit, very minor, but--.

So, anyway, it's something about how much a person can continue to stretch in any particular direction before that rubber band just snaps. And that's even--. Yeah, so there's more around that, but I think that's good for now, probably. I don't know why that just came to mind, but--. I think it's because when I think about the activists that I really respect, I think they have a really good--. They have a good balance of stretch and whatever its opposite would be, in the

rubber band metaphor.

BB: Stretch and rest.

CH: Stretch and rest. That's what I thought of actually, yeah.

BB: Or stretch and being settled.

CH: Yes.

BB: Stretch and comfort zones. [Laughter]

CH: Right, right. So, that's it.

BB: That's a nice hope for your rubber-band self. [Laughter]

CH: Yes.

BB: So this is always--. It's always such an awkward--. The "thank you" at the end of the recording, and I think this one feels even deeper because it's the last one of this that I'm going.

CH: Wow.

BB: And I love that. It's a beautiful way to end, and it's just so profound. And there aren't the right words to talk about the ways that I honored this and the faith I have that this is going to be useful for movement work. I just do, you know. And the gift that it is, that you all are, and the vulnerability of your stories on tape for the world. Like, good Lord, you know? It's like showing a part of your body you're self-conscious about or something. And who knows will go look at the photo for the rest of your life? [Laughter]

CH: [Laughter]

BB: So it's so generous and I feel really grateful. Thanks a lot.

CH: Yes, thank you for asking me. I feel like it's been a really, really rich process for me. I sort of suspected it would be because it's powerful to talk about yourself in this kind of

way. We don't do it often at all. And I just think that you hold it so gracefully. It's been such a pleasure, you know, hard at times and draining in a particular way, but your skill and presence, I don't know. I can't really imagine it being any better, like having this kind of situation be any more comfortable. So, I think it's--. And I think the whole project is amazing. I'm really honored to be in the mix. I was really surprised when you asked me, because I look at the other people in the group, you know, right, and I'm like, "But look at all those people. They've really done things." So whatever. That's just my thing, but thank you for asking me to be part of it.

BB: Thank you, Claudia.

END OF INTERVIEW