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(assistant director of Washington
office)

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MFDP Office in Washington
Interviewed by Anne Romaine

(Anne) Would you describe your activities. You went into Mississippi in 1961 and worked in McComb

(Leigh) McComb and then Hattiesburg... In fact I worked in the majority of the fifteen counties which comprised at that time the R Third Congressional District. And then I became...

(Anne) Would you briefly describe some of your activities throughout the mock election and up to the Summer Project ~~last~~ and leading up to the organizing of the MFDP?

(Leigh) In August before the March on Washington... COFO... At that time they decided that something dramatic had to be done to demonstrate the fact that Negroes are excluded from political action in Mississippi; that they would participate in the political life of the state, if there were no bars to that. If there were hindrances, no legal and political and ... hindrances. And so we set about organizing a mock election campaign. During that time of we elected at the statewide COFO meeting Dr. Aaron Henry ~~and~~ Clarksdale and Reverend Ed King, chaplain of Tougaloo, to run for governor and lieutenant governor respectively, in a mock election which was to precede the November 3rd elections which would be taking place. The regular candidates at that time, of course, were Paul Johnson for governor and Lubel (?) Phillips, Republican challenger.

The going was kind of rough there because at first the state didn't take us seriously. They thought that this was just another exercise of some sort.

And, we were ~~laughed~~ laughed at. But, when they saw how serious we were and how people were beginning to participate and thinking very seriously, "Well, since I can't vote for the regular thing I'm going to vote in this other thing, because I want to be heard; I want my voice to be heard in this." That's when the troubles began.

Workers who were in the state-- Oh, I must mention at this time we had some kids who ~~were volunteers~~ volunteered their services, who came in from Stanford University in California and Yale in Connecticut and they--

(Anne) You went to Yale?

(Leigh) Yes, I did. That's why I'm grinning. No, I had talked to some of the-- I had written some letters-- I had been in the state for two years... and I had written letters back to some of the kids who were still going to school and some of the organizations with which I had affiliated while I was in school.

Al Lowenstein

(Anne) Was this before. / . came down?

(Leigh) Yes. Well, see Al wasn't-- He didn't come down primarily because of me. He came down because he had already had some contacts in the South. All of our type of activities that we had on the campus were rather sporadic and weren't very well organized at that time.

So the Yale students and the Stanford students came in. We were doing several things. First was kind of very rough political education thing like, what is a ballot; what's it look like; who are the people who are involved on there; and how you should mark your ballot. The next thing to do was to then set up polling places. And this involved, since we couldn't hire

public buildings, naturally, since the state, or county, or municipal governments wouldn't permit us to use public places supported by tax dollars for our extra-legal or extra-political activity, we had to find places for anyone to-- for people to go to and vote. The significant thing about this was that there were a few white people in Forrest County who got confused during the elections and they came into some of the places where we had our mock elections going and we had to explain to them this was a mock election but it was open to them if they wanted to participate. And some of them, a few of them did.

(Anne) What were some of these polling places like?

(Leigh) They were in grocery stores--and we had many big signs, "This is your polling place", you know--and it would be out of grocery store windows, barber shop windows and like that. Some of the white, the neighborhoods there were very kind of confused and not so much defined as they are in the North, you see. Whites live next door to Negroes and this and that and the other. So there may be whites in this neighborhood on one side of the street; there may be whites on both sides but they're living on the same street or in the same block up to a certain point. There may be whites on one side of the line--invisible line--and blacks on the other side of the invisible line. Your next door neighbor could be white and you kids could be playing in your backyard and their kids could be playing in your backyard but there's no fence between the two backyards the kids might mingle anyway ~~until they are~~ until ~~at~~ school age.

This is the kind of thing and so it was natural that a few whites should

become confused and wonder why the voting was taking place on Saturday rather than on Tuesday. And this is why they wandered into some of the grocery stores that were in the neighborhood that I'm thinking of Walton-Crescent (?) in Forrest County. ~~and~~ So they voted. They signed their names and said well I don't see any harm in that and so they signed their names. And they voted.

