

Frank Goldsmith '67 Oral History Interview

Interview Conducted by
Severine Stier
and
Dahlia Krutkovich
March 7, 2019

Collection: Davidson College Archives

Title: Frank Goldsmith oral history interview, 2019 March 7

Description: Frank Goldsmith '67 reflects on his student years at Davidson, a period of time that preceded his eventual conversion to Judaism. Goldsmith speaks to how conservative a climate Davidson was in the mid-60s, the elimination of mandatory Vesper services, and the way the Religion department fostered critical inquiry about Christianity. A central figure in student activism at Davidson, Goldsmith also describes organizing with SSOC, his outrage with the Linden Affair as a young alumnus, and his later involvement with Carolina Jews for Justice.

Biography: Frank Goldsmith was born in Marion, North Carolina, and following his graduation from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Law School, later practiced law in Buncombe County. He graduated from Davidson in 1967 with a degree in French and studied for a year at the Université de Montpellier. He is an army veteran and an active member of Carolina Jews for Justice.

Interview Date: 2019-03-07

Interview History:

Interviewer: Severine Stier and Dahlia Krutkovich
Transcriber: Taylor Drake
Editors: Dahlia Krutkovich and Frank Goldsmith
Reviewed by Frank Goldsmith

Preferred Citation: Transcript, Frank Goldsmith oral history interview, 2019 March 7, by Dahlia Krutkovich and Severine Stier. Davidson College Archives, Davidson College. Online: [web address of cited transcript] (accessed [Date of download or review of web page]).

Setting Description: Zoom call with Frank Goldsmith in Asheville, North Carolina and Dahlia Krutkovich and Severine Stier at Davidson College, Davidson, North Carolina.

Transcript Notes: The following transcript has been edited for brevity and clarity.
FG: Frank Goldsmith
DK: Dahlia Krutkovich
SS: Severine Stier

Severine Stier: We are recording this zoom chat, because we want to preserve this interview in the college archives. And before we like before we do that, we do want to articulate some of what I mean, we're going to send you a formal form.

Dahlia Krutkovich: A release.

SS: A release form that will basically indicate whether or not you're comfortable with us preserving the either the video or the audio or both for the college archives, for like ever.

Frank Goldsmith: That depends on how I do! [\[Laughing\]](#)

SS: Okay, so I'll send that to you after that's just a formality. But we are recording this if that's alright with you.

FG: Yes, yes.

DK: For more formality, I'm required to read this bit at the beginning here. So, the recording of this interview will be made and the transcription will be added to the Davidson College archives.

These materials will be made available for research by scholars for scholarly publication and for other related research purposes consistent with Davidson's mission and regulated according to any restrictions placed on their use by the interviewee or interviewer.

The names of the interviewers are Severine Stier and Dalia Krutkovich. The name of the narrator is Frank Goldsmith. The location of the interview, we're in Davidson. Are you in Asheville, sir?

FG: Well, technically, I'm in Fairview, which is just outside of Asheville, so [a rural community in Buncombe](#) County.

DK: Fair enough.

FG: Asheville is close enough.

DK: The date is March 7, 2019. The purpose of this interview is to preserve the testimonials of Jewish students, or Jewish alumni of Davidson College, and I'm going to ask for your oral consent for this to be recorded.

FG: I consent.

DK: Wonderful.

SS: Okay, so just to start things off where, where were you? How did you learn about Davidson? Where are you originally from? And what was your relationship with Judaism like before you arrived here?

FG: Okay. Well, that's a number of questions.

I grew up in Marion, North Carolina, which is a small town. It's the county seat of McDowell County. It's not far from Asheville. I don't know if you know where Marion is, but it's [in McDowell County](#).

I had an uncle who attended Davidson, and I think that's why my interest was [sparked](#) in attending Davidson. So, I decided to apply and got in. The other schools I applied to were the Citadel, so I was infinitely happier at Davidson than I think I would have been at the Citadel; and also UNC. I thought Davidson offered a superior education to both of them, most likely. So, that's why I decided to go there. I probably learned about the school from my uncle, or my father learned about it from him, and they decided that that's where I should go.

