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MEMORANDUM

To: Tim West

Fm: Joe Sinsheimer

Re: Robert Moses Interviews (3)

Dt: September 21, 1998

[The interviews in this package represent about 1/30 of the material I will be sending you. I am going to send the material to you as I find it in my archives and as I organize it. My hope is that if I organize it for you in advance, we can save some time on the back end.]

Included in this package are three interviews I conducted with Robert Moses in the mid-1980s. Moses, was arguably the most important civil rights worker in Mississippi during the 1960s. He was the first outside worker to come to the state—coming to set up a small voter registration project in the town of McComb, located in the southwest corner of the state. By 1962, he had shifted his operation to the Mississippi Delta. By 1963, he was directing the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) work in the state and was one of the masterminds behind the 1964 Freedom Summer Project. (I have enclosed two pages from Taylor Branch's, Parting the Waters, which detail Moses' initial entry into the state.

Most of the material I will be sending you over the next few weeks will fit three categories: 1) interviews with a core group of SNCC workers or "field secretaries" working in Mississippi in 1961-65 2) interviews with residents of Greenwood, Mississippi, a major focus of SNCC's organizing efforts during that period and 3) interviews with other civil rights leaders, student volunteers, clergy, journalists, etc. who were working with SNCC at that time.

Please call with questions.

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To Vote in Mississippi: Advance by Retreat

MISSISSIPPI STARTED at the bottom. At least four stages of prior retreat made the active frustrations of Birmingham and St. Augustine comparatively advanced—even enviable. A year earlier, when Bob Moses appealed for refuge at a statewide meeting of NAACP chapter presidents, he brought with him only two teenage recruits and a record of anguish. Moses was not from Mississippi, nor an NAACP member. He was a twenty-seven-year-old New Yorker with a Harvard master's degree in philosophy, who had become an object of wonder since venturing into the southwest timber region around McComb on a solo mission for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, a youth organization that had grown out of the sit-ins. For trying to escort would-be voters to register, he had been arrested more than once, pummeled by a courthouse mob, and beaten severely near a town square in open daylight by a cousin of the Amite County sheriff. Still bleeding, he walked into the courthouse to file criminal charges, then testified against the cousin, and, until the local prosecutor advised him to flee for his life before a jury brought in the customary verdict of acquittal, continued doggedly to behave as though he possessed the natural rights of a white person. This presumption shocked Mississippi people more than the blood and terror.

John Doar sought out Moses to learn of the violence in Amite County, just as he had introduced himself to Medgar Evers and Vernon Dahmer on a previous clandestine tour of Mississippi—traveling incognito in khakis and boots, knowing enough to be fearful himself even as a high-ranking official of the Justice Department. A Republican from Wis-

consin, Doar had been asked to stay on in the Kennedy Justice Department partly because he had pioneered a go-out-and-poke-around-for-yourself approach to civil rights lawsuits, which made him unusual among desk-bound Washington lawyers. With Moses, Doar visited Negro farmers who were afraid to come to registration meetings because of the intangible reality of rural life—ominous messages maids and sharecroppers were hearing—and several were particularly worried about signs of anger on the part of E. H. Hurst, a state representative of local influence, against Herbert Lee, an NAACP farmer who attended Moses' registration meetings. Doar promised to drive out to Lee's farm on his next trip, but he found waiting at his office the next day a message from Moses that Hurst had just shot Lee to death in full public view outside the Liberty cotton gin.

In nearby McComb, while Moses pressed in vain for arrest in the Lee murder, his youthful admirers went to jail from a sit-in that quickly inspired a spontaneous march of more than one hundred high school students. Failing to dissuade them, Moses and other in-gathered SNCC leaders went along as protective support until McComb police plucked them from the line, ran some through gantlets of enraged citizens, and eventually crammed Moses and seventeen others—virtually the entire national leadership of SNCC—into the drunk tank of the Magnolia, Mississippi, jail. They obtained release more than a month later on appeal bonds financed by Harry Belafonte, and Moses soon asked the NAACP county leaders to sponsor a second foray anywhere apart from the skittering violence around McComb. "We had, to put it mildly, got our feet wet," he wrote. "We now knew something of what it took to run a voter registration campaign in Mississippi."

Many NAACP officials saw Moses differently, as a young mystical amateur—he had studied Zen Buddhism on a college sabbatical in Japan—who produced deplorable net results: no new registered Negroes, one NAACP corpse, needless beatings, some legal bills handed to NAACP adults, and an unruly class of damaged children expelled from school. Field Secretary Medgar Evers already had written a relentlessly critical assessment of SNCC's entry into Mississippi, which the national NAACP office circulated in urgent warning against the "continuing problem" of rival civil rights groups. Moses retained a foothold only because of one hardheaded practical farmer. Vernon Dahmer, obsessed by the sufferings of his friend Clyde Kennard, responded to a kindred grit in Moses.

At an NAACP banquet late in 1961, while Moses was in McComb, Medgar Evers broke down during his report on the condition of Kennard—a former paratrooper, both in Germany and Korea—who had been called home from his last year at the University of Chicago to run the farm he bought for his ailing mother outside Hattiesburg. Carefully, Kennard had applied to finish his degree at Southern Mississippi, the only

Interview with Robert Moses
Cambridge, Massachusetts
November 19, 1983

Joe Sinsheimer: Mr. Moses, Could you tell me how the Freedom Vote concept originated? Who was involved in that idea?

Robert Moses: The Freedom Vote in 1963 ... Why don't you turn that off and let me think.

Sinsheimer: Okay.

Moses: Okay. In my mind, the movement in Mississippi took a political ^{turn} in that time. Basically, we were using the campaign to register people as a tool for organizing people. And what made it a good tool was on the one hand that there was kind of a universal agreement among blacks in Mississippi that this should be done, so that people should be registered. So, it was a unifying force. And then you could get people who were involved in this eligible for some kind of protection from the Justice Department, even if it was nothing more than an interview. If a person was threatened, a local person trying to register or something, or there were some reprisals. So they did feel some kind of support and the SNCC workers also gained some type of support, in the sense that if they were harassed or something in the process of doing voter registration work, or organizing around voter registration work, then they also were eligible for some kind of support from the Justice Department, even if it was minimal. So it turned out to be the wedge around which we could penetrate into Mississippi and do some organizing. Now, as I remember correctly, as I remember, the first direct political effort was in the fall of 1961 when Reverend Smith, in what I think was then the Fourth Congressional District, and I have forgotten his name, but another minister up in the Second Congressional District ran for office. Do you remember that?

Sinsheimer: Yes.

Moses: Okay. That I think was the first effort toward turning people's attention to running candidates. They though were actually running on the regular Democratic ticket, and people had to register under that to vote for them. And the people who actually thought through that were the group working in Jackson. It was a group around the Mississippi Freedom Press, the Free Press. Have you seen copies of that?

Moses Interview (2)

Sinsheimer: No.

Moses: You should maybe try to find that because they might have a chronicle, which would if you could find it, would probably be good historical data for this question.

Sinsheimer: It was a newspaper published out of Jackson?

Moses: Yeah, it was a movement newspaper that was started in Jackson after the Freedom Rides.

Sinsheimer: It wasn't connected with SNCC?

Moses: Well, a lot of SNCC people were running it. But there was a white student from Oberlin who came down. And I think it went on for a couple of years. They might have a chronicle of the events leading up to the Freedom Vote. So anyway, that set a kind of precedent or tradition of turning attention 1) to the Democratic Party and 2) to going beyond just registering but focusing attention on the actual political process. I guess the other person who was instrumental was Bill Higgs. Have you talked to him at all? Do you know his name?

Sinsheimer: No.

Moses: Okay. He was a white Mississippian who just recently graduated from Harvard Law School. Before that he had graduated from Ole Miss, and he came very interested and active in the civil rights movement before they finally ran him out of the state. He is in Washington. But he did all the legal work for getting the papers together for Reverend Smith and the other candidate to run. He was not acting as campaign manager, but more than just a legal advisor. So I am not sure who had the idea first. I was not in Jackson, I was actually at that time still in McComb. I was eventually called to Jackson to help run, work in the campaign. I took on as Reverend Smith's campaign manager. Okay, that was that. And that probably was the forerunner of the kind of activity that finally blossomed forth in the Freedom Vote. I am trying to think if there was something inbetween. That was 1961, the winter of 1961, 1962 we were in Greenwood and the Delta. Then I guess we had the summer workshops in the summer of 1963 in the Delta basing out of Greenwood. And I am trying to think when, and who, where the idea of the Freedom Vote first came to fact. I guess they were having the election for Governor and Aaron Henry was running on the Freedom Vote.

Sinsheimer: Right, with Reverend Ed King.

Moses Interview (3)

Sinsheimer: The story as it has been written in a few places was that Allard Lowenstein had in the Jackson office recalled his memories of protest activities in South Africa and then said something to the effect that "Voting day should not be a day of mourning, but a day of actual voting." Even if that voting was not in a regular election.

Moses: How was Lowenstein there? Lowenstein in the Jackson office in 1963? It doesn't sound right. I mean there was a Jackson office in 1963, but by the summer of 1962 we were about twelve or fifteen and we were spread out in the Delta except for Curtis and Hollis, they were down in Hattiesburg. And Jesse Morris had come and he was in Jackson. But we had not gotten a WATS (Wide Area Telephone Service) line by then, so there was no central communication. I guess in the summer of 1962 we really dug into the Delta, and then we had that shooting in Greenwood.

Sinsheimer: Jimmy Travis?

Moses: Right. That was in the winter, early in 1963, late in 1962. And then everyone pulled into Greenwood, and right after that not too long after that, they started the demonstrations in Birmingham. That summer we were running workshops out of Greenwood. Eleanor Holmes was down there. She became Eleanor Holmes Norton one of Carter's commissioners. She was in charge of the Fair Practice Employment Agency. She was down there and Bernice from the Highlander Folk center was there helping to run a lot of the workshops. And we were there most of the summer, and that really was the focus of the activity for the summer. We were bringing people in from across the Delta area and a few from Hattiesburg, but mostly people from across the Delta, and we were having these workshops, and they were going back to their projects. We hadn't noticeably increased in size, we were still ten to fifteen in size. Now, I am not sure how Henry (Aaron Henry) decided to run. You don't know? For the Freedom Vote. You see we weren't in touch with Lowenstein at that time, so that doesn't sound right, that version of the story. It would be good to trace down some source of where the idea originally came from.

Sinsheimer: It is written that-- I guess that this would be August or September of 1963-- that there were these discussions in the Jackson office about where the Project was going.

Moses: Where is written? Is this in the history books? You mean there is no hard data?

Sinsheimer: No, it is someone recounting a conversation.

Moses Interview (4)

Moses: Do you know who?

Sinsheimer: Yes, one of the sources is David Harris' new book Dreams Die Hard. Which is about...

Moses: Oh, Davis Harris, he wrote about Al?

Sinsheimer: Yes, Sweeney and Lowenstein.

Moses: Does he say what his sources are?

Sinsheimer: He doesn't footnote anything.