That's one of the things that the MFDP, since its start and even before its start, has never been an exclusive or a racially exclusive group. It has always said in the constitution and in its bylaws and everything that the doors are open to any legal resident of Mississippi, period. And that doesn't say that you have to be black. It doesn't say that you have to be white or polka dot or Zebra stripe or anything. If you're a legal resident of Mississippi of voting age you are eligible to participate and become a member of the MFDP.

A few whites availed themselves of that but we do have, I should say maybe in Mississippi, a sizable number of whites that are in it.

As I said, there were many difficulties that we encountered. A lot of the workers were harrassed and given a ticket for speeding when you're parked or parking too far from the curb, or ridiculing an officer, any number. I'm trying to think of some of the charges that were lodged against me but I had so many. And you were continually in and out of court and it cost you money to go to the court. You have to pay fines; either that or you stay in jail so ~~you pay~~ because of the importance of the campaign and like that means we saw how important it was to them, the power structure in Mississippi, we

decided to go along with their hanky-panky and pay the fines and get out and continue to organize. Otherwise we would have stayed in jail. It had been our policy at that time, jail, no bail, you know but we had to think of some of the pragmatic things and that was how were we going to really get this demonstration.

We had adopted a principle in SNCC before the March on Washington, that demonstrations shouldn't be mere marching up and down the street, clapping our hands and singing. That if a demonstration was going to be worth anything it had to have an ~~educational~~ educational value. People had to participate and people had to not only participate but plan as well, and execute, and exercise a certain amount of continuity in these types of demonstrations. This, the first type of demonstration that was held after the March on Washington was over in Selma, Alabama ~~which~~ with which I helped out and this was what was called a Freedom Day.

The state of Alabama has required in its constitution and like that, only two days out of the month~~s~~ for people to register to vote and that's the first and third Monday of the month. So we decided that we were going to have a demonstration that day. The demonstration took the form of people massing and marching down to the courthouse and standing in line outside of the courthouse in front of the county registrar's office. This was some-
other
thing that was quite different from the/types of things. There was no singing and clapping of hands, no praying, none of this other bit. It was just the people had come down there to do one particular thing.

It was demonstrated to them two things. One, that when you start becoming relevant, that's when you start becoming dangerous. And secondly, it was also demonstrated to them as an educational thing, that the power structure wasn't going to give in an inch in any way, ~~shape~~ shape, form, or fashion and that other methods would have to be used to deal with them. Like aggressive action through the courts. Filing suits and filing of injunctions against the people who are responsible for the type of intimidation, voter intimidation that was going on there in the state.

So we in Mississippi borrowed a few pages from the Alabama notebook and decided that we, too, were going to have an educational type demonstration and this would be the mock election, which I described. Now throughout the state this happened. We got perhaps about 92,000 votes. Of these, approximately 12,000 had to be discarded, or disqualified. The reason for this was some people had voted too many times. Once was enough, you see. Other times there were people who were not of legal age to vote and a third thing was that there were illegible signatures and you couldn't make out who they were or where they were from or like that. You can't use a scribble as a type of vote, not without any kind of identifying thing under that. So they had to be disqualified also. So that led to disqualifying about 12,000 votes.

But, still, you had 80,000 people who would have made the difference between Lel Phillips becoming governor of Mississippi or not. Because he didn't lose by that big a margin, you see. Now those 80,000 votes could have given Johnson, Paul Johnson, a greater majority in the vote than what

he had. Or, it could have put ^RLubel Phillips in, even with a majority, because I think he lost only by about 20,000 votes. So if all those 80,000 votes had gone to him, he'd have won by 60,000 and that's a sizable margin.

(Anne) ... Negro vote?

(Leigh) Lubel Phillips was a Republican and this was the first time in a long time in the state's history that a Republican had dared to challenge the Democratic party machine that was there and they seriously campaigned. It's interesting to note that during that campaign there were many Republican pollwatchers who were also thrown out of the polling booths, who were also beaten up and there were also charges of fraud and counter-charges of fraud and manipulation of the vote and things like that, during that time. It's also interesting to note that James Eastland at the time said we don't have any room in Mississippi for any two-party politics. He has also repeated himself this year with the same thing.

This had demonstrated to the Republicans that they were going to have to go back and work a little bit harder.