In terms of Judaism, the interesting thing is that I was not Jewish then. I may have mentioned this in an email to someone, but, I'm a Jew by choice. I had done a lot of reading about religions. I had gone through this [odyssey](#) in high school of becoming an atheist after I read Bertrand Russell's *Why I'm not a Christian*, which [was](#) an influential book [for me](#). And I read [back then](#) a book by Gordon W. Allport, who was a sociologist, called *The Nature of Prejudice*, and then I began just reading about religions. [I](#) read about a lot of them, and the one that resonated with me the most was Judaism.

I grew up in a small town where there was only one other Jewish kid in high school. Well, I shouldn't say [“other”](#)— I was not one at that point— but his name was Steve Goldstein; he became a lawyer and practices in Asheville, although he's retired now. And he was a seat ahead of me in the high school band. We both played [cornet](#), and he was really good.

And so, there was not a huge Jewish community or a lot of ways to learn firsthand, experientially, about Judaism. I went to temple [in Asheville](#) one time in high school with [a](#) friend from Old Fort, which is an even smaller community. But by the time I got to Davidson, my thoughts had gelled so much that apparently, I was identified [as Jewish](#).

I must have self-identified as Jewish when I went to Davidson, because I don't know how else the school would have known to contact me with this project.

I don't know how it is now, but we had 12 fraternities, and 90 some percent of the students were in fraternities. It was all male. This was in 1963, when I went there, and my nickname in my fraternity was Rabbi.

DK: Wait, sorry—

FG: It was sort of jocular. It was said maybe in a teasing way because my interest in an affiliation with Judaism was well known enough.

So, that's how I was known to some people. And the other day, I had occasion to be going through a bunch of memorabilia in my office attic down in Marion. I left that law firm, and I'm still going through stuff and trying to sort things out. And I found this trove of letters from an English pen pal I started writing to when I was in the sixth grade, Mavis. And I found a letter she had written to me at my Davidson P.O. box in 1964. I don't remember the month. It would either have been in the second half of my freshman year or the beginning of my sophomore year. The envelope was addressed to "Rabbi Frank Goldsmith, P. O. Box 973, Davidson, NC." Mavis had a good sense of humor. I say that only because it's some evidence that indeed I did identify with Judaism when I came to Davidson. That being said, there really were no more Jewish students then at Davidson than there had been in my high school. I remember Arnie Goodstein from Charleston, who was a year ahead of me, but honestly cannot remember anyone else who was Jewish. At that time, there was no Jewish presence on campus. Nobody really to relate to about it.

And to sort of accelerate a little bit, I spent my junior year in France, in Montpellier, France, and I joined L'Union des Étudiants Juifs de Montpellier, and I worked on a French-speaking kibbutz the year after that in the Negev, in Israel. It was a phenomenal experience.

That's as much connection with Judaism as I then had.

DK: Of course.

FG: But I can I can tell you more about that odyssey if you're interested in it later on.

DK: The reason I had that reaction to your being called "Rabbi" was because part of our project has been looking through every copy of the *Davidsonian*, looking for instances of Jewish life, or mentions of Jewish people, attitudes towards them, et cetera.

Anyway, there's an *Around the Frats* column, I think where KA wrote about "Rabbi", and I wasn't sure to what they were referring.

FG: KA wrote about "Rabbi"?

DK: It might have been SAE, actually. I don't know.

FG: I was in Sigma Nu.... So, I was not in KA or SAE. And I have no idea.

DK: I might be misremembering, but I do remember someone being referred to as "Rabbi." And I remember taking a note of it and thinking, "I can't imagine this is good." But I'm glad it's a nickname, rather than something else.

FG: If it was in the period from '63 to '67, I don't know anybody else who was identified as "Rabbi."

SS: Other than yourself.