Moses: Because David would have come down with the volunteers from Stanford. You see part of the problem with that was that the college students would not have come down until after college had started. They came together So they could not have been involved in any August decisions.

Sinsheimer: No wasn't saying he was there. He did a lot of interviewing I guess.

Moses: Right. So the question is who was he talking to.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Moses: That version of his book doesn't sound right. I would look rather to how Henry, who approached Henry with the idea of running statewide. It might have been Al. Because Al, I know, before I had met him I had heard that he was moving around the state talking to people.

Sinsheimer: I might be able to track Aaron Henry down and get a telephone number because I think he is involved in the Cranston (Alan Cranston) campaign.

Moses: Yea, he might be a good source. Where else? (Pause) You might want to talk to Bernice. The name that wants to come to mind is Bernice Reagan who was a freedom singer. But that's not it. Bernice worked as a staff member of the Highlander Center and was actively involved in running those workshops. And if people were talking about doing something like a freedom Vote it would have been at those Greenwood workshops. But I don't remember Al ever coming to Greenwood, he never came when I was there.

Sinsheimer: Yes, I don't think he was even in Mississippi at that time.

Moses: But I think that it was out of the activity of that summer that people began to get the feeling of being able to manage some kind of statewide activity. But I don't recall when

Moses Interview (5)

Moses: (cont.) the idea for the Freedom Vote first came. I actually don't remember whether the idea was separate from the idea of the Stanford students coming down. My own feeling is that the idea somehow got launched in Mississippi of having this Freedom Vote and then the Yale and Stanford students joined to help. Now I am not sure what Al's contribution was outside of the Yale and Stanford student's was. And I don't know where we could find that out. (Pause) One person who would be good and might be reachable is Frank Smith. He is a city Councilman in Washington D.C. and he ran the Holly Springs project. He might remember where the Freedom Vote idea originated.

Sinsheimer: Was there debate about whether or not to bring the white students down? Do you remember?

Moses: (Pause) There may have been. But there wasn't a formal kind of debate about whether or not to have it. I think, yeah, I think that the decision to have the project was not tied to the students. Coming into the Summer Project there was debate about whether or not to have the Project precisely because the Project was tied to the students. I don't remember any such kind of debate around the Freedom Vote. I think the Project got under way There is nothing in the SNCC files about this?

Sinsheimer: There are no records specific to this, no.

Moses: There certainly was no discussion similar to the discussions that took place around Freedom Summer.

Sinsheimer: Now did you write a letter to give to Lowenstein to recruit the students?

Moses: No, I doubt whether I would have done such, and I doubt whether Al would have asked for such a letter. I mean Al ... those students were really his own personal contacts. People because of his association with Stanford, being associate Dean or something. And he was then at Yale and those were the only two schools that were involved.

Sinsheimer: There is this story of Lowenstein reading a letter you had written--an appeal-- in Harris' book, and then one of the Freedom Vote volunteers (Bruce Payne) mentioned it too. But I know that he had read Harris' book also. I wasn't sure whether that was just an idea in his mind or whether it was some sort of reality. Now ... (Pause)

Moses: It is not entirely impossible that I did it.

Moses Interview (6)

Sinsheimer: But anyway, the recruiting was left to Lowenstein since he had the contacts?

Moses: The whole idea for bringing the students down was Lowenstein's, that's for sure. The question to what extent he actually thought of the project, how early on he was involved in the conceptualization of the project, that is another question. And that I don't know. But I don't think so unless the project got conceptualized around the idea of Aaron Henry running for Governor and if it did that way then he might very well have had a role.

Sinsheimer: Well, I know that one of the first people Al talked to in Mississippi was Reverend King who ended up on that ticket.

Moses: Well, he would have talked to King as a matter of course, given to what he was doing when he came down because he was talking to people, apparently quite widely. So he would have talked to King. But that still does not in my mind does not address the question of how the Freedom Vote got conceptualized, who actually.... You see the other part of that was the awareness, the growing awareness, which slowly warmed people in the movement on their work of their need to kind of bypass the official organizations and apparatus and do things, legitimize themselves, by themselves. The concept of legitimacy-- qualified-- I mean those were concepts that we were rubbing up against in the process of trying to register people. Because what the people were saying and somehow believing in their own minds was that they were not qualified. So we had to come to grips with this notion... What does this mean? Who can legitimize people? How do a people get legitimate? Now those were notions that were coming out of the work itself and were slowly taking hold or growing in the workers' minds. And the Freedom Vote again was an effort to reach for legitimacy, and to overcome the argument in the press that what basically was the problem was that people were apathetic. You see that was another ... every time a newspaper man was interviewing you they were always reaching for that word. Isn't it true that there is a lot of apathy? So you were forced to focus in on that concept and what it means. I remember of coming to the point of rejecting that concept completely on the grounds that what was being done was not so much defining an objective state of the people, a condition of the people, but what was being done was defining a way of acting, a way of action, because if you said-- if you thought-in your own mind-- that the basic problem was the apathy of the people you were also channeling your actions in a certain way. In terms of what you would focus on to do about the apathy of the people. If you rejected that completely, if you

Moses Interview (7)

Moses: (cont.) didn't even for a second let it cross your mind that what the problem was apathy on the part of black people but lay elsewhere then you would focus your attention elsewhere. I remember June's mother, June Johnson was in Greenville and her mother. We took a bus load of people from Greenwood to Greenville to the courthouse to hear a trial after we had gotten arrested when he had that little march downtown. They had the trial in Greenville and while they were there we had them do some voter registration work in Greenville because one thing we could move about a little more freely. And she was ... well it transformed her-- just getting out and going those sixty miles or so and working in Greenville. I remember her saying that you would have never gotten me out in the streets in Greenwood to talk with people to register to vote. But what we were always looking for was the key to that kind of personal transformation. What is the key to getting people to move? And that was an important event-- seeing that if you took people and just transferred them a few miles out of their local situation into a different situation then some energy was released. Now that was in the summer of 1963 that we did that and that is the same thing that we were looking for around the Freedom Vote. That is what is it that you can do by yourself that can act in such a way to release energy and get people moving. So those ideas-- legitimacy, what qualifies, how do you get around the notion that people are qualified-- because what you are saying is that we can qualify ourselves. Energy-- how is that you can make a move to release people's energy. Now those were problems that we had confronted, things we were working on which would have led us to want to do something like the Freedom Vote. So wherever the idea came from we were sure to have latched on to it as soon as we had heard about it. I am just not sure where the idea came from. You know who might be another good person to contact and who would be interested in this question would be Ed King. Because I remember it was Ed at Tougaloo (Tougaloo College in Jackson) who first told me about Lowenstein and that he was moving all around the state trying to find people. So Ed might actually remember, or could put you onto some source which would pin it down.

Sinsheimer: Do you remember first meeting Lowenstein?

Moses: (Pause) Did I meet him before the Freedom Vote? I don't think our paths crossed until he actually came down with with the students, as far as I can remember.

Sinsheimer: After the Freedom Vote, were the discussions of where was the Project going?

Moses Interview (8)

Moses: How soon after? The Freedom Vote was over when?

Sinsheimer: The real election was November 4, and I think the Freedom vote was November 2 to the 4.

Moses: Well, I guess within the next month or so the question of having a Summer Project came up. Maybe Al-- I know when he left he **had** approached the idea of students coming back and doing a similar thing, but I don't know whether when he left he had already conceptualized students coming back for a summer.

Sinsheimer: It seems he had conceptualized it in his own mind. (Pause)

Moses: Well, had he actually said anything to anybody?

Sinsheimer: Well, from my understanding of it, he would have in the early winter of 1963-64 -- that he was already telling people in his travels that there was going to be a Summer Project, at the same point that debate was going on.

Moses: Yeah, what I am not sure of when we first started. When it was first approached.

Sinsheimer: There was a staff meeting on November 14, 1963.

Moses: Do you remember where?

Sinsheimer: A meeting was attended by seven white and thirty-five black fieldworkers, most of them affiliated with SNCC.

Moses: The Freedom Vote, I guess would have been a COFO operation.

Sinsheimer: This would have been the Greenville or Greenwood meeting?

Moses: Greenville sounds better. (Pause)

Sinsheimer: The only history of that meeting is in (Howard) Zinn's book, and I think he was present.

Moses: That could have been at Hattiesburg. Because Zinn was down at Hattiesburg, and right in that time I know we were having the demonstrations at Hattiesburg. The ministers from the National Council of Churches (NCC) were there. And we did have a meeting there, but the meeting there in Hattiesburg may have been a different meeting.

Sinsheimer: Hattiesburg was January of 1964, is that right?

Moses: The meeting?

Sinsheimer: The demonstration.

Moses Interview (9)

- Moses: Yeah, that sounds right. (Pause) So, I don't really remember when, because if the Freedom Vote was that late--November--it probably was some time shortly after that. I do remember that we had a workshop and Highlander came down. You should check their records.
- Sinsheimer: I have been there. They don't have a lot about that. (Pause) There seem to have been two debates, the first one would have been November 14, and the second one would have been the SNCC Executive Council meeting in December of 1963.
- Moses: In Atlanta?
- Sinsheimer: Yeah, I think so.
- Moses: There were other discussions in Mississippi, there was another big one in Hattiesburg in January. I guess that is right, that meeting, that first meeting was probably in Greenville. And I think the money for that meeting came from Highlander, and I think Miles (Horton--Director of Highlander) was down there. And I remember at that meeting that we got into the question of the Summer Project, of having the summer volunteers come down. The split was clear.
- Sinsheimer: Who were the opponents of the Summer?
- Moses: Basically, most of the SNCC staff were opposed, with a few exceptions. (Lawrence) Guyot, he was not opposed. And Dorrie Madden was for it. I don't know if there were any others on the Mississippi SNCC staff that were actually for it.
- Sinsheimer: What about David Dennis?
- Moses: Well, David was with CORE.
- Sinsheimer: Right.
- Moses: But I was just thinking of the SNCC staff. Dave was for it.
- Sinsheimer: Fannie lou Hamer?
- Moses: Fannie Lou Hamer was for it. Basically the split was between the staff and the people we were working with who had joined the work enough so that they were party to discussions like that. COFO people. Certainly, Aaron Henry was for it. So basically it was the staff against people we were working with.
- Sinsheimer: And you were initially for it?
- Moses: Yeah, I was initially-- I guess I was always for it. I didn't hold my peace, I did not enter into the debate until it

Moses Interview (10)

Moses: (cont.) became clear that we were stalemated. I finally decided to throw my weight in when-- after the Hattiesburg meeting because we were down there in January discussing it again. And between that November meeting, if that is the meeting and that probably is, and the January meeting in Hattiesburg, we were still undecided, and torn by it. Louis Allen was shot and killed while we were at the Hattiesburg meeting. I remember that it was in riding over-- I left Hattiesburg to ride over to Ingnet to see his wife that I decided that we should, I should throw my weight behind the Project. Because it seemed like we ought to. (Pause) It seemed we were not in position to reap whatever benefits were to flow from this first wave of civilized activity which was getting ready to culminate in Washington with the Civil Rights Act-- which was being put into place in some ways right there in Mississippi, it was right there in Hattiesburg, the kind of thing they were doing-- they were taking these ministers and bringing them down... demonstrations, and then they were going back to their congregations and then organizing busloads of people to go to Washington.