Now, there was nothing really significant about the campaign. Neither-- the whole campaign was centered around the issue of who sold out who and during 1962 when Kennedy during the confrontation between Ross Barnett and John Kennedy and the whole background of the whole thing. The second issue, of course, was nothing but running around the state seeing who could holler ~~XX~~ nigger the loudest, you see. Nigger and communist and Jews from New York and so on and so forth.

The point is that I wanted to make, was that there could have been at that point, if Negroes had been registered to vote, complete turn-around. The Democratic machine would have been broken. Not completely broken but they would have had a new administration in there and a lot of the people who enjoyed a certain amount of political power in the state wouldn't have such power today. And that's what significant about ~~the~~ ^{this} election now.

We've adopted the position of a plague on both of your houses, since neither one of you are really representing the people of Mississippi, not just black people but the poor people, the disenfranchised because these people don't have any say-so in their precincts or on the county level or anything else as to who is going to be selected for ~~mayor~~ mayor or anything else like that. It's only a very small group of people who decide ~~who~~ who's going to run and who isn't. You have a few mavericks now who have been encouraged by the MFDP's example, to come out and run for office. But before then no one had ever bothered to challenge the state's political system. And it had been MFDP who has ~~provided~~ provided the impetus for other people to get into the fray, which also caused ^{Pennington} ~~Pennington~~ (?) Walker to switch ^{--I mean} horses from Republican to Democrat ~~and~~ from Democrat to Republican. He might get back on the other side of the fence now, who knows? That's up to him to decide and I don't particularly want to get into that kind of speculation.

So there were a number of things that were happening in 1963 that set the stage for today and the type of campaigning that's going on right now.

counted our votes

But, to get back to the election we ~~announced~~ and it took us quite a long time to do it... We were able to say, of course, that our candidates won because mostly everyone had voted for Aaron Henry and Ed King. But --the day of the elections-- it took us well into Tuesday/to really get down to the final figures. A lot of-- I believed myself that many more votes were missing because ~~something~~ sometimes police would come around and raid the place and carry off the ballot boxes and like that thing. Second thing, sometimes people would see that the police were coming and they would just destroy them. Burn them up, tear them up, do anything to get rid of them because it had names and addresses of people who had voted in this and they didn't want any reprisals to take people who had participated in the Freedom vote. So there may have been, perhaps, another 20,000 who had voted. This is something that we'll never know and so we can always speculate but it doesn't do much good to speculate.

(Anne) Now what about the actual forming of the party, as a party MFDP? This came in early '64?

(Leigh) Right. This came about in-- Well, I'm going to have to backtrack until around, after the death of Kennedy. We were trying to decide what we were going to do the next year, since it was a year of political candidacies and like that. And, well...before Kennedy was killed we had another statewide MFDP meeting and we had decided that one way or another that we would try to participate in the 1964 campaign, that we would support Kennedy; and so on and so on and so on. But plans were not really crystallized as to what we were

going to do. Then came the news of, during the week, on ~~Ø~~ Friday Kennedy was killed. That left us holding the bag because, here now was a guy that we had already decided that we were going to support was done in by a bunch of crackpots. So we had to kind of come up with a plan. We wanted to have some more demonstrations. Well, we decided that we would focus on registering voters, ~~fourx~~ first of all. We decided that we would again take another leaf from the Alabama notebook and have some Freedom Days, in Mississippi. But it would be around-- We decided that the whole issue would be decided-- the whole demonstration would be on the vote. It wouldn't be on public accommodations. It wouldn't be on going to try and integrate churches or any of this other kind of this which is, while it's very well and people should belong to all types of mainstream of American life that it wasn't very relevant at that point. So we decided that we would stick to our guns in the voting arena.

There was coming up in Hattiesburg right after the first of the year the Supreme Court was supposed to rule on the Justice Department's suit there in Hattiesburg against Forrest County circuit clerk, Theron Lyne. He had been accused by the attorney general's staff of not complying, of disqualifying Negroes on the ~~XXXXXX~~ basis of their race and not on the basis of their performance in the execution of the voter application. On the 6th of January-- Well, the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals had held that he was guilty and they gave him an order to first to register the forty-three Negroes who had brought the complaint immediately and forthwith, and secondly, that he was to give

to each person who came into his office the examination. He couldn't tell them no you can't take it. Third, he was to point out any errors that they had made. Like if they had forgotten to fill in line 13 or something like that, he was to point that out to them. Fourthly, he was to submit periodic reports to the Justice Department ... that he had complied with this order, this court order.

