

ED KING

Interviewed 1966 by:
Anne Romaine
Howard Romaine

Interviewer: First, I'd like to talk a little bit about your traveling right before the convention. Where did you go? Did you travel outside the state, Kingsport...?

King: I only went to New York. I didn't really go outside the state that much. I spoke at a meeting in New York city of support groups a few days before Atlantic City. That's the only place I went.

Interviewer:

King: Oh, when he spoke publicly? I don't remember any optimism during that time.

Interviewer: You don't, why is that?

King: Cause we knew the odds were immense and the President didn't want anything usual happening at the convention, upsetting.

Interviewer: You mean....

King: Well, we had heard this and as I remember what ... would say, it was going to be a terrific fight. It was a good fight. But it had never been done so there was a possibility of succeeding.

Interviewer: Well, after you got to the convention.... when he got there one of the first things that struck him was that ... and Henry were talking to the press.... saying that FDP really had a chance to get more than five or sixand they seemed to.... operate from a point of weakness and the press was ~~King~~ saying too....

King: Well, the number of votes we had went up and down but part of it was we always had to underplay our potential strength so that Lyndon Johnson didn't smash us, and play off our strength-- We were both at one ^{hand} ~~had~~ trying to say we do have a chance of winning so that it is worth fighting, we are serious, on the other hand we didn't want to always say well we got eleven, twelve, thirteen states already in line but at the minute we said we had that many, we knew that the President would count out his side, and the Mississippi delegation would count out and somebody would start after the people that were leaning our way and so we were much more counting on last minute decisions in our favor than we were somebody making ~~an~~ the decision on one day to vote for us two days later because we knew the power could be brought against us.

So that if there's some confusion about the statements this is probably what was going on. I don't remember myself. I was usually giving the opposite of this angle. I was sure we were going to have to win. If I remember whatever public statements I was making.

Interviewer: Did you have strategy discussion about this?

King: Yes, we had strategy discussions about this. We had strategy discussions with the delegation from the very beginning that we would probably have to accept some kind of ^compromise.

Interviewer: You mean after--

King: --From the first meeting in Atlantic City after the delegation got there.

Interviewer: You all had leadership conferences too before the convention?
groups?

King: Of the civil rights ~~xxx~~ Yes. Probably was in early July. Bayard Rustin was here, Martin King, ... from SCLC, other people from SCLC, SNCC people, CORE people, all the civil rights groups except the NAACP.

Interviewer: Why were they absent?

King: I don't know. I assume because what we were doing was too radical. I never felt the NAACP was supporting us very strongly in Atlantic City. They ^{n't} gave us token support, that's all. I don't know why they were/here the whole COFO summer they didn't have NAACP support so it would have been kind of awkward for them to appear, for them to have come to this strategy meeting~~x~~. Although I think ~~this~~ was the first strategy meeting of the heads of the civil rights movement that I know of that Wilkins was not in. I'm sure it was his decision. It took place here at Tougaloo. The meeting went over strategy for Atlantic City and who would support us and that each group, CORE, Dr. King's group would begin contacting their people in northern delegations and trying to build up support for us before we got there. And a very good job was done of this. Most of the contacting was done through FDP at the Washington office but the other civil rights groups did a lot, a great deal. A lot of talking was done about types of strategy with Bayard Rustin. At one point we almost decided to have Bayard head up the northern strategy. This would have been kind of a real blue ribbon civil rights leadership with Bayard Rustin directing all of the outside strategy and demonstrations at Atlantic City. What we wanted was that Bayard would be in charge of building up Negro and white support

groups for us in Atlantic City. That "we" is FDP. We at FDP through Ella Baker and our Washington office, we would be more in charge of direct political contact with northern delegations like who do you reach in the state of Michigan in the UAW, liberal intellectual college and that sort of thing. We didn't want to give all ~~the whole~~ of it over to Bayard, not because anybody was against Bayard but because this removed it too far from Mississippi. This broke down because what we were asking for was two separate offices, Bayard to head one office preparing a certain kind of support for Atlantic City and FDP to run its own office, sort of independent of the civil rights movement, as a political organ. And Bayard insisted that this would be too complicated. Either he had to have absolute control of everything outside of the state as he had had in the March on Washington--nobody particularly thought of a "March on Atlantic City" or anything like that, certainly we had talked of bringing hundreds of thousands of people that might come since it was so close to big Negro cities, the big population groups. That broke down, Bayard feeling that he couldn't do it, that it was too loose. Our feeling was that if it didn't stay loose the Mississippi people wouldn't have anything to do and this was the civil rights movement doing something good for the people of Mississippi and the Mississippi people ~~feeling~~ not feeling that they had any part in it, which is a total difference in perspective.