Sinsheimer: Were you surprised that there wasn't more violence at the Hattiesburg Freedom Day?

Moses: (Pause)

Sinsheimer: You were arrested that day, right? And Oscar Chase was ...

Moses: Oscar was beaten. (Pause) Was I surprised?

Sinsheimer: It is the word Zinn uses.

Moses: I don't guess I anticipated a lot of violence, and I guess what you were living off of was kind of a feel for what the patterns were of violence in Mississippi. How they took place? Because basically I think you were still in your -- the Governor being in control of the reaction, trying to control the reaction of the people in the state by his mechanisms, the highway patrol, the state police, the county police, his investigating units, and so forth. And the feeling that whatever violence took place-- a lot of it was instigated around those mechanisms. And rifle shots more than just a shotgun, specific targets, designed if they could to pull the thread that might unravel what was going on. So it wouldn't have been, I wouldn't have thought I don't think that you would have any of those mechanisms in a violent way around that demonstration which was attracting outside attention. Those ministers there and so forth.

Interview with Robert Moses (11)

Moses: (Cont.)

And as long as that mechanism was in place and operating and covering the situation, you were not likely to have unplanned sporadic kinds of violence. You were getting that violence-- that kind of violence-- however around the state. There was a rash of the cross burnings, churches were burned, and then the kind of thing with Louis Allen-- getting shot out of no where, because certain mechanism was not focused on a certain place in Amite County around that. There was nothing going on there. And that is what we didn't have control over and it was not so much what might happen to us but what was happening to the people we were working with-- like Louis Allen. People one way or another we touched on or contacted. Because then there is evidence of an escalation of the kind of reprisal. And then what I felt would happen in the state if the nation went through a period of this liberalization due to the Civil Rights Act but Mississippi didn't. Then I felt that would lead to people, black people being brutalized because the kind of things they were touching in the Civil Rights Act as in desegregation of public facilities and so forth didn't effect these black people in Mississippi, or it didn't effect them very much. But you would have gotten the reaction from the white officials. So I felt that we should try to move to bring Mississippi in on whatever was happening. And I guess that's basically-- if you look back on it--that's basically what happened. Mississippi was kind of brought into, for good or bad, up to or on to the level of the country, instead of being somehow the symbol of the racism and the horror and the place where it generated and so forth. It was kind of moved into the country and its way. And I guess that is what was on my mind during that period. I was trying to weigh that against the real demands of the staff to have their own space and allow themselves to operate within it. There was a problem of whether we could sustain ourselves, whether we could survive it, because, you know, the pressure had begun to show on part of the staff members.

Sinsheimer:

Pressure generated from ...?

Moses:

From the movement. From the work.

Sinsheimer:

What was the reasoning of the people opposed (to the Summer Project)?

Interview with Robert Moses (12)

- Moses: I guess the basic problem was a gut reaction against having white student-types come down and have such a heavy hand.
- Sinsheimer: One of the things that I have been trying to decipher is in (James) Forman's autobiography there are these one or two sentences where he mentions that we began to see the problems during the Freedom Vote with the volunteers in November. I wasn't sure whether that was tied to specific examples, tied to feelings toward Lowenstein, or tied to what you are talking about, a certain gut feeling?
- Moses: Well, I am sure that part of the problem certainly had to do with the ability of the SNCC staff, of the Mississippi staff to work with on an equal basis northern college students, white students. And you had to look at that in individual cases. That was not the only problem for we had some blacks on the staff of SNCC in terms of their education who were the equal of any college student. And they were opposed. Do you remember the Southwest Georgia Project?
- Sinsheimer: Yes.
- Moses: Okay. Because that was the first project that white volunteer were used. That was in '63. Two of the young girls, black girls who were down in _____. One of them married Frank Smith and Martha Prescott, they came over to Mississippi to get away from the project because it became too much for them-- the interaction between the whites and the blacks. And it is not anything to be surprised at. I suppose at that time that SNCC was the only organization in the whole country that was trying to carry out an integrated living, working arrangement-- a fully integrated community. And to what extent you can do that living in the context of a society that is racially separate is a big question. So certainly there is no question about all the pressures that that generated. And it generated then in a short time I guess in the Mississippi Freedom Vote. I just remember one kind of incident during the Freedom Vote some of the students from Stanford and maybe some from Yale I am not sure, wanted to open up-- go into Yazoo City. And we hadn't worked there. And we suggested that they shouldn't go. But they carried it-- they were arguing with the staff and so forth. Frank Smith was there. This was in Jackson. And we told them that it wouldn't be a good idea to go. But they, it was strange, well maybe it wasn't strange, but their reaction was that it was difficult for them to accept us having jurisdiction in the matter as to whether they should do this or not. And I am sure that they were motivated partly by their own feeling for, wanting to break new ground themselves. You know to get out and go where no one has gone and do something. But I think, I

Interview with Robert Moses (13)

- Moses (cont.) mean I know if they were not really ready to listen to me about a decision they wanted to do or not do it is easy to see how they could move around say a staff person about something they wanted to do or not do when they were out there by themselves. So, I mean that is just an example of the kind of problem, and that's not the only kind of problem.
- Sinsheimer: Bruce Payne, he was a Yale volunteer remembers that. I talked to him. He teaches at Duke now. He remembers that. If it wasn't the same incident then it was one very similar to it. Lowenstein suggested that he be sent to one part of the state and the idea was that it was not such a good suggestion.
- Moses: I don't know if Lowenstein would have suggested this to them or not. He might have. But his name did not come up. Yeah, I guess that is that, but that is a different part of it-- the feeling that the students had kind of loyalty to Lowenstein. And I don't know but that would not have made a difference in what we were talking about. That was not the crucial issue. Although it did-- that kind of thing was something that would have, that did bother (James) Forman. And Ella (Baker) too.
- Sinsheimer: Okay, let's move on to the-- after the January meeting then, after the idea was more formally accepted. Were you involved in overseeing the recruiting at all? Or?
- Moses: Recruiting? Once it had been accepted on our part and then we had to present it to Atlanta.
- Sinsheimer: Right. COFO.
- Moses: To get, you know the acceptance on part of SNCC to make sure that they were going to join this project, then the recruiting on the part of SNCC took place through basically two channels. One would have been the Friends of SNCC apparatus and the second would have been the Southern college network, southern college students. And I guess that _____ was the person in the SNCC office who was working with the Friends of SNCC apparatus. And Ruby Doris.
- Sinsheimer: Margaret Burnham, was she involved?
- Moses: Margaret wasn't, as far as I know she wasn't in Atlanta. She came down for the Project. But I think that Ruby Doris Smith was doing the southern black colleges.

Moses Interview (14)

Moses: (Pause) So the Friends of SNCC operation. And then we were doing some recruiting out of Jackson, keeping in touch with students or people that we had contacted. And Mendy Samstein had a lot to do with that, I guess. Have you talked to Mendy?

Sinsheimer: I have seen a lot of memoes she has written.

Moses: No, Mendy is a he.

Sinsheimer: Sorry.

Moses: That's okay. (Pause--inaudible) Mendy, was basically the person who was on the telephone with Al, in charge of recruiting.

Sinsheimer: Was there a general staff feeling that recruiting was very important?

Moses: General staff feeling?

Sinsheimer: Quality-- was that stressed?

Moses: Of the people coming down?

Sinsheimer: Right.

Moses: Oh, I think we were, people were looking for good people. I remember that Mendy was very impressed with the applications, and the type of people who responded. (Pause) But I think the effort at least was to discourage people who might not be prepared psychologically. And I don't think there was any feeling to just get as many people as you can. ... Important to tell it like it is so to speak, let people sift through real carefully what the commitment was.

Sinsheimer: Now were you involved in this process at all?

Moses: I didn't go out and recruit people. In fact I think the only time I went out was when we had a breakdown in the process at Stanford when Lowenstein pulled out and Dennis (Sweeney) called and asked me to come to Stanford. (Pause)

Sinsheimer: I knew that you had spoken at Stanford, I think that was in March (1964). But you didn't speak anywhere else?

Moses Interview (15)

Moses: Well I can't say that I did not speak anywhere else, but I didn't go around actively trying to, say on a circuit, trying to recruit people. But then if I was out someplace then I certain I would have spoken. And I did travel around.(Pause).New York. I might have spoken, yeah I am sure because we did speak to some people, I remember that there was a conference or something up in Detroit. I was there, I remember we spoke there to some students. So I was involved in the recruiting, but it wasn't my major focus. I didn't do for example what I understand Lowenstein did.'Cause I think, from the messages I got, that he was moving around.

Sinsheimer: He seemed in contact with a lot of people from the National Student ...

Moses: NSA (National Student Association)

Sinsheimer: Yeah, NSA.

Moses: Yeah, But I don't know whether he was speaking at public meetings ...

Sinsheimer: It was a combination of a lot of things as far as I know. But I think ...

Moses: Because what he said was that he had worked more on that project than anything else he had ever been part of. He worked harder on that than anything he had ever worked on. This was in conjunction with his leaving.

Sinsheimer: Well, he seemed to be, as far as I can sort of get the general feel of it, he was going to a campus, getting in contact with one or two people he might have known there, for example Barney Frank at Harvard, saying you guys along with the Friends of SNCC get this coordinated, and then he would move on, and then he would come back and kind of oversee everything. But outside of certain campuses I am not sure how actively he was involved. Certainly at Yale, Stanford, and Harvard. (Pause) So at this point you would have been with the staff developing more formal plans?

Moses: We were through all this period, once we decided to have it, making preparations in Mississippi. Locating those counties about the project, making sure that they wanted to have it.

Sinsheimer: So that was something that was formally done? Each place ...

Moses: Each area where they had a project, meetings with people to discuss having this project, whether or not they wanted their area to be involved which meant that they had to come up with housing.

Moses Interview (16)

Sinsheimer: Were there areas of the state where the Project ...?

Moses: Well, there were areas of the state that we had not worked in, but all the areas where we had worked, people came through. And it became a way also of extending the project as people would hear about it, as word got around and so forth, people offered to take people in. So it became a way of organizing communities. (Pause) But we didn't use it for example to penetrate up into the Northeastern part of the state. Which is interesting because that is the place where in the late seventies the Klan marched.

Sinsheimer: Those are what they call the hilly regions of the state?

Moses: Yeah, well not the only hilly regions but I guess it was an area of the state that was a little more developed than some of the other parts of the state. And it is also the area in which the percentage of blacks was smaller. So we didn't-- in terms of registration-- try to pursue that more. But-- it turned out though because the movement never kind of got in there, you never had this kind of catharsis that the other areas did and it was the area where the Klan, you know, reemerged in the state and opened and began to march and so forth. I don't know whether you were following that or not.

Sinsheimer: No.

Moses: Because in the late seventies they were having Klan-- and black people were marching also-- but both carrying guns.