I believe that Lyne has not complied with this. I would put it strongly but the law is liable you know. Fact, I know of a few instances where he hasn't. But, at any rate his attorneys which were furnished him by the state of Mississippi had appealed the decision of the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals directly to the Supreme Court. And on the 6th of January in '64 the Supreme Court refused to review his case which in effect left the court order in effect which meant that if he didn't comply with the court order he would be cited perhaps not only for civil but ~~perhaps~~ perhaps criminal contempt.

With that under our belts around the 6th of January we decided that we would have some Freedom Days, that we would get masses of people to go down to the courthouse to take that exam. During this time we brought in many people from all over the country. ~~that was~~ There were about fifty-five ministers that came in. This was the first active involvement of the National Council of Churches for example.

Oh, you might want to get in touch with someone who is very much familiar with the activities of National Council of Churches. His name is Reverend Bob Beech and he's with the delta ministry and he's located in Hattiesburg. I

don't have his...do I? That's BEECH. I don't know why I never had Bob's address, but I worked with him. His phone would be listed and the delta ministry is listed also.

are

Now, all of these things ~~were~~ leading up to the formation of the Freedom Democratic Party. That's why I'm going into the kind of details that show you how-- See everyone in the state as well as the people of Forrest County participated in these decisions. People from all over the state came. Aaron Henry came all the way down from Clarksdale. Mrs. Hamer came down from Ruleville. Amsy Moore came down from Cleveland. Mrs. Devine came over from Canton. People came down from Jackson. Even Charlie Evers was down there. Of course, Jim Forman and John ~~xxxx~~ Lewis came over from Atlanta. People came over from Alabama. This was really a mass-type demonstration which didn't get too much publicity.

In the meantime when we announced that we were going to have this mass demonstration, we had received requests from Paul Johnson and like that who didn't want any notoreity brought to the state. He was trying...and so on and we can handle our own problems ourselves and so on. Not to hold the demonstration but we ignored it and we had the demonstration at any rate. As a matter of fact the demonstration was so successful that other towns in the state decided that they wanted to have them too. The next town where a demonstration took place was almost a month to the date. As a matter of fact it was a month to the date . It was on George Washington's birthday, the 22nd of Februrary in Canton, Mississippi, where the same

thing happened. Demonstrations, people went down to the courthouse, lined up outside, tried to go in, of course. Where there wasn't any brutality in Hattiesburg, there was in Canton. The next month on the 24th of March, Greenwood decided that they were going to have theirs. It was decided that if a whole lot of people were getting registered to vote that it would be good to try to show, have people or a political party ^{to} ~~in~~ which these people could belong.

And if you had a political party naturally, then you'd have to have candidates in order to run. So it was decided that they would form. That the people of Mississippi would form a political party there. A name hadn't been chosen but candidates... put the horse before the cart since the date for candidates to qualify for the June 2nd primaries was the 4th of April, we had to have our candidates ready and like that, and we didn't have time to call a statewide meeting so we chose at that time Mrs. Victoria Gray of Hattiesburg to run for the Senate, Aaron Henry to run for--no he didn't run this trip, I'm sorry--Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer from the 2nd Congressional District, John Cameron from the 5th Congressional District, and James ... to run from the 3rd Congressional District. You can check that name out. I ~~was~~ always ~~go~~ forget his name, I don't know why. He was from Vicksburg and I didn't get up around there.

So we chose these four ~~names~~ candidates, to run three in the Congressional ~~Dix~~ districts and one for the Senate, Mrs. Gray opposed John Stennis at the time. We had to pay \$300 for Mrs. Gray's entering into the race and \$200 each for the other candidates.