FG: Beside me. It's kind of ironic, because I've gone on to become a Torah reader and a leader of services and the president of a synagogue. I'm in an organization called Carolina Jews for Justice. In kidding, they sometimes call me "Rabbi." It's a social justice organization. Sometimes I'm asked to give a reflection at the beginning of a meeting, and often I pull something out of Jewish text. And so they call me "the Rabbi" for that. But I'm by no means a rabbi.

DK: Nonetheless, I was just wondering if you could just establish a timeline for us. Would you say that your religious exploration really came into view late in high school, or early at Davidson?

FG: I think probably by my sophomore year in high school.

I had early on decided that Christianity was not for me. I just could not theologically accept a lot of its premises. And so that led me to do all this reading, and I read about other religions as well. I read about Unitarianism, which seemed to be fairly neutral about some of the things I was concerned about. There were also other motivations. I dated a Catholic girl for a while, while I was at Davidson, and so I would attend Mass, but I never really participated. It just did not resonate with me. So I think my focus on Judaism really was established by late high school, I would say, as a product of, of just exploration and reading.

DK: And the years you were at Davidson, were '63 to '67?

FG: Correct. I graduated in '67. And there were some little intriguing connections with the family. I don't know that I have any familial connection with Judaism. But among the books that we retrieved from my grandmother's house — well, she was really an adoptive grandmother, but a blood relative — there was a book in Hebrew, printed in London in the late 1800s, and that always fascinated me.

Later, when I began to be able to read Hebrew, I discovered it was a New Testament, written in Hebrew, which is really odd.

SS: That is wild. So you started this religious exploration early on in high school. Were you worried about coming to Davidson since at the time it had, and continues to have such a connection to the Presbyterian faith? Did that at all influence your decision? Were you worried about being able to explore your Jewish identity here?

FG: No, I don't think that really entered my mind to tell you the truth, because it was such a nascent, undeveloped attraction to Judaism.

At that point, had been to temple one time in my life. I was certainly was not observant or practicing at all. I came out of Marion High School. It's a small high school, not many people went to Davidson, and I think I was flattered to have been admitted, so I don't think I was very concerned about that aspect of it. There were other reasons why I felt like I may or may not fit in.

I was already sort of a liberal, if you will, and a progressive kind of person, and Davidson was a pretty conservative place back then.

SS: Really?

FG: I know. You're astounded to hear that?

DK: When you said the Citadel, I was just thinking about the compulsory ROTC service. But...

FG: Well, we had that, and this was during the Vietnam War, so you had to take the first two years of ROTC. And after that, virtually everyone elected to take advanced, as they call it, ROTC and get a commission because otherwise, you were going to be a private. And so I did that as well.

DK: And I'm fairly certain mandatory Vespers [services] were abolished by the time you were at Davidson, but do you remember if that was the case?

FG: They actually were abolished during my time at Davidson.

DK: Oh really?

FG: So when I first went there, in my first two years, we had mandatory Vespers and daytime chapel.

I suppose a synagogue would have qualified had there been one anywhere near. But it was like class, you got a certain number of cuts. So it was very strict in that regard. It was very Presbyterian.

You could not possess alcohol on campus.

I remember there was a guy who was driving back onto campus with his fraternity brother right beside him, who was on the honor court. But they stopped suddenly, and a liquor bottle rolled out from under the seat. The fraternity brother felt obliged to turn him in, and the driver, a senior, didn't get to graduate with his class.

So, I spent my junior year in France, as I said. By the time I came back, it had all changed. Vespers was no longer mandatory, neither was church attendance.

But I also remember how the students rebelled, before it was abolished. They would wear t-shirts and shorts [to services]. Then the administration demanded we wear ties. So, students would tie a tie around their t-shirt. Or they would hold up a newspaper and read it. There were just these little ways of rebelling against this enforced Christian conformity that we were connected to.

DK: Would you say your France was formative for your Jewish identity? I know Montpellier has a pretty robust Jewish community. By the time you came back from France, were you more serious about actively practicing or identifying as Jewish? And was that possible at Davidson?

FG: It wasn't really possible at Davidson, then. I certainly was more engaged. This whole evolution has been a gradual process during all my more youthful years.