Sinsheimer: Where did the or when did the idea of the training programs originate?

Moses: Which training?

Sinsheimer: The Oxford.

Moses: The Oxford training programs. I am not sure when. We began, I mean we were just having nonstop now, meetings and discussions and plans among the staff as to how we were actually going to engineer the program for the summer. So certainly one of those was the idea that the students are coming. How do they come? How do they get where they are going? Do we meet with them? That kind of thing. So it certainly would have been one of those sessions where we would have talked about having some kind of meeting with the students.

Moses Interview (17)

Sinsheimer: The NCC offered some money for that, right?

Moses: Right. They were in the state. You know they had there program in Hattiesburg and things in other places too. And they were moving around I guess looking to set up this Delta Ministry Project. I think by that time they had already conceptualized the project. And so they were willing to help. So they did foot the bill for that. What we didn't think of-- and its too bad-- was doing something similar at the end of the summer. (Pause) We didn't.

Sinsheimer: Was there a-- from what I can tell I think somewhere between eighty and eighty-five percent of the volunteers were white.

Moses: If not more. But maybe not.

Sinsheimer: I did a sample and got eighty-five, and someone else got eighty-two, and someone else got eighty-eight, or something like that. But was that ...

Moses: But you have to remember that the universities and colleges had yet to be integrated. The first wave of blacks in American colleges came after, around 1969. I never thought about that. 'Cause in all of that the volunteers were looking, coming down and wondering and wanting to be involved and having something to do to work on, but we never thought about opening up the colleges and universities to black people. And I am sure that the problem was in our conceptualizing, again there were qualified-- I mean I am sure that myself and all those other people subconsciously would think in terms of well the problem is not so much that the colleges are not open to blacks, but there are not enough qualified black people to be able Because it is interesting that you had the Free Speech Movement, you know, coming out, and the movement to reorient the whole concept of the college as the local parent, to break out of that. But even in the Free Speech Movement, you didn't have coming out of the Free Speech Movement the demand to open the University to black people. And I am sure that it is the content-- the conceptual link that is missing. So that is one reason why we didn't have blacks because they were not there in the colleges. And where were they? They were in the southern colleges. And Ruby was breaking her back to try an get blacks from the southern colleges into the Project. And the problem, well there were a lot of them--

Moses Interview (18)

Moses: (cont.) here's two problems: one is the orientation of the black students in the southern colleges. Although they had been kind of liberated by the movement itself, by their own movement, the sit-in movement. And that had _____ a number of people out of their traditional ways of thinking, but still shackled-- I mean I remember meeting a few years ago a person who is now a professor, a young black professor and would be just _____ college who was in Nashville as a student in '64. And from Mississippi. And who is very militant now, and certainly was then. But for whom the thought of going back to Mississippi to work was something terrifying.

Sinsheimer: Was money also a problem?

Moses: Money would have been a problem. I mean money was a problem in getting black students. We did get some scholarship money for the black students. But anyway to get all that, I mean you couldn't come up with large numbers and I guess if we, I don't know if money would have been well-- we were working with, we already had contacts with the Field Foundation with work/study programs which we were running to get college students involved, to get our staff in the process of continuing education. And that was helpful but I don't know if you could have gotten the help on the scale that was required. I mean there was no way that we could have gotten people to shake loose a million dollars or something for a scholarship fund. Because the establishment at that time was too frightened of what the students might do. I don't think you could have gotten that kind of help even \$ 500,000. (Pause--inaudible) Tuition was a \$1000 per student, \$1500 maybe. Fifty students, fifty grand. So \$500,000-- on a long term basis you couldn't get \$50,000 a year or something like that to run No one was thinking on that scale. I don't think it crossed our mind that we should be asking on a scale like that. We were asking for peanuts. Ten students, \$10,000, and we were happy to get that.

Sinsheimer: The first training session was with the voter registration workers. Do you remember when Reverend Lawson came to speak?

Moses: I don't remember his speech.

Moses Interview (19)

Sinsheimer: Do you remember discussions of the theory of nonviolence during the training sessions?

Moses: (Pause) Do you have some-- any of the notes or papers or anything concrete? The content? Did he write up something?

Sinsheimer: Yeah, I don't have the content, I don't have the full speech but it seemingly left a ... (Reading)

Moses: Where was that quoted from? (Tracy Sugarman)

Sinsheimer: (Pause) (Reading) Was that question then as problematic as maybe that account suggests?

Moses: Well actually it went deep into the staff, not only the volunteers.

Sinsheimer: Right. Well this seemed to -- this whole thing involved volunteers and staff and everyone

Moses: But (Bob) Zellner's comments (Tracy Sugarman Stranger at the Gates) seem to be directed to the volunteers. Because he wouldn't be saying that to the staff. But the staff had had their own discussions previously in Atlanta. There was a heavy meeting of the SNCC staff about this question-- a question of carrying guns. And the question of using guns which were in local people's homes if you were attacked. And staff people stated their own personal positions about what they would and wouldn't do. And I think if anything that the Project probably weakened the hold that the nonviolent philosophy had on the organization because faced with this overwhelming possible resistance and forced to kind of again, you know, sift through your own attitudes about what you are going to do in particular situations, people I think moved more toward a self-defense posture. I don't think violence versus nonviolence is such a good dichotomy, but the question of self-defense and what you do, what the limits are, what means you take toward defending yourself. Or going into-- I think people would rather go into their own minds-- this is part of psychologically preparing themselves. And we went into them in staff discussions. So-- it was however, dangerous to carry guns in Mississippi because of the law, you know, that the guns have to be carried open. Because all the white farmers put their rifles or shotguns or whatever they were using on the

Moses Interview (20)

Moses: (cont.) pickup trucks, on the glass at the back.

Sinsheimer: Right. Right.

Moses: So you saw that all the time. But no black farmers were doing that. Black farmers had guns--but they were in their homes. But for a black farmer to post his gun on his pick up truck would be like a sign for picking a fight. Be kind of like just sitting yourself out there to be harassed by highway patrol or the police. Not that they would pick you up for having a gun, but running this red light or missing that stop sign. So I don't know-- I don't remember seeing any black farmers posting their guns. Now Medger (Evers) of course carried a gun all the time and he kept it on his seat in his car. Which is again a signal because anytime a highway patrol or ~~somebody~~ stops you and they see a gun then right away, you know, you are targeted. And my feeling was that always that the strategy was to move as quietly as possible among people so that you could work. Because the strategy was not to pick a fight and just throw yourself into the wave of mechanisms.... (Break)

Well I thought the discussion had a lot of negative qualities because the emotional pitch was so high. and you couldn't get into what the real practical issues were but more around are you violent or nonviolent? Or even if not violent because no one is going to say that they are violent, are you nonviolent? And people don't want to say that they are nonviolent. So I am not sure-- the interaction with the volunteers was too short and what they would pick up certainly would be much more what the person, staff person on the Project they were on, or the people they were living with. And certainly we didn't meet any people in Mississippi who were practicing nonviolence-- I mean none of the people we were working with-- and while they sometimes acknowledged that we ourselves were practicing non-violence so instead they would not buy it. And we weren't selling it, that's the other thing. There was nothing in the work that we were doing which required any of the people that we were working with practice nonviolence. There's nothing in terms of going down to register or anything like that which required that they take the nonviolent stance.

Moses Interview (21)

Moses: (cont.) It may have been something that we were requiring of ourselves but it wasn't something-- like the sit-ins, right where you anticipate that there is going to be some violence directed at the people who are participating personally, and therefore they should be trained. So the whole--see Lawson's, I had forgotten that Lawson was at Oxford-- because Lawson's particular approach and commitment to nonviolence died in Mississippi in the movement actually before, long before the Summer Project. I think it died right after the Freedom Rides in the summer of '61 when all the people he had trained gathered in Jackson and tried to launch a nonviolent movement and failed. He himself, for whatever reason, didn't feel that he should join the movement in its organized form, so he wasn't there. And there wasn't the spiritual engine that you need to make something like that go, also wasn't there. So that died, and I kind of marked its death at the time, it was something that I was watching closely. So you were left with this more practical program of voter registration organizing which didn't require either on the part of the staff or the people a commitment to nonviolence.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Moses: There is nothing in the federal government that says you have to be nonviolent to go register.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Moses: And they encourage everyone to register. The right to register is part of the law and there is nothing in the law that says you have to adopt this or that stance. So the volunteers as far as I can see didn't get a heavy dose of nonviolence, and certainly they were not-- most of them coming from some kind of nonviolence stance or background unless there were some Quakers.

Sinsheimer: Was there-- in terms of the composition of the volunteers, what sense was there that they were recruited not only because of who they were but the connections that they had?

Moses Interview (22)

- Moses: No sense. I mean the people at Stanford and Yale the assumption is in the society that those students are well connected. But aside from the fact that college students in the society as a whole are well connected, I don't have any recollection of people being concerned, you know, with prestigious connections.
- Sinsheimer: Well the reason I asked that is because I read an interview report of Geoffrey Cowan and one of the things that
- Moses: But who would have known about that. I mean the people who might have known about-- there was a group of people who might have known and would be interested in that. Do you remember or did you run across the name Tim Jenkins?
- Sinsheimer: He was out of Nashville?
- Moses: No, Tim was at Yale Law School and was a Vice-president of NSA.
- Sinsheimer: Oh right, okay.
- Moses: He was black and very influential. (Interruption)
At the time of the Summer Project I guess he was still a student at Yale just getting ready to graduate and so was Elanor, Elanor Holmes. And there was a group of people like that who were high powered in themselves in prestigious organizations or schools who might be aware of this or that person and, you know, their connections.
- Sinsheimer: Certainly not the staff people in Mississippi.
- Moses: Staff people in Mississippi, no. And couldn't care less. To just be honest with you, you know, they didn't want them down there. Much less someday a guy might pop up at a meeting and flash his connections. It just served to remind them, you know, of everything that they were fighting. (Pause) Of course you get someone like Guyot who might voice some sentiments in that area, about people with connections and the importance of having them. But Guyot was an exception, and not involved in recruiting.
- Sinsheimer: (Pause) Do you think there was a difference between the people who were doing the voter registration-- the volunteers doing the voter registration work and those who came to the Freedom School orientation?

Moses Interview (23)

- Moses: Oh, I have no way of knowing. It doesn't seem like there could be. I guess as the applications came in people indicated their interests. There were some social scientists from Michigan-- I think they were from Michigan -- who came down to the orientation and they wanted to study
- Sinsheimer: Wisconsin.
- Moses: Wisconsin. And we didn't let them. So the chance for all that kind of analysis went by the boards and we weren't equipped to do it ourselves.
- Sinsheimer: (Pause) What about the-- I guess I am trying to draw a distinction between some of the quieter-- from what I can sense-- some of the quieter southern students who came from let's say, whose motivations if you can be rude enough to be a social scientist let's say religiously motivated as opposed to some of the northern volunteers. Did you sense there was at all a sort of class division among the volunteers?
- Moses: Now, do you mean the division along regional lines? Between southern students ... and do you have figures on the numbers of southern people?
- Sinsheimer: Most of them-- I think it is somewhere, I could look it up, but somewhere around eighty percent were from the north. What I am getting at
- Moses: And how many of those from the South were black?
- Sinsheimer: Well that's the thing that most of the southern ones were black. Well when I talked to Sue Thrasher down at Highlander-- she more or less came right out of that Nashville movement. In other words the volunteers that are traditionally written about especially in the media the sons and daughters of people with connections, people very verbal talking with reporters. And yet you get this undercurrent of feeling that there was another whole group of people there.
- Moses: Well, I mean there was quite a group of people there, and I suppose in their own right they deserved to be studied. I mean just to get some understanding about America. And I suppose that if the funds were made available it is possible to do it, actually go out and study. Wally Roberts who was a Freedom School coordinator in Shaw, do you know of him?