(Anne). . . sometime describe you experience in Hattiesburg and the people that supported Mrs. Gray, how she came to be prominent and--

(Leigh) Well, she's ~~walked~~ always been in prominence there. She was an ex-
a school teacher, a businesswoman. She walked out of school because she wouldn't take any nonsense from the ~~teachers~~ when she started to teach something about Negro history and they told her that she couldn't teach it to the children in class. So she said well, if I can't teach it I can't see why I can stay here and teach. So she walked out of the classroom and hasn't been back yet. Didn't pick up her paycheck even. . . . get bought off like that.

She tried to register to vote. She's encountered any number of difficulties. Her husband, who had been in the Army and was a plumber by trade couldn't get a ~~license~~ to be a plumber in Forrest County. As a matter of fact there are no ~~licensed~~ Negro plumbers, no licensed electricians and like that, so that you have to hire white electricians. He got a job with the Department of Water Works in Hattiesburg. He was doing actual plumbing work for the Department but he was getting, he was being paid as an assistant and not a worker, not a ~~licensed~~ plumber. And the guy who held the title of plumber was doing nothing while . . . was doing all the work.

(Anne) What kind of organization did they have there in Hattiesburg?

(Leigh) Well, they had the NAACP which wasn't doing much of anything. That was just about it. They had a ministerial alliance which each town
always has where the ministers get together and they talk about ^{theological} ./. things
and not things of this world. And there was really never any kind of organization

in Hattiesburg until COFO got there and started trying to organize people.

I guess you can say the town... They had fraternal organizations like the Elks and the Masons and the Oddfellows--

(Anne) I mean how did COFO ... get started?

(Leigh) Well, we got started by going around knocking on doors and talking to people and asking them if they'd go down to register to vote. A lot of people didn't even know what the voting form was or how to complete it and like that. We started having people in neighborhoods say, alright now we're taking a long time to teach each one individually but if you can come together in a group we can pass out materials and you can learn how to fill out these things.

Getting back to this thing there--the Theron Lyne thing. The court also gave him only thirteen sections of the constitution which has approximately 280 sections to the constitution, that he was to give people a copy. And this was based on the fact when the Justice Department went through the records of people who, whites, who had completed the forms that these were the questions most frequently given to whites. They were easier than some of the long drawn out things. There was only one very long one in that, and that had to do with constitutional amendments.

So we would reproduce these, constitutional amendments. Mimeograph them off and have a sheet of paper with blank spaces in them for ~~people~~ people to answer questions... and answer them. Tell them what the various oaths that they had to take. Residency requirements was one thing that a lot of people got confused on. In the state a minister is allowed half the time to

be a registered voter, to qualify to be a ~~XXXXX~~ ~~XXXX~~ registered voter than a regular resident and this is because of the ~~XXXX~~ itinerant nature of ministers. Sometimes they're assigned to a new parish instead of requiring the minister to live one year in his precinct and two years in the state. The requirement is one year in the state and six months in his precinct.

So we would hold these meetings together and demonstrate to the people. We would go over the voter application form and we would go over the constitution, the ~~XXXXXX~~ sections of the constitution that they would have to reproduce. Until they learned it more or less by rote. Then we decided that as SNCC staff, ~~XXXXXX~~ COFO staff there we would, we couldn't do it all ourselves and so we had to have an organization of people to do it. So we ~~XXXXX~~ started the block captain system.

Now the block captains were responsible for-- We got people to volunteer to be a ~~XXXXX~~ block captain and that meant that everyone on their block they were responsible for seeing that they went down to the courthouse or that they provided them with the necessary materials that they would be responsible for holding voter education shops in their homes or in the homes of their neighbors and like that. Out of this block captain meeting several other problems came up. People began to look around their community and find out that there were a lot of people there who didn't have jobs, who weren't getting adequate welfare payments, and like that. Then they organized welfare relief committee in December of '63. This was before the Freedom Day in Hattiesburg.