I suppose it was gradual until I became adult and finally decided that I wanted to formally convert, because I felt that I was something of an imposter.

When I'd been in this Jewish organization in Montpellier, I was not Jewish. I then worked on that French-speaking kibbutz and really wanted to make Aliyah; but before converting, I was not really Jewish. I thought I would come back and finish at Davidson, and then I would go back to Israel. It was a wonderful experience, working on the kibbutz that summer in Israel. All of that certainly had a positive influence in my engagement with Judaism.

It even affected my choice of branch in the army. Most people from Davidson chose non-combatant branches, like the Quartermaster Corps, or the Adjutant General Corps, or Military Intelligence, or whatever, and I chose the Infantry. I asked to be sent to the Desert Warfare Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, because I thought there would be a war in the Middle East. And there was, in 1967, the summer I graduated. But it was over so quickly.

So at the time, I was so committed even to the point of wanting to fight for Israel....

DK: I would love to ask you more questions about your personal experience, but we're limited by the scope of this project to thinking about Davidson as an institution. On that note, was Max Polley employed by around your time?

FG: Was Max Polley? Yes. I loved Max. He was a wonderful professor.

DK: Were there people on campus that could help you explore this identity? It was almost impossible to practice, from what we've heard. Being observantly Jewish in the '60s and '70s, as far as keeping Shabbat or even keeping Yom Kippur, keeping Passover, would have been impossible.

But were there people on campus, you could go to, like Max Polley?

FG: There really weren't. Max Polley would have been a good person to go to, and I really liked him and had a good relationship with him. I don't recall that we talked about Judaism.

There was a professor, a younger professor whose name escapes me right now. He taught a sort of non-credit course in Hebrew, biblical Hebrew, and I took it. It was just an elective. Everybody else in the class was going into the ministry, save me.

I took that course. I had learned a bit of Hebrew when I was in Israel and, and wanted to pursue that [learning more Hebrew]. And so, I talked with him, and he certainly knew that I was not headed for the ministry, and rather, I was coming at it from a Jewish perspective. But I don't remember any conversations with any of the other religion faculty. And I actually had more hours in religion than in my minor, which was German (my major was French).

Davidson had such a strong department in religion, and I found Biblical Studies particularly fascinating.

DK: And this was during the period where religion, professors in religion were required to have not an MDiv, but were required to have been ordained essentially?

FG: I knew they had to be Presbyterian. I wasn't sure they had to be ordained. That doesn't surprise me at all. I know all the faculty had to be Presbyterian. I remember after I graduated, there was an issue with a Jewish professor who had been offered a position.

SS: We were going to ask about the Linden Affair.

FG: You know about that? I wrote a blistering letter to Davidson. One of my classmates resurrected it not long ago and sent it to me. I'd sort of forgotten about it. I really took them to task for how they either wouldn't hire him or wouldn't put him on a tenure track. I don't remember the issue.

DK: Do you remember how you heard about the Linden affair?

FG: I don't know whether I heard about it from a classmate or not.

I have a lot of good friends, who were my classmates – we gather annually to go swamp canoeing for the last 30-some years. They're a great bunch of folks. Most of them had become civil rights lawyers like I was, but some did other things. And it may have been one of those guys, because most of them are from Charlotte. They're closer to Davidson, so they must have heard about it. But somehow, I heard – I don't know if it was in the *Charlotte Observer*. I doubt Davidson itself sent out anything then.

SS: I don't think they did. It was in the *Washington Post*. And the *New York Times*.

FG: Yeah, yeah. So anyhow, somehow, I heard about it, and maybe if I look back at the letter that will reveal how I heard about it.

I was pretty outraged about that.

And I mentioned working with Carolina Jews for Justice now, and which is a fairly new organization. We were founded in 2013, in the Triangle, and the Asheville chapter was founded in early 2014. And one of our main focuses is antisemitism.

We also engage in other areas of social justice from a Jewish perspective: economic justice, racial justice, immigration rights, voting engagement, LGBTQ rights, and the intersection between multicultural hatred (antisemitism, racism, Islamophobia), and white nationalism, all of those things. So, I was pretty attuned to things of that nature.