Moses Interview (24)

Sinsheimer: He is at the Massachusetts Citizen's Advocate now?

Moses: Right. It's right up here.

Sinsheimer: Do you know if he is still living in Boston?

Moses: Yeah. I think I have a phone number.

Sinsheimer: Oh really. Okay.

Moses: And there is another girl who was with the Freedom Schools who is heading up a school for organizers in Chicago. So I don't know if it true or not, but I have the sense that a lot of them, a lot of the volunteers, you know, have made their own in the society as a whole, in one way or another, made some kind of mark on it. And the experience in Mississippi was important to them.

Sinsheimer: There's a book being written on this actually.

Moses: Oh really.

Sinsheimer: A guy named David Chalmers at Florida. I don't know how he is doing it per say. There are a lot of books being written about this as far as I can feel out, which is quite interesting in itself right now why there is this-- especially to me since I am writing it myself.

Moses: But I have no idea about that question except I didn't buy the image of the volunteers as the well connected.

Sinsheimer: You said that you didn't buy that?

Moses: No. I mean that was not-- I never thought of that as more than something else than Evans and Novak. You know, their theory that there's this great plot. Of course, Al (Lowenstein) thought more along these lines of connections, political connections-- can operate with connections. But we weren't operating that way. I mean our few little connections were with the Justice Department-- Burke Marshall and really John Doar who was down in Mississippi.

Sinsheimer: The first training session when Doar spoke, he from what I can tell upset a lot of people, and the second training session -- I don't remember where I read it-- but someone said that you asked people

Moses: Not so spend their time arguing.

Moses Interview (25)

Sinsheimer: Right. Right. Why was that?

Moses: I guess basically because we didn't do that. That wasn't how we worked with them in SNCC. We left that to Atlanta and the publicity people.

End of interview.

Interview with Robert Moses
Cambridge, Massachusetts
November 19, 1983

Joe Sinsheimer: Mr. Moses, Could you tell me how the Freedom Vote concept originated? Who was involved in that idea?

Robert Moses: The Freedom Vote in 1963 ... Why don't you turn that off and let me think. Okay.

Sinsheimer: Okay.

Moses: Okay. In my mind, the movement in Mississippi took a political turn in that time. Basically, we were using the campaign to register people as a tool for organizing people. And what made it a good tool was on the one hand that there was kind of a universal agreement among blacks in Mississippi that this should be done, so that people should be registered. So, it was a unifying force. And then you could get people who were involved in this eligible for some kind of protection from the Justice Department, even if it was nothing more than an interview. If a person was threatened, a local person trying to register or something, or there were some reprisals. So they did feel some kind of support and the SNCC workers also gained some type of support, in the sense that if they were harassed or something in the process of doing voter registration work, or organizing around voter registration work, then they also were eligible for some kind of support from the Justice Department, even if it was minimal. So it turned out to be the wedge around which we could penetrate into Mississippi and do some organizing. Now, as I remember correctly, as I remember, the first direct political effort was in the fall of 1961 when Reverend Smith, in what I think was then the Fourth Congressional District, and I have forgotten his name, but another minister up in the Second Congressional District ran for office. Do you remember that?

Sinsheimer: Yes.

Moses: Okay. That I think was the first effort toward turning people's attention to running candidates. They though were actually running on the regular Democratic ticket, and people had to register under that to vote for them. And the people who actually thought through that were the group working in Jackson. It was a group around the Mississippi Freedom Press, the Free Press. Have you seen copies of that?

Moses Interview (2)

Sinsheimer: No.

Moses: You should maybe try to find that because they might have a chronicle, which would if you could find it, would probably be good historical data for this question.

Sinsheimer: It was a newspaper published out of Jackson?

Moses: Yeah, it was a movement newspaper that was started in Jackson after the Freedom Rides.

Sinsheimer: It wasn't connected with SNCC?

Moses: Well, a lot of SNCC people were running it. But there was a white student from Oberlin who came down. And I think it went on for a couple of years. They might have a chronicle of the events leading up to the Freedom Vote. So anyway, that set a kind of precedent or tradition of turning attention 1) to the Democratic Party and 2) to going beyond just registering but focusing attention on the actual political process. I guess the other person who was instrumental was Bill Higgs. Have you talked to him at all? Do you know his name?

Sinsheimer: No.

Moses: Okay. He was a white Mississippian who just recently graduated from Harvard Law School. Before that he had graduated from Ole Miss, and he came very interested and active in the civil rights movement before they finally ran him out of the state. He is in Washington. But he did all the legal work for getting the papers together for Reverend Smith and the other candidate to run. He was not acting as campaign manager, but more than just a legal advisor. So I am not sure who had the idea first. I was not in Jackson, I was actually at that time still in McComb. I was eventually called to Jackson to help run, work in the campaign. I took on as Reverend Smith's campaign manager. Okay, that was that. And that probably was the forerunner of the kind of activity that finally blossomed forth in the Freedom Vote. I am trying to think if there was something in between. That was 1961, the winter of 1961, 1962 we were in Greenwood and the Delta. Then I guess we had the summer workshops in the summer of 1963 in the Delta basing out of Greenwood. And I am trying to think when, and who, where the idea of the Freedom Vote first came to fact. I guess they were having the election for Governor and Aaron Henry was running on the Freedom Vote.

Sinsheimer: Right, with Reverend Ed King.

Moses Interview (3)

Sinsheimer: The story as it has been written in a few places was that Allard Lowenstein had in the Jackson office recalled his memories of protest activities in South Africa and then said something to the effect that "Voting day should not be a day of mourning, but a day of actual voting." Even if that voting was not in a regular election.

Moses: How was Lowenstein there? Lowenstein in the Jackson office in 1963? It doesn't sound right. I mean there was a Jackson office in 1963, but by the summer of 1962 we were about twelve or fifteen and we were spread out in the Delta except for Curtis (Gans) and Hollis, they were down in Hattiesburg. And Jesse Morris had come and he was in Jackson. But we had not gotten a WATS (Wide Area Telephone Service) line by then, so there was no central communication. I guess in the summer of 1962 we really dug into the Delta, and then we had that shooting in Greenwood.

Sinsheimer: Jimmy Travis?

Moses: Right. That was in the winter, early in 1963, late in 1962. And then everyone pulled into Greenwood, and right after that not too long after that, they started the demonstrations in Birmingham. That summer we were running workshops out of Greenwood. Elanor Holmes was down there. She became Elanor Holmes Norton one of Carter's commissioners. She was in charge of the Fair Practice Employment Agency. She was down there and Bernice [redacted] from the Highlander Folk center was there helping to run a lot of the workshops. And we were there most of the summer, and that really was the focus of the activity for the summer. We were bringing people in from across the Delta area and a few from Hattiesburg, but mostly people from across the Delta, and we were having these workshops, and they were going back to their projects. We hadn't noticeably increased in size, we were still ten to fifteen in size. Now, I am not sure how Henry (Aaron Henry) decided to run. You don't know? For the Freedom Vote. You see we weren't in touch with Lowenstein at that time, so that doesn't sound right, that version of the story. It would be good to trace down some source of where the idea originally came from.

Sinsheimer: It is written that-- I guess that this would be August or September of 1963-- that there were these discussions in the Jackson office about where the Project was going.

Moses: Where is written? Is this in the history books? You mean there is no hard data?

Sinsheimer: No, it is someone recounting a conversation.

Moses Interview (4)

Moses: Do you know who?

Sinsheimer: Yes, one of the sources is David Harris' new book Dreams Die Hard. Which is about...

Moses: Oh, Davis Harris, he wrote about Al?

Sinsheimer: Yes, Sweeney and Lowenstein?

Moses: Does he say what his sources are?

Sinsheimer: He doesn't footnote anything.

Moses: Because David would have come down with the volunteers from Stanford. You see part of the problem with that was that the college students would not have come down until after college had started. They came together So they could not have been involved in any August decisions.

Sinsheimer: No wasn't saying he was there. He did a lot of interviewing I guess.

Moses: Right. So the question is who was he talking to.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Moses: That version of his book doesn't sound right. I would look rather to how Henry, who approached Henry with the idea of running statewide. It might have been Al. Because Al, I know, before I had met him I had heard that he was moving around the state talking to people.

Sinsheimer: I might be able to track Aaron Henry down and get a telephone number because I think he is involved in the Cranston (Alan Cranston) campaign.

Moses: Yea, he might be a good source. Where else? (Pause) You might want to talk to Bernice. The name that wants to come to mind was Bernice Reagan who was a freedom singer. But that's not it. Bernice worked as a staff member of the Highlander Center and was actively involved in running those workshops. And if people were talking about doing something like a freedom Vote it would have been at those Greenwood workshops. But I don't remember Al ever coming to Greenwood, he never came when I was there.

Sinsheimer: Yes, I don't think he was even in Mississippi at that time.

Moses: But I think that it was out of the activity of that summer that people began to get the feeling of being able to manage some kind of statewide activity. But I don't recall when

Moses Interview (5)

Moses: (cont.) the idea for the Freedom Vote first came. I actually don't remember whether the idea was separate from the idea of the Stanford students coming down. My own feeling is that the idea somehow got launched in Mississippi of having this Freedom Vote and then the Yale and Stanford students joined to help. Now I am not sure what Al's contribution was outside of the Yale and Stanford student's was. And I don't know where we could find that out. (Pause) One person who would good and might be reachable is Frank Smith. He is a city Councilman in Washington D.C. and he ran the Holly Springs project. He might remember where the Freedom Vote idea originated.

Sinsheimer: Was there debate about whether or not to bring the white studentss down? Do you remember?

Moses: (Pause) There may have been. But there wasn't a formal kind of a debate about whether or not to have it. I think, yeah, I think that the decision to have the project was not tied to the students. Coming into the Summer Project there was debate about whether or not to have the Project precisely because the Project was tied to the students. I don't remember any such kind of debate around the Freedom Vote. I think the Project got under way There is nothing in the SNCC files about this?

Sinsheimer: There are no records specific to this, no.

Moses: There certainly was no discussion similar to the discussions that took place around Freedom Summer.

Sinsheimer: Now did you write a letter to give to Lowenstein to recruit the students?

Moses: No, I doubt whether I would have done such, and I doubt whether Al would have asked for such a letter. I mean Al ... those students were really his own personal contacts. People because of his association with Stanford, being associate Dean or something. And he was then at Yale and those were the only two schools that were involved.