Interviewer:that would seem like a fantastic amount of people....

King: Well, that was only one idea. There were other kinds of support,

and pressures and telegrams and letters and all kinds of things. And Bayard would have done much the same thing that was done through our Washington office anyway. But it would have just been done very independently of any connections with Mississippi. As it was I think we made the right decision because I think our Washington office did a terrific job.

Interviewer: Bayard was pressured from the UAW?

King: No, not at that time I don't think there was anything. There were connections-- I don't think Bayard was pressured by UAW when he came to ~~xxxx~~ Atlantic City and was never trying to get us to accept the compromise there but that was because he feared the white backlash which he said was ^{seated} developing in the country. Now if FDP got ~~defeated~~ and the South walked out of the convention which was what he thought would happen, that there would be such a ~~which~~ backlash that Johnson would loose the election to Goldwater. I don't think he was under any pressure from the UAW or anybody. And Bayard's strong point was that the peace of the world is more important than race at this momemt and the Negroes had to realize that Lyndon Johnson was the great candidate for peace and if we wanted peace in the world we had to support him and not upset the convention. But I don't think ~~we~~ he was being pressured, ~~he~~ was ~~take~~ taking a big view.

Interviewer: Well, after it was clear that you couldn't get a
Do you have any ideas about that?

King: I'm confused on that. ...thinking was that we couldn't get it. We had already won a great deal. He was afraid, I think, that something would go wrong with what we had already won and that we would lose if we tried for more. We would lose even what we had. But when we decided we wanted to try for it, ...went out and worked for it and tried to get the minority report and worked right up to the minute the vote was taken in the convention, ~~sign~~ signing up delegations. I think he had eight or nine, I think he had nine states out the thirteen he needed for a roll call for votes by the time the ~~the~~ thing was called on the floor and as the evening progressed the other states got in touch with us saying they would have voted for a roll call ~~but~~ vote except they had been told that FDP had accepted the compromise. ~~I know because~~

I know I was called at the ...Hotel about 4:30 that morning. I think by a delegate from Iowa saying that he had just heard a strange story that FDP had wanted Iowa's vote for a roll call ~~but~~ vote, that we had not accepted the compromise. He wondered if that was true.

Interviewer: Who put this out?

King: The President. So that we were fighting the minute that the news broke a report that we had won a great ~~victory~~ victory which we had accepted and this was--many said--that this was acceptable to us. ~~Many~~ Many ^{that} of the delegation/had planned a ~~caucus~~ caucus that night just before the convention to decide what to do about it had not even have their caucuses, they

adjourned their meeting before we could get to them because the first report they got was that they had accepted. This was put out on television while Bob Moses, Aaron Henry and I were in Humphrey's room negotiating, it was announced on television that it was final, while we were in the room.

It was being offered to us for us to consider. This was another reason we were so angry in turning it down. My own feeling is that even Humphrey was tricked at this point. Bayard was there, Martin King was there, Walter Reuther, Aaron was there. We were talking about it. I had made a proposal for several modifications in the plan as offered which I'm very sure would have been accepted. We were offered two seats. I asked that those be split into four half seats, four half votes. We were ~~made out~~ mad because the President was saying, "I'd take Aaron Henry and Ed King." You know, to be the spokesmen and we may have been the top-ranking people in the delegation but we didn't like--and we knew the people wouldn't like it--that if they had had a right they would have voted Aaron. They might have voted me among four but if they had voted for four it ~~wouldn't~~ would have been Aaron, Mrs. Hamer, Vicki Gray who was the committee woman and I probably would have been a fourth to be elected. This was a ~~one~~ compromise we were trying to work out and go back to the people and give them a chance to vote on it and this would have put in two more people, reasonably represented. Humphrey that we can't take a chance on that, the President insists that I be in it because I was white, that he wanted an interracial delegation. I said, well, I'm sure

Mrs. Hamer has to be a part of it and Humphrey said, the President has said that he will not let that illiterate woman speak on the floor of the Democratic Convention. Bob Moses exploded, Humphrey got very angry.

Interviewer: What did Bob say?