Out of this they would go around canvassing the neighborhood in addition

to going down, getting people to go down to register to vote. A lot of people who had gone down to register to vote had lost their jobs because their names had appeared in the newspapers. So anyone who had gone down to register to vote, they would try to give them food and clothing to sustain them until they could find another job. And this was the welfare and relief committee and then out of this a whole lot of other little organizations sprang up where you would find the same person on about four or five committees-- neighborhood committees-xx You had committees gax to go around and talk to churches, to talk to people, Sunday being the day when you can reach the most amount of people. They would be delegated to go into their churches to talk with the various organizations in their churches about supporting the Movement, and the people who were involved in the Movement. Because we as SNCC people weren't getting too much money at the time. We couldn't afford to pay rent and so we would stay with a family. So that this family wouldn't be put out too much by our having stayed there and eaten their food, They formed another committee of concerned mothers from the various areas from about five distinct Negroes areas there in Hattiesburg and they would be responsible for donating food and coming over the to office and cooking the food and laying it out for the people to eat. Then we kind of rotated from house to house to house so that we wouldn't importune one family too long.

This was really a good type community organization that came out of Hattiesburg. This has been duplicated in other areas of the state as well.

I hope this is giving you a kind of background of the type of things that we were doing. I remember when I first came to Hattiesburg. Mr. Damer who was killed took me out at the farm and kept me there because the police were after me and they were afraid for what might happen to me and like that. So in the daytime I would work on his farm, chop and saw logs and do this, do that or whatever needed to be done and at nighttime I would go to the city and hold meetings with people and I would be out of there. Until I got tired of that and I said well, I'm going to go anyway. I shouldn't have to hide since I'm not doing anything illegal. But he was very courageous in doing that because he would have been gunned down long before this, long before last January. I was in Africa when I heard about it. I was shocked, but-- He was a good guy.

Mrs. Gray was organizing out if Palmer's Crossing, walking around. She's a very quite woman but she's very persuasive and she's verydogged and she usually gets what she goes after. She was going after getting people from Palmer's Crossing, which is a little suburb of Hattiesburg, an unincorporated village. She was getting them to go into the county courthouse to register to vote. She was organizing welfare and relief out there in her area. She used her house as a storage space for the food and clothing that would come down and she organized a committee of women to come out there and administer that program, while she, in turn, went around the state and was campaigning for her election, for the June 2nd primary and she was also, at that time, very active in the Methodist church. She was also very active with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, doing their voter education--citizenship

education program. So she was teaching. She was ... supply of energy from there. Her influence in the community has been the result of her activities and the example that she has set of being a selfless woman who put the movement in human rights above her own personal gain. In addition to which, she was the mother of three children and she was raising them. Her daughter was married in 1964 and she still has a son who is seven years ~~xxx~~ old and another who's about ~~XXXXXX~~ fourteen ~~xxxx~~ now. And she was continuing, trying to raise them. She tried to spend as much time as she could with them, without neglecting her civic responsibilities... This is what leads to people sitting up and listening to her when she has something to say because they know that she doesn't have any axe to grind. ~~XXXX~~

As a businesswoman she was in the ~~wholesale~~ wholesale business selling cosmetics and she had offices down on the coast in Gulfport, Biloxi as well as up in Hattiesburg and in Laurel. So she was all over that area anyway. Her experiences had made her see a lot of the things that were going on in the state that she didn't like and she wanted to do something about changing it. She gave up her business to come into the Movement. ...

(Anne) What was the attitude of the Hattiesburg community towards the white students coming down in the Summer Project?

(Leigh) They welcomed them.

(Anne)?

(Leigh) They welcomed into the community. As a matter of fact we had the largest number of students of any project in the state, we had almost 80 students. We had approximately 60 Freedom School teachers. We had six Freedom Schools, two community centers, two and a half. We established

a main Freedom library with five branches. The kids catalogued about 12,000 ~~books~~ books. They did a good job. They stayed in homes with families. They lived with them. They shared their fare. They ~~taught~~ taught at the schools. They had workshops at night. ...prepared the next day's lessons. They helped do political organizing. They helped to real ground-work toward the organizing of the FDP for August, but I wasn't quite up to there yet. I think I better go on a little bit further.

They were really very much welcomed in the community. And they still, a lot of them still have contact down in Mississippi and they still go down on their vacations and spend a week-end or two with "their" families. They've adopted their families and their families have adopted them. It's a very good thing, I ~~think~~ think, in establishing a kind of people to people relationship ~~xxxxxx~~ like talked about but never implemented.