Sinsheimer: There is this story of Lowenstein reading a letter you had written--an appeal-- in Harris' book, and then one of the Freedom Vote volunteers (Bruce Payne) mentioned it too. But I know that he had read Harris' book also. I wasn't sure whether that was just an idea in his mind or whether it was some sort of reality. Now ... (Pause)

Moses: It is not entirely impossible that I did it.

Moses Interview (6)

Sinsheimer: But anyway, the recruiting was left to Lowenstein since he had the contacts?

Moses: The whole idea for bringing the students down was Lowenstein's, that's for sure. The question to what extent he actually thought of the project, how early on he was involved in the conceptualization of the project, that is another question. And that I don't know. But I don't think so unless the project got conceptualized around the idea of Aaron Henry running for Governor and if it did that way then he might very well have had a role.

Sinsheimer: Well, I know that one of the first people Al talked to in Mississippi was Reverend King who ended up on that ticket.

Moses: Well, he would have talked to King as a matter of course, given to what he was doing when he came down because he was talking to people, apparently quite widely. So he would have talked to King. But that still does not in my mind does not address the question of how the Freedom Vote got conceptualized, who actually.... You see the other part of that was the awareness, the growing awareness, which slowly warmed people in the movement on their work of their need to kind of bypass the official organizations and apparatus and do things, legitimize themselves, by themselves. The concept of legitimacy-- qualified-- I mean those were concepts that we were rubbing up against in the process of trying to register people. Because what the people were saying and somehow believing in their own minds was that they were not qualified. So we had to come to grips with this notion... What does this mean? Who can legitimize people? How do a people get legitimate? Now those were notions that were coming out of the work itself and were slowly taking hold or growing in the workers' minds. And the Freedom Vote again was an effort to reach for legitimacy, and to overcome the argument in the press that what basically was the problem was that people were apathetic. You see that was another ... every time a newspaper man was interviewing you they were always reaching for that word. Isn't it true that there is a lot of apathy? So you were forced to focus in on that concept and what it means. I remember of coming to the point of rejecting that concept completely on the grounds that what was being done was not so much defining an objective state of the people, a condition of the people, but what was being done was defining a way of acting, a way of action, because if you said-- if you thought in your own mind-- that the basic problem was the apathy of the people you were also channeling your actions in a certain way. In terms of what you would focus on to do about the apathy of the people. If you rejected that completely, if you

Moses Interview (7)

Moses: (cont.) didn't even for a second let it cross your mind that what the problem was apathy on the part of black people but lay elsewhere then you would focus your attention elsewhere. I remember June's mother, June Johnson was in Greenville and her mother. We took a bus load of people from Greenwood to Greenville to the courthouse to hear a trial after we had gotten arrested when he had that little march downtown. They had the trial in Greenville and while they were there we had them do some voter registration work in Greenville because one thing we could move about a little more freely. And she was ... well it transformed her-- just getting out and going those sixty miles or so and working in Greenville. I remember her saying that you would have never gotten me out in the streets in Greenwood to talk with people to register to vote. But what we were always looking for was the key to that kind of personal transformation. What is the key to getting people to move? And that was an important event-- seeing that if you took people and just transferred them a few miles out of their local situation into a different situation then some energy was released. Now that was in the summer of 1963 that we did that and that is the same thing that we were looking for around the Freedom Vote. That is what is it that you can do by yourself that can act in such a way to release energy and get people moving. So those ideas-- legitimacy, what qualifies, how do you get around the notion that people are qualified-- because what you are saying is that we can qualify ourselves. Energy-- how is that you can make a move to release people's energy. Now those were problems that we had confronted, things we were working on which would have led us to want to do something like the Freedom Vote. So wherever the idea came from we were sure to have latched on to it as soon as we had heard about it. I am just not sure where the idea came from. You know who might be another good person to contact and who would be interested in this question would be Ed King. Because I remember it was Ed at Tougaloo (Tougaloo College in Jackson) who first told me about Lowenstein and that he was moving all around the state trying to find people. So Ed might actually remember, or could put you onto some source which would pin it down.

Sinsheimer: Do you remember first meeting Lowenstein?

Moses: (Pause) Did I meet him before the Freedom Vote? I don't think our paths crossed until he actually came down with with the students, as far as I can remember.

Sinsheimer: After the Freedom Vote, were the discussions of where was the Project going?

Moses Interview (8)

Moses: How soon after? The Freedom Vote was over when?

Sinsheimer: The real election was November 4, and I think the Freedom vote was November 2 to the 4.

Moses: Well, I guess within the next month or so the question of having a Summer Project came up. Maybe Al-- I know when he left he ~~had~~ approached the idea of students coming back and doing a similar thing, but I don't know whether when he left he had already conceptualized students coming back for a summer.

Sinsheimer: It seems he had conceptualized it in his own mind. (Pause)

Moses: Well, had he actually said anything to anybody?

Sinsheimer: Well, from my understanding of it, he would have in the early winter of 1963-64 -- that he was already telling people in his travels that there was going to be a Summer Project, at the same point that debate was going on.

Moses: Yeah, what I am not sure of when we first started. When it was first approached.

Sinsheimer: There was a staff meeting on November 14, 1963.

Moses: Do you remember where?

Sinsheimer: A meeting was attended by seven white and thirty-five black fieldworkers, most of them affiliated with SNCC.

Moses: The Freedom Vote, I guess would have been a COFO operation.

Sinsheimer: This would have been the Greenville or Greenwood meeting?

Moses: Greenville sounds better. (Pauses)

Sinsheimer: The only history of that meeting is in (Howard) Zinn's book, and I think he was present.

Moses: That could have been at Hattiesburg. Because Zinn was down at Hattiesburg, and right in that time I know we were having the demonstrations at Hattiesburg. The ministers from the National Council of Churches (NCC) were there. And we did have a meeting there, but the meeting there in Hattiesburg may have been a different meeting.

Sinsheimer: Hattiesburg was January of 1964, is that right?

Moses: The meeting?

Sinsheimer: The demonstration.

Moses Interview (9)

Moses: Yeah, that sounds right. (Pause) So, I don't really remember when, because if the Freedom Vote was that late--November--it probably was some time shortly after that. I do remember that we had a workshop and Highlander came down. You should check their records.

Sinsheimer: I have been there. They don't have a lot about that. (Pause)
Moses: There seem to have been two debates, the first one would have been November 14, and the second one would have been the SNCC Executive Council meeting in December of 1963.

Moses: In Atlanta?

Sinsheimer: Yeah, I think so.

Moses: There were other discussions in Mississippi, there was another big one in Hattiesburg in January. I guess that is right, that meeting, that first meeting was probably in Greenville. And I think the money for that meeting came from Highlander, and I think Miles (Horton--Director of Highlander) was down there. And I remember at that meeting that we got into the question of the Summer Project, of having the summer volunteers come down. The split was clear.

Sinsheimer: Who were the opponents of the Summer?

Moses: Basically, most of the SNCC staff were opposed, with a few exceptions. (Lawrence) Guyot, he was not opposed. And Dorrie Madden was for it. I don't know if there were any others on the Mississippi SNCC staff that were actually for it.

Sinsheimer: What about David Dennis?

Moses: Well, David was with CORE.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Moses: But I was just thinking of the SNCC staff, Dave was for it.

Sinsheimer: Fannie Lou Hamer?

Moses: Fannie Lou Hamer was for it. Basically the split was between the staff and the people we were working with who had joined the work enough so that they were party to discussions like that, COFO people. Certainly, Aaron Henry was for it. So basically it was the staff against people we were working with.

Sinsheimer: And you were initially for it?

Moses: Yeah, I was initially-- I guess I was always for it. I didn't-- I held my peace, I did not enter into the debate until it

Moses Interview (10)

Moses: (cont.) became clear that we were stalemated. I finally decided to throw my weight in when-- after the Hattiesburg meeting because we were down there in January discussing it again. And between that November meeting, if that is the meeting and that probably is, and the January meeting in Hattiesburg, we were still undecided, and torn by it. Louis Allen was shot and killed while we were at the Hattiesburg meeting. I remember that it was in riding over-- I left Hattiesburg to ride over to Ingham to see his wife that I decided that we should, I should throw my weight behind the Project. Because it seemed like we ought to. (Pause) It seemed we were not in position to reap whatever benefits were to flow from this first wave of civilized activity which was getting ready to culminate in Washington with the Civil Rights Act-- which was being put into place in some ways right there in Mississippi, it was right there in Hattiesburg, the kind of thing they were doing-- they were taking these ministers and bringing them down ... demonstrations, and then they were going back to their congregations and then organizing busloads of people to go to Washington.

Sinsheimer: Were you surprised that there wasn't more violence at the Hattiesburg Freedom Day?

Moses: (Pause)

Sinsheimer: You were arrested that day, right? And Oscar Chase was ...

Moses: Oscar was beaten. (Pause) Was I surprised?

Sinsheimer: It is the word Zinn uses.

Moses: I don't guess I anticipated a lot of violence, and I guess what you were living off of was kind of a feel for what the patterns were of violence in Mississippi. How they took place? Because basically I think you were still in your -- the Governor being in control of the reaction, trying to control the reaction of the people in the state by his mechanisms, the highway patrol, the state police, the county police, his investigating units, and so forth. And the feeling that whatever violence took place-- a lot of it was instigated around those mechanisms. And rifle shots more than just a shotgun, specific targets, designed if they could to pull the thread that might unravel what was going on. So it wouldn't have been, I wouldn't have thought I don't think that you would have any of those mechanisms in a violent way around that demonstration which was attracting outside attention. Those ministers there and so forth.

Interview with Robert Moses (11)

Moses: (Cont.)

And as long as that mechanism was in place and operating and covering the situation, you were not likely to have unplanned sporadic kinds of violence. You were getting that violence-- that kind of violence-- however around the state. There was a rash of the cross burnings, churches were burned, and then the kind of thing with Louis Allen-- getting shot out of no where, because certain mechanisms was not focused on a certain place in Amite County around that. There was nothing going on there. And that is what we didn't have control over and it was not so much what might happen to us but what was happening to the people we were working with-- like Louis Allen. People one way or another we touched on or contacted. Because then there is evidence of an escalation of the kind of reprisal. And then what I felt would happen in the state if the nation went through a period of this liberalization due to the Civil Rights Act but Mississippi didn't. Then I felt that would lead to people, black people being brutalized because the kind of things they were touching in the Civil Rights Act as in desegregation of public facilities and so forth didn't effect these black people in Mississippi, or it didn't effect them very much. But you would have gotten the reaction from the white officials. So I felt that we should try to move to bring Mississippi in on whatever was happening. And I guess that's basically-- if you look back on it--that's basically what happened. Mississippi was kind of brought into, for good or bad, up to or on to the level of the country, instead of being somehow the symbol of the racism and the horror and the place where it generated and so forth. It was kind of moved into the country and its way. And I guess that is what was on my mind during that period. I was trying to weigh that against the real demands of the staff to have their own space and allow themselves to operate within it. There was a problem of whether we could sustain ourselves, whether we could survive it, because, you know, the pressure had begun to show on part of the staff members.