King: He told Humphrey that he was a racist, ~~that~~ Humphrey was trying to say no, that's what the President said but it came out that Humphrey felt the same way that surely we have someone else w that the people would feel just as comfortable with somebody who can handle themselves better. ~~Now~~

Now, I think what the real issue was that she was too emotional a speaker and they were just afraid to have her as a delegate if she ever would ... and get to a microphone. ~~and~~ I don't think it was quite as racist as it sounded but it was pretty bad. Anyway we were still trying to negotiate something, we hadn't just flatly turned it down. We were telling Humphrey that we had to go back and talk to our people about it. Humphrey finally was saying well that's reasonable, if you go and talk to your people and Humphrey told Bob Moses, now look, Moses, anything you tell those people they're bound to do so like I know you're the ~~boss~~ boss of that delegation. And Bob was saying that they've got to talk about it. We had just about, I felt, gotten Humphrey to the point where we would have a n hour or so to go talk to the delegation when an aide rushed into the hotel room and said to Humphrey, you must come look at TV, and he rode ~~the~~ the television in; it was on and there was a newscaster announcing and we sat. He said that a compromise had been reached, the credentials committee had given out its report ~~and~~ ^{that} the FDP

had accepted our two seats. Bob got up and said, you cheated, to Humphrey, ran out of the room and slammed the door. And the meeting just broke up. I ran out with Andy Young to try to catch up with Bob.

Humphrey I felt was so shocked when this thing came on that I felt that even Humphrey had been used by the President, you know, to stall us. By the time we got to the delegation the SNCC people had gone mad because they were convinced that Ed King, and Aaron Henry and Bob Moses has made a deal because there it was on ~~TV~~ television. So it was no wonder that we never caught up because you see we had enough states to force a roll call vote. The roll call vote we would have ~~xxx~~ won on the matter of debate this was the first roll call would have been on a public debate. As it was, they had a voice vote where McCormick would say the ayes have it no matter what the opinion of the convention was. By the time we got settled, 6:30 or 7 o'clock we finally had our meeting and rejected it, ... was taking a kind of practical point, we'd better save face and go through with this. ~~xxxx~~ We'll never be able to stop it now. We not knowing politics, not knowing ^{we were thinking} dishonesty ~~were thinking~~ well all we have to do is tell the people who four hours ago were with us that we want a roll call vote. We were going to have quite a show on the convention floor. We had heard Senator Morse ~~was~~ would probably ~~going to~~ speak for us and possibly Adlai Stevenson and you can see why the President didn't want ~~xx~~ the convention breaking over ^{it}_A. We don't know about Stevenson but there sure were hints in that direction, that he was willing to

break with the President.

Interviewer: How many meetings did you all have with Humphrey?

King: Three. At the last meeting Mrs. Hamer did not come. We didn't even know we were going to a meeting with him. Bayard came over and said I want to talk to somebody and Bayard ~~walk~~ took us to the meeting with Humphrey and Mrs. Hamer was deliberately not taken to that meeting. The last meeting we did have with Humphrey when Mrs. Hamer was there she told him, Senator Humphrey, "I been ~~paying~~ praying about you and I been thinking about you and you're a good man and ~~you~~ you know what's right and the trouble is you're afraid to do what you know is right." She says, "you just want this job. I was timekeeper." And she started her timekeeper story. "I lost my job and I know a lot of people have lost their jobs and God will take care of you. Even if you lose this job. But Mr. Humphrey, if you take this job, you won't be worth anything. Mr. Humphrey, I'm going to go pray for you again." He didn't want her there the last time.

Interviewer: She thought Humphrey was crying. At one time. Who are the people who encouraged you ought to take this compromise when finally they did...

King: Bayard and Reuther were the main ones.

Interviewer: Bayard because of the war...

King: That's part of what he talked about about ~~and Reuther~~

Interviewer: And Reuther wanted to--

King: for putting down the right wing. Reuther--

Interviewer: --because the President pushed his button?

King: I think because the President pushed his button. Reuther was, as I understand it, was flown there from Detroit in the middle of the night. Nobody knew he was in town. He had been breaking delegations all day, like Michigan and some... support. We had enough support you see in places like North Dakota and South Dakota, Iowa, small states for roll call that even if they began to break off the large states some of the small states would get very angry at that kind of pressure.