SS: Do you remember getting a response to your letter?

FG: I don't remember getting a response. I may be able to find out whether I did or not, if I look where the letter is.

It may have been some sort of “thank you for your views, we'll take them into consideration” response. I don't know. Something meaningless.

SS: Interesting. I do want to know a little bit more about the about the surrounding area. Did you hear of Jewish people in Davidson? Even though there weren't any Jewish students at the school, did you have any contacts in the Charlotte area while you were here?

FG: No, none, none at all.

SS: Okay.

FG: Yeah. I felt completely isolated. I think I could have I could have changed that, though.

I probably could have reached out and searched for connections in Charlotte. I don't think there were any connections at Davidson.

In fact, I was back there for my 50th reunion a couple of years ago. I was astounded to learn there was a Hillel at Davidson.

I just did not know that. And I talked with Carol Quillen about some of this, either at a reunion or somewhere else. And she was welcoming and positive and hopeful that things had changed, because I described a little bit to her about how things had been back in the day.

SS: And as an alum, have had you heard of any other incidents of antisemitism at Davidson, aside from Linden? And then we do want to talk about the recent unmasking of the Neo-Nazis this past fall. Had you heard of any other incidents?

FG: No. I have not heard of them. You know, I don't doubt that there have been things that have occurred. But I don't often go back to the campus. As I said, I went back for my 50th. And part of that was because for whatever reason, they decided to give me the Distinguished Alumni Award. And so I enjoyed seeing my classmates, but I'm not a regular visitor to the campus.

If I'm down that way, I may stop off and buy a new t-shirt or sweatshirt, if I've worn the other one out.

So, I don't I really don't know. And I need to be better informed about the more recent episode that you're talking about. One of my Charlotte friends did tell me about that. But I don't know the details. I would be interested to know.

DK: We can definitely talk about it at the end of the oral history. Just getting back to what it was like to be a student at Davidson who questioned whether or not he wanted to be a Presbyterian. Were there other students on campus who were going through similar journeys?

FG: Yeah, I think so.

And it was not just a matter of my questioning my affiliation, I clearly was not only rejecting being Presbyterian (I had not been brought up as a Presbyterian), but I was rejecting being Christian at all. I just pretty clearly decided that was not for me.

And I think having done the reading I had done before getting to Davidson prepared me somewhat for what freshmen were taught in Bible class when they got there. Because I think a lot of Davidson students, at least at that time, came to Davidson fairly naive about religion and fairly certain of their beliefs from a pretty conservative Christian point of view, at least theologically, and maybe politically as well.

And I know that, for a lot of my classmates, they were really shaken by what they learned in the religion classes about the strands of authorship of the Bible, and some of the contradictions; the historical, biblical scholarship approach was new to them. And I think it undermined, for some of them, the foundations of their faith.

And for me, that certainly was not the case. I just really relished all of that learning and embraced it. I think it's because, not intentionally, I had prepared myself for that, by the reading that I had done. So, I think there were a lot of students who were questioning their faith. I think that's probably not unusual, when one goes to college. You know, I think there are a lot of changes that take place.

I don't know of anyone else who specifically became interested in Judaism. Or rather, I think there were some who became agnostic or atheist, but I don't know of anyone else who turned towards Judaism. I would love to have found them.

DK: We've talked to some Catholic people, professors, even, who have said to us, essentially, "I was seen as a pagan when I came to Davidson." Did you feel like your experience paralleled, for instance, the Catholic girl you dated?

FG: Yeah, my [Catholic] friend is somebody I had known from the Asheville area, and truthfully, I think that's an accurate comparison.

There were there were just about as few Catholics in the town I grew up in as there were Jews, and popular attitudes towards Roman Catholics were generally negative, at least at the time I grew up, and I think they probably still are. I don't know that that's something she and I ever really discussed.