Sinsheimer:

Pressure generated from ...?

Moses:

From the movement. From the work.

Sinsheimer:

What was the reasoning of the people opposed (to the Summer Project)?

Interview with Robert Moses (12)

Moses: I guess the basic problem was a gut reaction against having white student-types come down and have such a heavy hand.

Sinsheimer: One of the things that I have been trying to decipher is in (James) Forman's autobiography there are these one or two sentences where he mentions that we began to see the problems during the Freedom Vote with the volunteers in November. I wasn't sure whether that was tied to specific examples, tied to feelings toward Lowenstein, or tied to what you are talking about, a certain gut feeling?

Moses: Well, I am sure that part of the problem certainly had to do with the ability of the SNCC staff, of the Mississippi staff to work with on an equal basis northern college students, white students. And you had to look at that in individual cases. That was not the only problem for we had some blacks on the staff of SNCC in terms of their education who were the equal of any college student. And they were opposed. Do you remember the Southwest Georgia Project?

Sinsheimer: Yes.

Moses: Okay. Because that was the first project that white volunteers were used. That was in '63. Two of the young girls, black girls who were down in _____. One of them married Frank Smith and Martha Prescott, they came over to Mississippi to get away from the project because it became too much for them-- the interaction between the whites and the blacks. And it is not anything to be surprised at. I suppose at that time that SNCC was the only organization in the whole country that was trying to carry out an integrated living, working arrangement-- a fully integrated community. And to what extent you can do that living in the context of a society that is racially separate is a big question. So certainly there is no question about all the pressures that that generated. And it generated then in a short time I guess in the Mississippi Freedom Vote. I just remember one kind of incident during the Freedom Vote some of the students from Stanford and maybe some from Yale I am not sure, wanted to open up-- go into Yazoo City. And we hadn't worked there. And we suggested that they shouldn't go. But they carried it-- they were arguing with the staff and so forth. Frank Smith was there. This was in Jackson. And we told them that it wouldn't be a good idea to go. But they, it was strange, well maybe it wasn't strange, but their reaction was that it was difficult for them to accept us having jurisdiction in the matter as to whether they should do this or not. And I am sure that they were motivated partly by their own feeling for, wanting to break new ground themselves. You know to get out and go where no one has gone and do something. But I think, I

Interview with Robert Moses (13)

Moses (cont.) mean I know if they were not really ready to listen to me about a decision they wanted to do or not do it is easy to see how they could move around say a staff person about something they wanted to do or not do when they were out there by themselves. So, I mean that is just an example of the kind of problem, and that's not the only kind of problem.

Sinsheimer: Bruce Payne, he was a Yale volunteer remembers that. I talked to him. He teaches at Duke now. He remembers that. If it wasn't the same incident then it was one very similar to it. Lowenstein suggested that he be sent to one part of the state and the idea was that it was not such a good suggestion.

Moses: I don't know if Lowenstein would have suggested this to them or not. He might have. But his name did not come up. Yeah, I guess that is that, but that is a different part of it-- the feeling that the students had-- kind of loyalty to Lowenstein. And I don't know but that would not have made a difference in what we were talking about. That was not the crucial issue. Although it did-- that kind of thing was something that would have, that did bother (James) Forman. And Ella (Baker) too.

Sinsheimer: Okay, let's move on to the-- after the January meeting then, after the idea was more formally accepted. Were you involved in overseeing the recruiting at all? Or?

Moses: Recruiting? Once it had been accepted on our part and then we had to present it to Atlanta.

Sinsheimer: Right. COFO.

Moses: To get, you know the acceptance on part of SNCC to make sure that they were going to join this project, then the recruiting on the part of SNCC took place through basically two channels. One would have been the Friends of SNCC apparatus and the second would have been the Southern college network, southern college students. And I guess that was the person in the SNCC office who was working with the Friends of SNCC apparatus. And Ruby Doris.

Sinsheimer: Margaret Burnham, was she involved?

Moses: Margaret wasn't, as far as I know she wasn't in Atlanta. She came down for the Project. But I think that Ruby Doris Smith was doing the southern black colleges.

Moses Interview (14)

Moses: (Pause) So the Friends of SNCC operation. And then we were doing some recruiting out of Jackson, keeping in touch with students or people that we had contacted. And Mendy Samstein had a lot to do with that, I guess. Have you talked to Mendy?

Sinsheimer: I have seen a lot of memoes she has written.

Moses: No, Mendy is a he.

Sinsheimer: Sorry. ~~she~~

Moses: That's okay. (Pause--inaudible) Mendy, was basically the person who was on the telephone with Al, in charge of recruiting.

Sinsheimer: Was there a general staff feeling that recruiting was very important?

Moses: General staff feeling?

Sinsheimer: Quality-- was that stressed?

Moses: Of the people coming down?

Sinsheimer: Right.

Moses: Oh, I think we were, people were looking for good people. I remember that Mendy was very impressed with the applications, and the type of people who responded. (Pause) But I think the effort at least was to discourage people who might not be prepared psychologically. And I don't think there was any feeling to just get as many people as you can. ... Important to tell it like it is so to speak, let people sift through real carefully what the commitment was.

Sinsheimer: Now were you involved in this process at all?

Moses: I didn't go out and recruit people. In fact I think the only time I went out was when we had a breakdown in the process at Stanford when Lowenstein pulled out and Dennis (Sweeney) called and asked me to come to Stanford. (Pause)

Sinsheimer: I knew that you had spoken at Stanford, I think that was in March (1964). But you didn't speak anywhere else?

Moses Interview (15)

- Moses: Well I can't say that I did not speak anywhere else, but I didn't go around ~~actively trying to~~, say on a circuit, trying to recruit people. But then if I was out someplace then I ~~certainly would have~~ spoken. And I did travel around. (Pause). New York. I might have spoken, yeah I am sure because we did speak to some people, I remember that there was a conference or something up in Detroit. I was there, I remember we spoke there to some students. So I was involved in the recruiting, but it wasn't my major focus. I didn't do for example what I understand Lowenstein did. 'Cause I think, from the messages I got, that he was moving around.
- Sinsheimer: He seemed in contact with a lot of people from the National Student ...
- Moses: NSA (National Student Association)
- Sinsheimer: Yeah, NSA.
- Moses: Yeah, But I don't know whether he was speaking at public meetings ...
- Sinsheimer: It was a combination of a lot of things as far as I know. But I think ...
- Moses: Because what he said was that he had worked ~~more~~ on that project than anything else he had ever been part of. He worked harder on that than anything he had ever worked on. This was in conjunction with his leaving.
- Sinsheimer: Well, he seemed to be, as far as I can sort of get the general feel of it, he was going to a campus, getting in contact with one or two people he might have known there, for example Barney Frank at Harvard, saying you guys along with the Friends of SNCC get this coordinated, and then he would move on, and then he would come back and kind of oversee everything. But outside of certain campuses I am not sure how actively he was involved. Certainly at Yale, Stanford, and Harvard. (Pause) So at this point you would have been with the staff developing more formal plans?
- Moses: We were through all this period, once we decided to have it, making preparations in Mississippi. Locating those counties about the project, making sure that they wanted to have it.
- Sinsheimer: So that was something that was formally done? Each place ...
- Moses: Each area where they had a project, meetings with people to discuss having this project, whether or not they wanted their area to be involved which meant that they had to come up with housing.

Moses Interview (16)

Sinsheimer: Were there areas of the state where the Project ...?

Moses: Well, there were areas of the state that we had not worked in, but all the areas where we had worked, people came through. And it became a way also of extending the project as people would hear about it, as word got around and so forth, people offered to take people in. So it became a way of organizing communities. (Pause) But we didn't use it for example to penetrate up into the Northeastern part of the state. Which is interesting because that is the place where in the late seventies the Klan marched.

Sinsheimer: Those are what they call the hilly regions of the state?

Moses: Yeah, well not the only hilly regions but I guess it was an area of the state that was a little more developed than some of the other parts of the state. And it is also the area in which the percentage of blacks was smaller. So we didn't-- in terms of registration-- try to pursue that more. But-- it turned out though because the movement never kind of got in there, you never had this kind of catharsis that the other areas did and it was the area where the Klan, you know, reemerged in the state and opened and began to march and so forth. I don't know whether you were following that or not.

Sinsheimer: No.

Moses: Because in the late seventies they were having Klan-- and black people were marching also-- but both carrying guns.

Sinsheimer: Where did the or when did the idea of the training programs originate?

Moses: Which training?

Sinsheimer: The Oxford.

Moses: The Oxford training programs. I am not sure when. We began, I mean we were just having nonstop now, meetings and discussions and plans among the staff as to how we were actually going to engineer the program for the summer. So certainly one of those was the idea that the students are coming. How do they come? How do they get where they are going? Do we meet with them? That kind of thing. So it certainly would have been one of those sessions where we would have talked about having some kind of meeting with the students.

Moses Interview (17)

Sinsheimer: The NCC offered some money for that, right?

Moses: Right. They were in the state. You know they had there program in Hattiesburg and things in other places too. And they were moving around I guess looking to set up this Delta Ministry Project. I think by that time they had already conceptualized the project. And so they were willing to help. So they did foot the bill for that. What we didn't think of-- and its too bad-- was doing something similar at the end of the summer. (Pause) We didn't.

Sinsheimer: Was there a-- from what I can tell I think somewhere between eighty and eighty-five percent of the volunteers were white.

Moses: If not more. But maybe not.

Sinsheimer: I did a sample and got eighty-five, and someone else got eighty-two, and someone else got eighty-eight, or something like that. But was that ...

Moses: But you have to remember that the universities and colleges had yet to be integrated. The first wave of blacks in American colleges came after, around 1969. I never thought about that. 'Cause in all of that the volunteers were looking, coming down and wondering and wanting to be involved and having something to do to work on, but we never thought about opening up the colleges and universities to black people. And I am sure that the problem was in our conceptualizing, again there were qualified-- I mean I am sure that myself and all those other people subconsciously would think in terms of well the problem is not so much that the colleges are not open to blacks, but there are not enough qualified black people to be able Because it is interesting that you had the Free Speech Movement, you know, coming out, and the movement to reorient the whole concept of the college as the local parent, to break out of that. But even in the Free Speech Movement, you didn't have coming out of the Free Speech Movement the demand to open the University to black people. And I am sure that it is the content-- the conceptual link that is missing. So that is one reason why we didn't have blacks because they were not there in the colleges. And where were they? They were in the southern colleges. And Ruby was breaking her back to try an get blacks from the southern colleges into the Project. And the problem, well there were a lot of them--

Moses Interview (18)

- Moses: (cont.) here's two problems: one is the orientation of the black students in the southern colleges. Although they had been kind of liberated by the movement itself, by their own movement, the sit-in movement. And that had _____ a number of people out of their traditional ways of thinking, but still shackled-- I mean I remember meeting a few years ago a person who is now a professor, a young black professor and would be just _____ college who was in Nashville as a student in '64. And from Mississippi. And who is very militant now, and certainly was then. But for whom the thought of going back to Mississippi to work was something terrifying.
- Sinsheimer: Was money also a problem?
- Moses: Money would have been a problem. I mean money was a problem in getting black students. We did get some scholarship money for the black students. But anyway to get all that, I mean you couldn't come up with large numbers and I guess if we, I don't know if money would have been well-- we were working with, we already had contacts with the Field Foundation with work/study programs which we were running to get college students involved, to get our staff in the process of continuing education. And that was helpful but I don't know if you could have gotten the help on the scale that was required. I mean there was no way that we could have gotten people to shake loose a million dollars or something for a scholarship fund. Because the establishment at that time was too frightened of what the students might do. I don't think you could have gotten that kind of help even \$ 500,000. (Pause--inaudible) Tuition was a \$1000 per student, \$1500 maybe. Fifty students, fifty grand. So \$500,000-- on a long term basis you couldn't get \$50,000 a year or something like that to run No one was thinking on that scale. I don't think it crossed our mind that we should be asking on a scale like that. We were asking for peanuts. Ten students, \$10,000, and we were happy to get that.
- Sinsheimer: The first training session was with the voter registration workers. Do you remember when Reverend Lawson came to speak?
- Moses: I don't remember his speech.