Afterwards I heard, I don't even remember where, that the President intervened in Detroit at this time Reuther was involved in just about having a strike, one of the automobile industries for UAW, a strike in the election year would have been very bad, and it would have been hard for Reuther and everybody else. And as I heard the President intervened to help Reuther settle the thing with whatever motor company it was, Chrysler, I think, without a strike and a settlement sort of to Reuther's advantage in exchange for Reuther coming to Atlantic City and helping.

Reuther said that he would destroy ... See ^{Rauh} Rowe(?) was the legal ^[wrong throughout] counsel for UAW

Interviewer: Reuther said this publicly?

King: Yes. But I don't know that Reuther said this to Rowe. Reuther said this to me, Bob Moses, ^{Aaron} ~~Este~~ Henry and said that man worked for us and

we'll break him if we have to, destroy him. We'll fire him if he goes and keeps going working for you people, but Rowe at the same time was not in-- he had been in on some of our negotiation sessions--Rowe was off at the credentials committee meeting. And Rowe would not have made any move without our permission and for the first time at a credentials committee meeting Governor Lawrence, ~~he just died~~ bless his soul, he just died today, who was chairman of the committee would not let Rowe ~~have~~ out of the meeting, or Edith Green get out of the meeting. Whereas in the past they had always been able to get a recess and telephone us so that when the compromise plan was introduced in the credentials committee meeting, the Governor would not allow a recess for Rowe to contact us to find out ~~what~~ what our position was. So that our position was never expressed in the credentials committee meeting ~~when~~ when the vote came. It was put through without Rowe or Edith Green being able to say what the FDP thought about it, their position. They had been negotiating for four or five days and we had always been able to have it. So a lot of word got out that Rowe's job had been threatened by Reuther and Rowe had given in. Now, I think, from what Rowe said, and others, that Reuther probably did call him on the telephone at some point and was probably pretty nasty to him but the threat that so many people, SNCC people and others had talked about, that Rowe gave in because ~~Reuther~~ Reuther threatened his job isn't quite that way, because Reuther did threaten his job, the great liberal that Reuther is, I

think he's a good guy these days, Reuther did threaten it in my presence, Bob Moses' presence, not in Rowe's presence.

Interviewer: Rowe wasn't aware of this--

King: I don't know. I think Rowe was not aware of it until later, 'till after the thing was already in process. I'm not sure. I mean Rowe could have been threatened, ^{I think} even if Rowe had been threatened he would have gone ahead. ~~Anyway~~ You could imagine how that ~~could have been~~ could have been interpreted by Mississippi people and by SNCC people. Of course, they felt Rowe had to give in to Reuther. Maybe he did. I don't think he did.

Interviewer: That might be one explanation. Maybe by the time came for signing that minority report Reuther made clear that if he signed the minority report--

King: By that time I'm sure Reuther had.

Interviewer: That's why he probably didn't sign the minority report.

King: I thought he did sign it.

Interviewer: No, he did not sign. That was the big point.

King: If he didn't sign it it didn't matter because he was out getting signatures and ~~xxx~~ I'm sure he would have when it came up to thirteen. I don't have any question on that.

Interviewer: You mean he would have signed it when he knew--

King: Until he had enough it didn't matter whether his name was on there. He was out getting more ~~x~~ names on it so I'm sure that--

Interviewer: So Reuther and who's the other name you mentioned?

King: Bayard, and Humphrey.

Interviewer: ...addressed the delegation?

King: No, no, no, this was a small meeting with just Eric as chairman Bob as advisor and I was there....

Interviewer: Who addressed the delegation?

King: Well this was the next day, after it was all over. That night we had turned it down. The next day the President still wanted to come back and accept it. Was begging us to please accept it.

That night there wasn't much point about accepting it because we thought we had a chance to fight for something more so we ~~were after~~ went after it. The next day, the question was, well we lost more would you go ahead and accept this gracefully. I mean, I don't think there could be any question about turning it down the first night. We fought for what we'd been fighting for all along, the roll call vote.

It was impossible

~~Was~~ Interviewer: ~~Was it possible~~ the next day to get a roll call vote?

The issue

King: Oh, yeah that was over. ~~It~~ was dead. It could have but how could you have ever gotten people to go back? I mean nobody would have gone back on the vote and start.... The issue that day was would we go ~~ahead~~ ahead and accept the two seats.

Interviewer: What day was that?