Yeah, I think I think that's an apt comparison. One of my very good friends in high school was Catholic. He was picked on for it, and I took up for him and befriended him. He has never forgotten that. I mean, to this day, he lives in California, but he reminds me that he saw me as a friend when a lot of others did not approach him.

DK: [That](#) builds into my next question, which is, how did you feel like your non-Jewish peers understood or imagined Judaism at the time at Davidson?

FG: I don't think they had much of a clue. And mind you, I was not a really good font of knowledge for them, either, at that point.

I was still learning. At that time, I really didn't know Hebrew. I didn't know much about ritual observance or practice. I didn't attend synagogue. [So](#) I've evolved a lot and learned a lot.

And I think my peers did not know much about Judaism at all. I think that's why, when they called me, "Rabbi," it was a little bit teasing. It wasn't pejorative, but it was joking and teasing, like, "[Isn't](#) that kind of odd? Frank is interested in Judaism. Let's call him 'Rabbi.'"

SS: And we spoke about Vespers, were there other traditions, religious traditions, or even broader structures that were present at Davidson while you were here, that were kind of ingrained in the everyday or even within fraternity life?

FG: I don't think so much in fraternity life. It was more modeled after a Roman orgy or something [laughs]. That's not quite true — you couldn't have alcohol and there were no women.

I don't know that it was a particularly religious atmosphere in the fraternities.

But Davidson was imbued with Christianity. And in the religion classes, I think there was an assumption that when they talked about the Old Testament, it was pointing towards the New Testament, even among these professors that I so much admired. They were brilliant men.

You know, there was still that Christian take on things, even though it was done with a very scholarly view. As far as school life, the church was pretty prominent on campus, what with Vespers and daytime chapel as a student assembly. It wasn't always a religious theme, but periodically, there would be some religious component to these mandatory assemblies.

DK: Right. People saying prayers before meetings, praising Jesus, that seems to be just baked into the everyday experience of Davidson.

FG: It was probably so common that I didn't take note of it.

SS: That makes sense.

FG: And I have no doubt that things like that grated on me. I didn't think it was right. But what am I [going to](#) do? I'm at Davidson. It's a Presbyterian school, and I'm not going to change that by myself.

DK: Just to be as explicit as possible, and this is a question we ask everyone: did you see any overt antisemitism in the town or at the college?

FG: If there were, it was just kind of like offhand jokes, or somebody saying something unthinkingly, probably not realizing or intending that it could be taken as antisemitic. I mean, it was a very different time for Jews in America. And I'm sure that Davidson being what it was back then, nobody had really interacted with Jews, unless they were from Charleston, or Atlanta.

I don't have any specific memory of antisemitic incidents while I was there. Part of that may be because there were no Jews. And there was hardly any point then to saying something antisemitic. Because who would the antisemites be talking to?

If I were able just to turn back the clock and replay everything, something would probably strike me as being intolerant. But I don't recall hearing anything in the town, or in the surrounding area, or on campus at that time. This is a long time ago, over 50 years ago, so my memory could be flawed as well.

SS: Your story is so different than so many others, because Jewish life here was so different nonexistent. And you weren't formally Jewish.

DK: The funny thing is you're also not the first alumnus we've heard of who ended up converting.

FG: Is that right?

DK: Yes. So, it's something to dig into, at the very least.

FG: Well, for a while I was thinking, well, I must be the only Davidson alumnus who's become president of a synagogue and a Torah reader and a service leader and all that, but I'm sure that's not true now. There must be a number of others who have pursued Judaism, who have become more observant, more involved in synagogue life.

SS: We have also heard that Rob Spach, our current chaplain brought about a lot of change as well.

FG: That's great.

SS: Yes. There is an alumnus, an anonymous donor, who has funded a trip to Poland and England for Jewish students at Davidson. We visited some concentration camps and juxtaposed that visit with more contemporary life in in London, which was great. And I'd never thought that'd be part of my Davidson experience.

FG: I remember, the year I was in France, I hitchhiked to Germany and went to Dachau. And, that was only 20 years after the war had ended. So, it was an interesting experience. That's the only former camp I was able to get to. That's great. It sounds like things are growing and thriving at Davidson, and that's a wonderful thing.