Moses Interview (19)

Sinsheimer: Do you remember discussions of the theory of nonviolence during the training sessions?

Moses: (Pause) Do you have some-- any of the notes or papers or anything concrete? The content? Did he write up something?

Sinsheimer: Yeah, I don't have the content, I don't have the full speech but it seemingly left a ... (Reading)

Moses: Where was that quoted from? (Tracy Sugarman)

Sinsheimer: (Pause) (Reading) Was that question then as problematic as maybe that account suggests?

Moses: Well actually it went deep into the staff, not only the volunteers.

Sinsheimer: Right. Well this seemed to -- this whole thing involved volunteers and staff and everyone

Moses: But (Bob) Zellner's comments (Tracy Sugarman Stranger at the Gates) seem to be directed to the volunteers. Because he wouldn't be saying that to the staff. But the staff had had their own discussions previously in Atlanta. There was a heavy meeting of the SNCC staff about this question-- a question of carrying guns. And the question of using guns which were in local people's homes if you were attacked. And staff people stated their own personal positions about what they would and wouldn't do. And I think if anything that the Project probably weakened the hold that the nonviolent philosophy had on the organization because faced with this overwhelming possible resistance and forced to kind of again, you know, sift through your own attitudes about what you are going to do in particular situations, people I think moved more toward a self-defense posture. I don't think violence versus nonviolence is such a good dichotomy, but the question of self-defense and what you do, what the limits are, what means you take toward defending yourself. Or going into-- I think people would rather go into their own minds-- this is part of psychologically preparing themselves. And we went into them in staff discussions. So-- it was however, dangerous to carry guns in Mississippi, because of the law, you know, that the guns have to be carried open. Because all the white farmers put their rifles or shotguns or whatever they were using on the

Moses Interview (20)

Moses: (cont.) pickup trucks, on the glass at the back.

Sinsheimer: Right. Right.

Moses: So you saw that all the time. But no black farmers were doing that. Black farmers had guns--but they were in their homes. But for a black farmer to post his gun on his pick up truck would be like a sign for picking a fight. Be kind of like just sitting yourself out there to be harassed by highway patrol or the police. Not that they would pick you up for having a gun, but running this red light or missing that stop sign. So I don't know-- I don't remember seeing any black farmers posting their guns. Now Medger (Evers) of course carried a gun all the time and he kept it on his seat in his car. Which is again a signal because anytime a highway patrol or somebody stops you and they see a gun then right away, you know, you are targeted. And my feeling was that always that the strategy was to move as quietly as possible among people so that you could work. Because the strategy was not to pick a fight and just throw yourself into the wave of mechanisms.... (Break)

Well I thought the discussion had a lot of negative qualities because the emotional pitch was so high. and you couldn't get into what the real practical issues were but more around are you violent or nonviolent? Or even if not violent because no one is going to say that they are violent, are you nonviolent? And people don't want to say that they are nonviolent. So I am not sure-- the interaction with the volunteers was too short and what they would pick up certainly would be much more what the person, staff person on the Project they were on, or the people they were living with. And certainly we didn't meet any people in Mississippi who were practicing nonviolence-- I mean none of the people we were working with-- and while they sometimes acknowledged that we ourselves were practicing non-violence so instead they would not buy it. And we weren't selling it, that's the other thing. There was nothing in the work that we were doing which required any of the people that we were working with practice nonviolence. There's nothing in terms of going down to register or anything like that which required that they take the nonviolent stance.

Moses Interview (21)

Moses: (cont.)

It may have been something that we were requiring of ourselves but it wasn't something-- like the sit-ins, right where you anticipate that there is going to be some violence directed at the people who are participating personally, and therefore they should be trained. So the whole--see Lawson's, I had forgotten that Lawson was at Oxford-- because Lawson's particular approach and commitment to nonviolence died in Mississippi in the movement actually before, long before the Summer Project. I think it died right after the Freedom Rides in the summer of '61 when all the people he had trained gathered in Jackson and tried to launch a nonviolent movement and failed. He himself, for whatever reason, didn't feel that he should join the movement in its organized form, so he wasn't there. And there wasn't the spiritual engine that you need to make something like that go, also wasn't there. So that died, and I kind of marked its death at the time, it was something that I was watching closely. So you were left with this more practical program of voter registration organizing which didn't require either on the part of the staff or the people a commitment to nonviolence.

Sinsheimer:

Right.

Moses:

There is nothing in the federal government that says you have to be nonviolent to go register.

Sinsheimer:

Right.

Moses:

And they encourage everyone to register. The right to register is part of the law and there is nothing in the law that says you have to adopt this or that stance. So the volunteers as far as I can see didn't get a heavy dose of nonviolence, and certainly they were not-- most of them coming from some kind of nonviolence stance or background unless there were some Quakers.

Sinsheimer:

Was there-- in terms of the composition of the volunteers, what sense was there that they were recruited not only because of who they were but the connections that they had?

Moses Interview (22)

Moses: No sense. I mean the people at Stanford and Yale the assumption is in the society that those students are well connected. But aside from the fact that college students in the society as a whole are well connected, I don't have any recollection of people being concerned, you know, with prestigious connections.

Sinsheimer: Well the reason I asked that is because I read an interview report of Geoffrey Cowan and one of the things that

Moses: But who would have known about that. I mean the people who might have known about-- there was a group of people who might have known and would be interested in that. Do you remember or did you run across the name Tim Jenkins?

Sinsheimer: He was out of Nashville?

Moses: No, Tim was at Yale Law School and was a Vice-president of NSA.

Sinsheimer: Oh right, okay.

Moses: He was black and very influential. (Interruption)
At the time of the Summer Project I guess he was still a student at Yale just getting ready to graduate and so was Elanor, Elanor Holmes. And there was a group of people like that who were high powered in themselves in prestigious organizations or schools who might be aware of this or that person and, you know, their connections.

Sinsheimer: Certainly not the staff people in Mississippi.

Moses: Staff people in Mississippi, no. And couldn't care less. To just be honest with you, you know, they didn't want them down there. Much less someday a guy might pop up at a meeting and flash his connections. It just served to remind them, you know, of everything that they were fighting. (Pause) Of course you get someone like Guyot who might voice some sentiments in that area, about people with connections and the importance of having them. But Guyot was an exception, and not involved in recruiting.

Sinsheimer: (Pause) Do you think there was a difference between the people who were doing the voter registration-- the volunteers doing the voter registration work and those who came to the Freedom School orientation?

Moses Interview (23)

- Moses: Oh, I have no way of knowing. It doesn't seem like there could be. I guess as the applications came in people indicated their interests. There were some social scientists from Michigan-- I think they were from Michigan ~~who~~ ~~who~~ came down to the orientation and they wanted to study
- Sinsheimer: Wisconsin.
- Moses: Wisconsin. And we didn't let them. So the chance for all that kind of analysis went by the boards and we weren't equipped to do it ourselves.
- Sinsheimer: (Pause) What about the-- I guess I am trying to draw a distinction between some of the quieter-- from what I can sense-- some of the quieter southern students who came from let's say, whose motivations if you can be rude enough to be a social scientist let's say religiously motivated as opposed to some of the northern volunteers. Did you sense there was at all a sort of class division among the volunteers?
- Moses: Now, do you mean the division along regional lines? Between southern students ... and do you have figures on the numbers of southern people?
- Sinsheimer: Most of them-- I think it is somewhere, I could look it up, but somewhere around eighty percent were from the north. What I am getting at
- Moses: And how many of those from the South were black?
- Sinsheimer: Well that's the thing that most of the southern ones were black. Well when I talked to Sue Thrasher down at Highlander-- she more or less came right out of that Nashville movement. In other words the volunteers that are traditionally written about especially in the media the sons and daughters of people with connections, people very verbal talking with reporters. And yet you get this undercurrent of feeling that there was another whole group of people there.
- Moses: Well, I mean there was quite a group of people there, and I suppose in their own right they deserved to be studied. I mean just to get some understanding about America. And I suppose that if the funds were made available it is possible to do it, actually go out and study. Wally Roberts who was a Freedom School coordinator in Shaw, do you know of him?

Moses Interview (24)

Sinsheimer: He is at the Massachusetts Citizen's Advocate now?

Moses: Right. It's right up here.

Sinsheimer: Do you know if he is still living in Boston?

Moses: Yeah. I think I have a phone number.

Sinsheimer: Oh really. Okay.

Moses: And there is another girl who was with the Freedom Schools who is heading up a school for organizers in Chicago. So I don't know if it true or not, but I have the sense that a lot of them, a lot of the volunteers, you know, have made their own in the society as a whole, in one way or another, made some kind of mark on it. And the experience in Mississippi was important to them.

Sinsheimer: There's a book being written on this actually.

Moses: Oh really.

Sinsheimer: A guy named David Chalmers at Florida. I don't know how he is doing it per say. There are a lot of books being written about this as far as I can feel out, which is quite interesting in itself right now why there is this-- especially to me since I am writing it myself.

Moses: But I have no idea about that question except I didn't buy the image of the volunteers as the well connected.

Sinsheimer: You said that you didn't buy that?

Moses: No. I mean that was not-- I never thought of that as more than something else than Evans and Novak. You know, their theory that there's this great plot. Of course, Al (Lowenstein) thought more along these lines of connections, political connections-- can operate with connections. But we weren't operating that way. I mean our few little connections were with the Justice Department-- Burke Marshall and really John Doar who was down in Mississippi.

Sinsheimer: The first training session when Doar spoke, he from what I can tell upset a lot of people, and the second training session-- I don't remember where I read it-- but someone said that you asked people

Moses: Not so spend their time arguing.

Moses Interview (25)

Sinsheimer: Right. Right. Why was that?

Moses: I guess basically because we didn't do that. That wasn't how we worked with them in SNCC. We left that to Atlanta and the publicity people.

End of interview.