King: I don't know, probably Wednesday. I think the vote came on Tuesday night. We had the delegation together. Bayard talked to them, Martin Luther King. Bayard gave, you know, a brilliant talk on politics and the

meaning of compromise and such things like that. There was never, the issue was never whether we ~~would~~ compromise or not. The issue was only what compromise would we accept. ~~Q~~

One other thing that I had tried to get in the final session was Humphrey. I had asked him on the two votes where we would sit. It was clear that we would be given special seats not in the Mississippi delegation. It turned out we were offered two seats with Alaska or something like that.

Bayard was going on. Martin King was saying he thought this would just be wonderful for all the Negro people in America if they saw ^{Aaron} ~~Eric~~ and me there, realize that Mississippi Freedom had been recognized in some way. I was arguing that we be allowed to fill in. We take those two seats and then if the Mississippi delegation went home, -I was sure they would--then we be allowed the option of increasing more people. That we would take the compromise of two seats--we had sixty-eight people there--they had sixty-~~six~~ eight people--~~ignox~~ forgotten what the total vote was, 36 or 38 or something, some of those were half votes, some of those were whole votes. Humphrey said no, that they were sure that some Mississippians would stay. Doug Win, for instance, did stay... and with young Democrats.

Interviewer: Is he here in town?

King: No, he's from Greenville. He's sort of near kin to President Johnson. He's gotten a good federal appointment with the state since then.

Three Mississippians stayed. Humphrey said that under the unit rule if one person stayed from Mississippi he would be able to cast the entire

vote for the entire white delegation even if they all went home, President Johnson going to let Mississippi cast a full vote, and Aaron and I would cast two votes if there were two white ~~Missipp~~ Mississippians stayed they could cast sixty-eight votes for Mississippi. We didn't like that, Humphrey didn't like it either but he said that's all the President's going to give you. Mississippi will still have its vote. To us this was the bad part of the compromise so that you know we were working to try to polish up the compromise that was given but also push Humphrey on the point of whether Aaron Henry would ever really be ... casting the vote for the two at large delegates. Could we be called freedom delegates at large, or would ~~hex~~ we just be at large. It was clear we would just be at large, with no reference to Mississippi. We could have lived with that. Humphrey said that in all honesty he did not know that the problem of Mississippi casting the sixty-eight votes would come up, that nobody would notice that because the vote would be by acclamation. And I said well, ~~what's~~ what you really mean is that somebody will move and the entire convention will vote on President Johnson by acclamation and Aaron Henry and I will never be seen by any of these Negroes that Martin Luther King was talking about, casting votes on behalf of the people of Mississippi.you're right, those votes will never be cast.

We had a letter from him the second day after this saying the President had agreed--I guess the letter came from McCormick--begging me to take the seat, and Aaron even after we had turned it down, saying that they were

now willing to consider splitting it into four seats and changing some of this.

Interviewer: How soon after this was the....?

King: Well, say if the compromise was offered on Tuesday, then on Wednesday our delegation met and turned it down. On Thursday we got a letter. By that ~~at~~ point feelings were so totally set we had already ... on the floor of the convention and had a sit-in and, ... By that point there wasn't even much use in bringing it out and Aaron had gone home. Aaron had disappeared before...

~~King: Interviewer:~~ I assume he came home to Mississippi and ... back... business. Wasn't much else to do and I don't think he enjoyed the sit-ins. I think the sit-ins and things that we did were very important.

Interviewer: In what sense?

King: It carried through with a principle that these were the seats that belonged to the people of Mississippi, the black people of Mississippi as well as the white people, It was a kind of a creative disruption and civil disobedience kind of carried into the middle of politics. We had had civil disobedience everywhere else so it belonged in politics too. And least it was a kind of honest open civil disobedience; it wasn't the dishonest kind of thing that was going on all through the convention about--that was pretty much out in the open.

^a We had support from northern liberals on that. We never made a move to on anything, even ~~on~~ turning down the compromise, ~~without~~ that we didn't have some northern liberal democrats coming to our support. We had

people saying accept it but we also had people saying turn it down.
about

Interviewer: What do you feel ~~wax~~ King's position in all of this?

King: It was a very interesting one. He did not pressure us strongly to take it. The SNCC people were terrified that Martin Luther would sway the delegation, but I wasn't. His position as he told me was that he wanted to see us take this compromise because this would mean strength for him, help for him in Negro voter registration throughout the South and in the North. He could say, if the people of Mississippi did this why don't you move in Georgia, why don't you move in Virginia. ~~hex~~ He said, so being a Negro leader I want you to take this, but if I were a Mississippi Negro I would vote against it. So he understood.