DK: Absolutely.

FG: When I was there, for many, many years [the college chaplain](#) was [Rev.](#) Will Terry. I don't know if you've heard.

And I got along fine with Will Terry. I don't know that he had any particular interest in religious diversity. I think he tried his best to be a friend to the students and a counselor to them in different ways.

DK: Do you think if you were to [have](#) come to him and said, "I'm thinking about all of these Jewish things," he would say to you, "that's lovely. [Go](#) for it"? Or, "Here's the name of a Rabbi in Charlotte," or [simply](#), "I don't know how to help you."

FG: That's a good question. And unfortunately, I can't ask it of Will because I think he passed away, but it may have been the third: "I don't know how to help you with that." I don't know. I don't want to underestimate him. He may have had ideas, but I'll bet nobody came to him and asked him that. Because I don't know who would have at that point.

DK: May have been some closeted Jews.

SS: Maybe.

DK: [This is a rather large question, but do](#) you think Davidson instilled some sense of *Tikkun Olam* in you, as a student? Something we talk about a lot now is human values, which is basically another way of phrasing "putting good back into the world." There are many Jewish alums who are very concerned with social justice, who work with organizations like JFREJ [\[Jews for Racial and Economic Justice\]](#) or JOIN [\[Jewish Organizing Institute and Network\]](#) and feel like their commitment to social justice is central to their Jewish identity.

Do you think Davidson had a hand in that? Or was that something that you independently came to through your own religious education?

FG: I think it would have been a pretty tangential influence. I already came to Davidson, as I've said, having read about prejudice and that sort of thing, [so](#) I was pretty much on the path towards liberalism and was a lot more progressive than almost all of my contemporaries there. I don't know if you have heard about Students for Democratic Society back in the 60s.

DK: Oh yes, oh cool.

FG: So, we didn't have SDS in the South, what we had in the South was the Southern Student Organizing Committee. I formed a chapter of SSOC at Davidson. I was one of the cofounders and SSOC was designed to be sort of provocative. Its emblem was a [C](#)onfederate flag, with a black and [a](#) white hand crossed over it.

We did things like picket textile mills, where the workers were on strike, or support the [C](#)ivil [R](#)ights [M](#)ovement. So, I don't think any of that involvement in social justice issues was instigated in me by being at Davidson. In fact, I think Davidson, for the most part, was not at all very enthusiastic about its students participating in things like that.

On the other hand, I do think Davidson teaches a certain moral compass that's very strong. I mean, I think the honor system is real and was a good influence. I think there is a lot of ethical teaching that goes on there, certainly in the religion department and elsewhere. And I think the culture of the campus is an ethical sort of culture, from my experience there. Stressing honesty and doing the right thing.

And so, I don't think that that was intended to lead us into a path of social justice and Tikkun Olam by any means. Not that they would have even known what that is, necessarily. It is part of my [own](#) values. I can't deny that.

SS: What year did you found the Southern Student Organizing Committee?

FG: [It](#) was my senior year. So, I think it was 1966 after I got back from France. That's my recollection of it.

DK: I don't actually know the dates he worked at Davidson, but was Alan Singerman employed at Davidson during your time there?

FG: No, I don't think so. We had Joe Embry and Walter Meeks and [Francis Ghigo](#). Anyhow there were maybe four French professors, but not him.

DK: He was the one of the first Jewish professors tenured at Davidson, which is why I asked.

FG: Is that right? Well, that had to have been long after my time.

DK: Yeah. I wasn't sure if he was just floating around.

FG: Especially being a French major, I would have loved that.

DK: Yeah, absolutely.

SS: [Well](#), thank you so much, this was lovely.

DK: Thank you so much for talking with us today!

FG: I have enjoyed it. If you think of things you forgot to ask or you need more information, you know how to reach me.

DK: Absolutely.

SS: Thank you. And I'll send over the permissions this afternoon.

FG: Okay, that sounds great.

SS/DK: Thank you so much.