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Joanne Favors biographical sketch

Marguerite Stegall

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, kvj134@mocs.utc.edu

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Recommended Citation

Stegall, Marguerite, "Joanne Favors biographical sketch". (2021) *Chattanooga Racial Justice Bibliographies*. <https://scholar.utc.edu/racial-justice-biographies/6>.

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Joanne Favors

Written by Maggie Stegall.

Joanne Favors, born in 1942, is a woman of medium stature, a slight southern drawl, white curly hair, and a face with wrinkles that naturally occur over time. While she is a widow, she, nonetheless, has four children to keep her company (Tennessee General Assembly 2021, District 28). However, this is not what defines her, as she possesses a strong presence and conviction as well. She has been insurmountable in her contribution to the culture and society of Chattanooga Tennessee for a very long time now. Favors was born and raised here in Chattanooga and is a devout Christian, currently attending Olivet Baptist Church (Interview 2011, 0:58-3:03 pg 1; Tennessee General Assembly 2021, District 28). She also attended Chattanooga Avenue School, and then Howard High School (Interview 2011, 0:58-3:03 pg 1). When Favors was in elementary and middle school around the 1950s, she lived on the same street as caucasian children but they went to different schools (Interview 2011, 1:13-3:03 pg 1). The dichotomy between Favors and her White peers had been stark from a very early age (Interview 2011, pg 1). Not only was this dichotomy evident, but being Black in Chattanooga during this time also came with a great many fears - just one of those being that if you wandered off for too long you may end up missing, or worse (Interview 2011, 0:00-1:12 pg 3). This was an unfortunately true fear the Black community faced during her youth (Interview 2011, pg 3). This was merely a glimpse of the struggles that Favors faced.

Before Favors graduated from high school, the Howard class of 1960 followed in the footsteps of their college peers: they made plans for sit-ins all around Chattanooga (Interview 2011, 0:00-7:05, pg 4-5). Contrary to popular belief, the sit-ins in Chattanooga were not as violent as they tended to be in other parts of the country (Interview 2011, 0:00-7:05, pg 4-5). Both fire hoses and police dogs were present at the event, but there was no fighting (Interview 2011 pg 4-5). Despite not knowing this in the moment, these young men and women would be a part of a momentous event that would change the social landscape of Chattanooga (Interview 2011, 0:00-7:05, pg 4-5).

Later, Favors went to Cleveland State Community College for her Associate Degree, New York University for her Bachelors, and Andrews University for her Graduate Degree (Ballotpedia 2021). This is where Favors had faced blatant racism during her first year at community college. Favors simply wrote an essay and turned it in. However, her professor thought that she had plagiarized her work because it was so well-written (Interview 2011, 10:21-11:23, 0:00-4:45, pg 6-7). This part of her past heavily influenced how she raised her own children, because of the effect it had on her (Interview 2011, 0:00-2:20, pg 7). This racist event affected not only the instruction of her own children, but also influenced her to join in politics, for all children who were being oppressed (Interview 2011, 0:00-4:45, pg 7-8).

After finishing her college work Favors began her professional life. She started as a nurse at Erlanger hospital just as it was integrating, with medical personnel and patients coming from Carver Hospital (Interview 2011, 7:09-7:59, 9:13-10:21, pg 6). It was here that Favors saw the integration process of the medical community and how it was not an easy change in the least (Interview 2011, pg 6). While the doctors easily moved from the previous facility, for the patients it was not the same (Interview 2011, pg 6). They were often put in with the more ornery patients, and thus had a more strenuous visit to the hospital (Interview 2011, pg 6). Despite how rocky integration was, it seemed to have happened quite

quickly, for better or worse (Interview 2011, 0:00-7:05, pg 4-5). This was an important growing moment for her, one she would remember for a very long time.

Soon her time in the medical field galvanized her jump into politics. Favors used her knowledge in healthcare, and her work on many different committees, to inform how she approached the Hamilton County Commission and many of her other future endeavors (Mines 2020, para. 9-10). She joined the County Commission in 1998 until she left in 2005 (Interview 2011, 5:20-6:04, pg 8; Tennessee General Assembly 2021, District 29). Her work on the Affordable Care Act is a testament to her influence (Sher 2017, para. 10-11). She has been cited as insurmountable to its creation, this being due to her past experiences (Sher 2017, para. 10-11). Favors' personal experience also showed her the need to change voter ID laws (Interview 2011, 2:20-4:45 pg 8; Sher 2017, para. 12-13). This is mostly because her mother struggles with these laws (Interview 2011, pg 8; Sher 2017, para. 12-13). Her mother does not have a birth certificate, which is necessary in order to get any form of ID in Tennessee and Chattanooga (Interview 2011, pg 8; Sher 2017, para. 12-13). Favors has also been on many health care boards, the House of Health Committee, House Health Subcommittee, and the House Insurance and Banking Committee (Tennessee General Assembly 2021, District 28). Favors is currently in the Tennessee General Assembly continuing to do hard work for her community and is still on many medical boards (Tennessee General Assembly 2021, District 29).

Going a bit back in time, but still relating to the present, Favors' actions during the sit-ins have greatly affected Howard High School as a whole. Many current students attribute her actions during the sit-ins as having affected their time and education at Howard (Jackson 2008, 13). The battle for justice and equity was important to these students, and, as stated previously, they attribute this drive to the Howard class of 1960 (Jackson 2008, 13). Favors has witnessed racist events very similar to those she faced with her classmates in her past to this day. In the wake of the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, and the Black Lives Matter organization (Hayes 2020, para. 15-18). One major influence of her past is in how Favors thinks about and addresses others. Favors does not like to use labels on anyone around her, her ideal is to be able to help everyone, no matter who they are, not just those in the Black community (Interview 2011, 7:56-9:30, pg 9). One outstanding quote from Favors is " Emmett Till would have been about the same age I am now had he still been alive today" and this shows how close the events in the history books truly are (Interview 2011, 4:03-5:16, pg 2). This is all a part of her fight for equity in Chattanooga, this is what Joanne Favors' impact on Chattanooga truly is. She has not influenced only one generation, but rather an entire city to change and for the better.

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Credit

This biography was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of HIST 3920R: History of White Rage taught by Professor Susan Eckelmann Berghel, Ph. D. in the Department of History at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga in Spring 2021.