Interviewer: That's sort of the ~~same thing~~ feelings of Rustin ~~wick~~ too

King: King never expressed that clearly to the delegation. He tried to get the delegation to accept it, in which case he was doing his duty.

Interviewer: Why do you feel that President was so scared? Do you feel that he told Humphrey, you're job's on the line?

King: Oh, absolutely. It was either Humphrey ~~hex~~ Senator Dodd ~~who~~ ~~Johnson~~ of Connecticut who Johnson....

Interviewer: Were you told that? Who told you that?

King:

end side one, ~~channel~~ channel 1

Highlander Center

August 29,

Interviewed by:
Anne Romaine

ED KING (cont'd)

(King) some of the political developments within the state. I guess
became
that we ~~became~~ political, The kind of unity that the Negro community
had shown in the fall of 1963 was bound to begin to disappear. At the
third district convention of the Freedom Party we had a kind of a show-
down that looked like it was a ~~showdown~~ showdown between civil rights groups
but really was a showdown against big city control. I really wasn't in-
volved in any of the manoeuverings on it but I saw what was happening and
it was sort of a sign that we were coming of age.

The only place where there had been ~~much~~ much civil rights work
in the third district was Jackson and Hines County and in McComb, Pike
County and Liberty, Mississippi which is a ... County. But during the
election in '63 we had worked most of the other counties in the district.
We tried to get a lot of people to come and these counties had begun, during
the summer, holding their precinct meetings and organizing them. These
people came to the convention expecting Jackson to take all the officers.
They had organized among themselves to make sure that the big city of
Jackson didn't get all the Negro officers. R. L. T. Smith, who was a
Negro minister-businessman insurance agent and a success, landlord and
so on and a noted NAACP person. He's an ~~older~~ older Negro leader in the
state and has been a leader in the past. R. L. T. Smith assumed that he

would be elected as one of the delegates to the Atlantic City Convention from his Congressional district. The people from all the small towns assumed the same thing. The people from the small towns: Vicksburg, Natchez, Liberty and McComb had caucuses, pooled their vote to make sure that they got some of their people elected and the big city people didn't get everything, and proceeded to vote in people from the small town as a block ~~block~~ vote, swapping it off with Vicksburg getting one delegate, Liberty getting the next delegate, McComb getting the next delegate and Jackson not getting anybody and R. L. C. and Smith getting angrier and angrier and angrier, / ~~Seeing~~ this as a great diabolical plot against the ~~NAACP~~ NAACP where it really had nothing to do with NAACP politics. It had something to do with it but he was identified with the NAACP and everybody knew that the NAACP was not supporting the Freedom Party. But it really was a rural-urban fight, the small town versus the big city and the Mississippi Jackson is a huge city. It has a population of around 400,000 and nothing else in the state is much above 35, or 40 thousand. So the people learned politics very quickly and they learned how to have block vote and how to make alliances and Vicksburg was willing to vote for somebody from McComb if McComb voted for Vicksburg. Jackson didn't get to carry the day. Finally the last delegate was to be elected. This ~~little~~ little alliance of the small towns had elected all its people, they were ready to elect somebody from Jackson. R. L. T. Smith, again, was ~~not~~ nominated. R. L. T. Smith was ^{nominated} ~~elected~~ for every office and lost every one in a kind of bewilderment about what was going on. And the final humiliation came when the last ballot

for the last delegate, when revered R. L. T. Smith,--revered by some-- was nominated and thought surely he would win this time and a white teacher from Tougaloo College--same Congressional district--Lois Chasey from the English Department at Tougaloo College and had moved to Mississippi from Idaho but had lived in the state three full years, was a voting citizen was an active worker in the Freedom Democratic Party--Miss Chasey was nominated and suddenly the people felt, wouldn't it be wonderful to have a white delegate, and suddenly the white woman teacher got elected instead of R. L. T. Smith. The NAACP has never forgiven us .

The other kind of friction we had, some of us tried to work this through and so R. L. T. Smith was nominated as an alternate delegate-at-large. When the state convention met some of us made sure that the at-large delegates tied to represent everybody in the state who had done any work in the past and who should be there. And R. L. T. Smith was nominated as an alternate. We never paid much attention to who was alternates and who was a full delegate, we never really thought that anybody would get seated. And, it turned out that R. L. T. Smith was given a second insult and a snub because he was elected as an alternate delegate whereas ~~xxx~~ nobody was trying to insult anybody. He was just selected as an alternate instead of as a regular delegate because we had sixty-eight people going to Atlantic City and it hardly made any difference whether they were full delegates, half votes or were alternates because we didn't think any of them would be seated.