In April, we spent the most part of the time mapping out a campaign platform for our candidates. And going over with the candidates like what is it that you see that you think that we ought to be changing? Or, what is it that you see that you think that we ought to keep and like that. T⁺⁺alking to issues rather than to race and like that. Now the campaign had three main issues that it talked to. First thing was economics. The fact that automation was taking over a large number of jobs and that a large number of people were not only unemployed but they were unemployable having had no experience except picking cotton or sweeping floors or this and that and the other. So the type of jobs that would be coming in to the state, if they would be coming in, they weren't going to be able to fill these jobs unless there was a kind of training

program going on. And what we wanted the Federal government to do in the case of Mississippi, insofar as job training was concerned and insofar as attracting industries there, insofar as supplying a labor force for the labor market. Now they talked to these issues with the people and a quite surprising number of white people said, you know, I wish our candidates would talk like that. We got quite a few letters from people just on that one issue of economics.

The next issue happened to have dealt with ~~K~~ justice in the state and the fact that ~~poor~~ poor people are excluded. Poor people, black and white, are excluded from the ~~juror~~ ~~jurors~~ jury lists and that it was only well-to-do or middle class or upper middle class people who were on the jury rolls. So it wasn't just a black problem; it was a Mississippi problem. The way justice is administered in the court and so on.

Of course, with that ~~etc~~ came the whole thing of police brutality which ~~unfortunately~~ unfortunately people have come to disregard now as saying well you're just talking to hear your head making noise. It ~~happens~~ happens to be a fact of life ~~with~~ with which Mississippians must live, black and white. For example, when we were having out in Palmer's Crossing, ^{maybe I shouldn't have identified the} I don't know. ^{area,} ~~the welfare and relief~~ Out in Palmer's Crossing ~~when these~~ committees were giving away the food and clothing to people who had been deprived of their jobs because they had tried to register to vote, there were some poor whites in the neighborhood and they came and they wanted to-- They didn't have any money, they didn't

have any food and they didn't have any clothes. And so they said we want some too. And we said certainly, you can have it. All you have to do is step in in line. You're not going to be waited on ahead of everyone else. Somehow or other the news got leaked to downtown that whites were coming together with Negroes. They found out who they were
(blackout)

Anyway the sherrif had gone to peoples' homes and had told them like they weren't to go there and bother with those niggers. You know, to stay away from over there. It was very funny. One of the women said that, well, I knew I was white and I thought that I could do anything that I wanted to in Mississippi and now they come and they tell me that I can't do this and I can't do that. Well, I'm just as bad off as you all.

(Anne) She came to your office?

(Leigh) Yes. She said she definitely didn't like it. She said she's beginning to see now what this thing was all about. She didn't last very long either. She had to move away. She was hounded out of the community. They ~~hounded~~ hounded her away. They called her a bunch of nigger-lovers and threatened her family and all that sort of thing. So she's away from there. The others have been too afraid to speak ~~xxx~~ out and so they accept things as they are.

Still, when we find out that there is a family that's in need, consider the fact that they're in need and not the color of their skin so we got to sneak some food around to them and like that. It's done in that way.

There is a criminal element there in Mississippi that are opposed to change. I don't say that all white people love Negroes and would join hand in hand walking off into space, you know, ~~xxxx~~ if it weren't for this criminal element, but I'd say a good many of them wouldn't adopt the kind of views that they have right now if it weren't for fear. And when they speak it's more or less from lip service than they're looking at you and their trying to tell you at the same time, don't take it too hard I have to say this. They don't know who their neighbor is or they don't know whether or not something is going to happen to them like what happened to Miss Newman. It's a very hard thing to define right now, but you have a lot of secret sympathizers who are simply afraid to come out and say something.

So, during the spring we bought time on television for Mrs. Gray and it was beautiful. We didn't buy time for her until the day the election and that was at noon when she went on TV, had fifteen minutes and she was telling people to get out and vote. Told them, don't sit down since I'm not talking to white people, I'm not talking to black people, I'm talking to Mississippians. It matters not to me if you vote for me or not. It matters only if you vote.