Mr. Smith was one of our delegates. He did not come to Atlantic City. He told us there was illness or death in his family and he was not able to come. He was an extremely influential NAACP member in the state of Mississippi. He's very conservative in his economic thinking. He has run for Congress two years earlier, backed by SNCC and the Freedom Movement in the state. He was persuaded to run as one of the first Negroes to run for Congress in the Democratic Party primary. He, of course, was defeated, but it was a good symbol. But some of his campaigning during that time so frightened ~~white~~ people, that this man was running in a Democratic primary. Some people jokingly referred to him as a Whig because he didn't quite seem to know what the liberal ~~policy~~ policies of the national Party were about. But he had been willing to risk his very life and run for office and people respected him for what he had done in the past and wanted him on the delegation.

In the spring of 1964, when the COFO ~~Summer~~ Summer Project was being planned and the Atlantic City Challenge was being developed, the NAACP broke with COFO. COFO was the parent group for the Freedom Party. The NAACP said that the idea of the Summer Project would be too dangerous and too expensive, that just a lot of bond money would be wasted in Mississippi and that people would probably be killed if they came into Mississippi to work. We agreed that people would probably be killed but we thought it would be some of the leaders in the state, some of the SNCC

workers and others. We didn't expect it to be northern students. We thought they would have a slight degree of protection. But, we felt that without this kind of risk of sacrifice and a serious involvement in a statewide project that we could have no progress. I think the NAACP's real concern was not the violence~~xxx~~, the potential violence, but money. The NAA said, through Wilkins, people like this, as a matter of strategy that Mississippi should be left alone until the rest of the deep South had been touched. At this point very little had really been done in Louisiana, outside of New Orleans, very little had been done in Georgia outside of ~~/~~Atlantic and Albany, very little had been done in Alabama outside of Montgomery, Birmingham and a little work in Selma. In terms of pratical strategy this may have been wise, but we ~~wax~~ felt that our strategy of tackling Mississippi was more practical because the time had come for this. The NAACP saw the Summer Project, therefore, as an immense waste of money because Mississippi shouldn't move until Memphis was almost perfect and New Orleans was at least as integrated as Milwaukee. On the strategy of the Summer Project they saw it as a great money expense with no results.

On the political strategy of the Freedom Party the NAACP had even greater oppositions. I think the real source of their opposition to both was that anything done in the state would be done mostly by SNCC and CORE; the NAACP had almost no organization, perhaps a thousand members, most of whom would not work and had not worked in the past. The NAACP had produced a few outstanding leaders like Aaron ~~xxxx~~ Henry and Medgar Evers who were

in constant trouble with Roy Wilkins in the New York office, because they believed that work should be done in Mississippi and they believe that it would have a terrific financial cost, but, it had to be done. On the political front the NAACP knew that if a political organization was really developed in the state, this political organization would not be controlled by NAACP. It would be an adult organization. The NAACP had kept down the rivalry in the civil rights movements, been able to tolerate it only because CORE and SNCC were chiefly operated and run by young people. A political party would be run by adults and if the adults were not to be equated with the NAACP then this could only be a threat to NAACP control of the Negro community. And, this meant control from outside the state.

The official reason the NAACP gave was that the COFO Summer Project was fantastic enough and was foolish, but to talk about challenging the regular delegation from the state of Mississippi at a political convention, was unheard of frivolity. The NAACP felt that we could not be serious, that all we were talking about was a new kind of ~~demonstration~~ demonstration, that we really weren't talking about political activity. We couldn't mean it serious politics because we had no probably chance of succeeding. We didn't feel that way. We felt that we had a good chance of succeeding, although honestly we didn't expect to have all sixty-eight delegates seated. But we did think it should be followed through and we should follow through with the political letter of the law.

The NAACP said that this would be an even greater expense than the Summer Project itself, that if the NAACP participated that the Freedom Party would just run up huge bills and the NAACP would be left holding the bag and half to bail out the poor Negroes of Mississippi again.