She was very beautiful. People calling up the office and asking why hadn't we heard from her before. We simply didn't have the money to really do the type of political campaign. When you realize how many millions of dollars people spend, or up even in the hundreds of thousands of dollars that people spend, political candidates spend on campaigns and to think that we had a budget for four ~~xxxx~~ candidates for \$5,000 and out of this \$5,000 you had to pay--this was all that we could afford--you had to pay for leaflets, you had to space for advertising in some of the newspapers. Some of them would accept

the money and some of them wouldn't accept the advertisement. Then providing for transportation for them to go around the state in their particular area. I know I had the lovely thing of trying to be in two places at one time because I was running around in Cameron's ~~camp~~ campaign and he was just in his district, and then I had Mrs. Gray's campaign to run and she was all over the state. All of that took a lot of money went for gas alone for the car and repairs on the car. I was driving a '63 Valiant but it had at that point something like 128,000 miles on it. Lot of abuse that the car took.

We actually tried to put on an intelligent campaign. The time came. Mrs. Gray got about 8,000 votes across the state.

(Anne) 8,000? How does that correspond to the number of Negroes in Mississippi?

(Leigh) It corresponds to about a third of the Negroes who were registered to vote. But many of them didn't vote. Like in last June's primary many still didn't vote. As I was trying to tell you today like I... on the telephone that they felt physically intimidated when they went down there to the various polling places. All the polling places are held in white neighborhoods and here they are. It takes a brave person to go into a place where it is completely hostile to him. Where he sees people sitting out. Where he sees these men sitting out in a car, four or five men and he's alone and he doesn't know what's going to happen. He's going to keep walking past that place if he's got any sense, if he's the least bit prudent. If he's not prudent he's going to go in and assert his right to vote and that's going to end that.

That's the kind of thing that's going on now. We made a report to that

to the Justice Department. And the Justice Department sends these long-winded things out about we haven't noticed any irregularities and all of this. So you just don't have any faith in the Justice Department going to implement the ~~XXX~~ Constitution. Not the Voting Rights Act of '65 because in the Voting Rights Act of '65 there isn't one thing in there that protects the innocent or punishes the guilty, or brings about any kind of real redress of people's just grievances. It's nothing but another bunch of words added to-- Another piece of paper to clutter up an already mountain of laws that where if they would just implement the laws that they already have on the books they wouldn't need any of this other thing. This was one of the reason why we were opposed to the '65 voting rights registration because it didn't do anything.

Of course, we were termed ingrates and things like that. But if they enforce the Constitution as it is, as it stands and enforce the existing legislation that is already on the books you don't need any more legislation. You have a whole plethora of legislation and all of which means nothing. If they go back to the Reconstruction laws... be very good, they could have insure compliance with the Constitution, and, insure the lives and safety of people around. But they're not doing any of those things. And they're telling us that we need another set of civil rights laws. Which is a bunch of baloney. So
At least I don't.
we just don't buy it./I don't think we should waste our time with other laws.

Now they know perfectly good and well you have to wonder why they aren't-- And these are some of the questions that Mississippians are asking themselves. Why don't they enforce the laws that are on the books? And when it comes down to that when the Justice Department says, well we don't have the power to do this or we don't have the laws and so on an so on. And

when the law says absolutely different, you see, then people wonder, well, do they really mean it or is this just some more rhetoric that on one hand placates masses of Negroes and on the other hands placates the white power structure there in the South who are opposed to any change. And then if any change comes it's so gradual an imperceptible that you don't really notice. I notice it because it's my job to note these things and to be aware of all kinds of changes and this and that and the other. But if you ask the average Mississippian what has the voting rights bill done for him. You ask him tomorrow after he's tried to vote today. And he'll tell you what he thinks it has done for him. And you ask him if because now he has the right to vote that it's going to change anything for him, politically in that state. Is it going to get him a job; is it going to get pavement in front of his house and things like that. It's not going to do it. And he knows this and this is why a lot of them stay home because they figure like what's the use.

We just have to deal with it at that level. That voting rights act and all this sort of things cannot solve problems. It can only go a little ways into ~~alleviated~~ alleviating certain things. But if laws that are already on the books were implement they could do a heck of a lot more, you see. I don't want to get into that either

I kind of lost track of where we were. But I was trying to give you the kind of picture why people felt that this was really needed. I'm looking at this thing too. How many more minutes ~~xx~~ do we have on that--