At this time the NAACP also did not know who the ~~next~~ Republican candidate would be and felt it was a mistake to align themselves with Lyndon Johnson and the Democratic Party when some acceptable Republican that ~~the~~ NAACP leaders might have felt more at home with might come along. Or the NAACP should remain neutral and not take a stand. The Freedom Party was committed to Lyndon Johnson and to the Democratic Party for the time of our organization so there could be no question about who we would support in an election.

As the summer drew on, some of these people had a chance to participate in the Freedom Party. The NAACP and some of the traditional Negro leaders in the community, some established ministers and usually the wealthy businessmen, those whose incomes are guaranteed by segregated systems sometimes, and those who've been the established Negro ~~folks~~ spokesmen forever. I don't mean the Toms, because that's a different kind of spokesmen, but the ones who were the leaders but never really favored serious change, just steps toward change. These people would normally have been the leaders of the Freedom Party delegation. They reflected the national NAACP thinking. But the Freedom Party had no chance, ~~which~~ was a crazy idea, had never been done anywhere else and therefore, they shouldn't

participate in it. That's good middleclass thinking. You don't get involved in something new, especially something as new as the Freedom Party and going to a political convention. These people felt, for sure, that we were not going, we would not get there and they disassociated themselves from something that they could not comprehend. When they disassociated themselves from the precinct meetings, from the county conventions, from the Congressional convention, the state convention, they did not get elected to office.

By the end of the summer, by the time of the state convention when it became quite clear that the Freedom Party was very serious, that we were going to Atlantic City, that we were going to rent a very cheap hotel in the city but we were renting a hotel, we were chartering busses to go, and that we were raising money throughout the state of Mississippi at fish fries and everywhere else we could raise it plus raising money throughout the nation, a number of established middleclass Negro leaders tried to get into the Freedom Party. Now, I would say that about 1/5 of the Freedom Party delegates were from the ~~middleclass~~ middleclass; they were not all domestics, or plantation workers. There were almost no real plantation workers; most of our people were ~~poor~~ poor farmers, but they didn't live on the plantation. They either owned 10 or 12 acres of land and just barely lived, or they lived in the cities and worked the plantations but they didn't live on the plantation. So they were a step above the poorest Negroes in the state. But perhaps a

fifth of the delegation were from the established ~~leaders~~ leaders: undertakers, established ministers, college teachers, druggists like Aaron Henry. So the middleclass was not really completely left out. It was just that suddenly this was something big and normally they would have been 80 to 90% of with only a token participation by the Negro poor and this was an organization now that the poor were going to be very powerful in. They asked could they be included in the delegation; could we find a place for them?

I know, I was asked by some because I'm a college teacher. Aaron Henry was asked by people from Greenville, Meridian, places where there have been opportunities for Negroes to become successful. These people were told no. You can't get in it this late. You can't come. These people had never been told no by other Negroes and these people were used to having the poor Negroes ask them for favors. When they had to ask to be included, this must have been humiliating. And when they were told, you will not be included, it is too late, you can work with the Freedom Party but you cannot go to Atlantic City as a delegate, you can come to Atlantic City and work, they wouldn't go.

What happened in Atlantic City is documented, I guess, fairly well.

(Anne) Could we, either...

(King) After the Freedom Party went to Atlantic City, ~~and~~ after people like Mrs. Hamer spoke, who does represent the ~~pp~~ poor people who don't even have a high school education, grade school education, after some of

our other people spoke, Mrs. Victoria Gray ~~was~~ who's had several years of college, we were not just an organization of the poor, after these people had appeared on television, appeared at the ~~executive~~ credentials committee, after Mrs. Hamer had come from a plantation in Mississippi in a two-year period of time was sitting down in a hotel room negotiating with Hubert Humphrey and Walter Reuther and people like this, after they talked to Senator Morse, after they had met Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy, these people were ~~not long~~ no longer ashamed of themselves. They believed in themselves. Once they came back to Mississippi, these sixty-eight people were leaders. People had seen them. People trusted them; people knew them. And suddenly a real class barrier developed the minute we got back from Atlantic City. The old Negro leadership class, who had not believed we would go, who finally had asked to be included and were told it was too late to be included as an officer, now refused to work with the Freedom Party. Because they had been replaced and there was very bitter resentment towards the lower class and the poor Negroes and real friction. Something I think we can understand very naturally and the civil rights labels are only convenient labels to attach to what has happened. But it did happen and that's where Mississippi is right now with a kind of internal feuding within the Negro community from a displaced leadership class to restore itself and take the leadership over from a new class of leaders.