

[Annie Devine]

Interview

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Negro woman

Canton, Miss.

FDP: member of ex.com.

Q: Could you just start out by telling us how you first got interested in the movement, how you got involved?

A: Well, the first time I got interested was in December, 1963. I was working for Security Life Insurance Company. I had worked before then, though, with the Aaron Henry - Kind freedom votes for Governor and Lieutenant Governor. But that didn't mean that I was interested in civil rights as such; I was just doing a little extra work, since I was going to people's houses and selling insurance every day. But now the early part of '63, Dave Dennis, George Raymond, well, some civil rights people, came in to find some place here in Canton to have meetings. And for the workers to live. Now the NAA was already organized here, except for the fact that they had to have secret meetings. And they had been closed out, they were meeting down at St. Paul--that's my church--the officers there decided that they couldn't bear the intimidation from the city officials so they closed the door and stopped them from meeting there.. But when George Raymond and Dave Dennis were...finally found a place to stay, then there was this big job of really finding a place to have meetings. C. O. Chen owned a motel down on Franklin Street that was not being used at this time, so he decided to let the workers have this place to be used for having their meetings. Now, Franklin Street's a short street, and it's crowded, and there's not a good place for meetings, but anyway, meetings were held there. And some nights I would pass along coming home from my work, and I would hear the singing...and one night I stopped by the place, and the place was crowded with people, and I saw the police driving around, back and forth, and I decided to go in the building to see what was going on. Well, the kids were talking about voter registration, and civil rights, and I didn't stay very long, because it seemed like something was going to happen. The police drove up, and two cars--one car of uniformed policemen and another car with one uniformed policeman and the rest of the people were dressed ordinary--and they didn't bother anybody as such, but they did get out of the car and search two or three boys that was standing around, but they didn't arrest them, and I didn't hear any harsh words spoken. And then I started thinking about what was going on here, and it just happened in the next few weeks they moved down to a church down on Lee Street-- there was a feeling that there was more room in the church-- and it wasn't crowded like up here in the city. Especially in the shopping area where people were always coming out, and so they moved down here on Walnut Street, and I went to this meetings, and it was a large meeting, and there was twelve policemen--(I counted them)--all while the

meeting was going on, they was standing around listening, and walking back and forth in the streets around the building, and as we looked out, we could see them taking license plate numbers and asking people questions. And when I got in the car that I was coming home in, George Raymond was driving this car (he's project director) and the policeman asked me where I lived, as he did the other people in the car, and I told him, and my name, and who I worked for... and then he told me I wouldn't be living there tomorrow night. Well, I had some funny thoughts there, because I didn't know that things like that were being said to people, and I said Well, I was pretty sure I wasn't going to get fired, because I was working for a Negro company, and I was pretty sure I wasn't going to get fired for attending any kind of meeting. But any way, I came on home, and I said to myself, he said I was going to have a job finding myself some place to live, because I'm not going to worry about that. So the next morning, instead of going on my daily work, I decided to start canvassing for people, finding people to join in workshops and help getting people registered to vote, and my manager came the next day or two and I told him I was very interested in civil rights. And we talked about it, and he told me well maybe you should make up your mind, Mrs. Devine, and so I kept on working in civil rights, still thinking that this cop would come by and tell me where to move. And not long after that I seed a notice that my rent had increased. And of course I went to see about that, and Mrs. Cain informed me that I was going around to everybody's house, and I must be working more than before, and I surely was getting lots of money, so I could afford to pay the rent. Well, that started a chain of activity that meant writing to Weaver, that meant getting a lawyer, that meant doing a lot of things, you know. So I thought I'd better get on working in civil rights...since I was going to have to go through all of this. And I found finally that my rent went down after three months of paying 14 dollars a week. During that time, now, I stopped working for Security Insurance Company. I didn't have an income. But I had to pay that rent. So after having a lawyer spoke to them, and seeing what could be done about it, the rent was brought back down to where I could afford to pay it. Well, then comes this big meeting, state meeting in Jackson, that Mrs. Gray was speaking about. We had tried for months and months to get people registered, and had not been successful; the tests that people had to take were too hard. It wasn't the test itself, but the interpretation of the Constitution, was almost impossible for anybody to pass the test. That means teachers, and just anybody...because you had to interpret this section of the Constitution satisfactorily to the Registrar. People couldn't do it. Nevertheless, we worked with people, and went to people's houses, and we worked with people in meetings, but it just didn't work, and what really happened is that...you see, it's

just like Mrs. Gray said; it isn't that civil rights activities had failed, but it was the fact that there had to be a stronger force than just civil rights, in order to bring about the kind of change that was needed. Because all we can truthfully say that we did was to fight policemen and pay fines. That's just about the size of it, after a whole year of activity. Then comes the Freedom Democratic Party, I was one of the people who sat on the temporary executive committee from May 26 through August 6, and that's when we had a state meeting and elected our delegates to the national convention. We also elected our permanent officials for the party. I was one of the people elected as delegates to the national convention. We went to the national convention and we challenged the delegation from Mississippi, and I guess everybody knows what took place there. And then we came back, and because there was no one else in my district, I accepted to run for Congresswoman from the district against Mr. Prentice Walker, and first of all, I went to the Secretary of State to get my name on the regular ballot and was turned down. And then, even though we had the number of qualified electors, we still were denied this right to run as independents for this election. And then we decided that we would use the freedom vote; and of course, in the district we had well, on Nov. 3, when the election was, I had something like 997 votes... On the freedom ticket from the four districts. I accepted this as ~~an~~ <sup>an</sup> ~~act~~, said, because there was no one else at that time, not because I really would have accepted the position if I had been officially elected. But with this very strong feeling that there had to be some political force, other than civil rights organizations, in this state, to bring about change...the kind of change that's needed. I can say that I don't believe, even now, that the violence and the economic reprisals against Negroes, and even the voting rights field, is going to, well I mean, the voting rights field is not going to bring about the change that's needed to get rid of the violence and the economic reprisals, that we're subjected to in this state. I feel that only the Congressional challenge will be a beginning. Just a small beginning, of what can develop into the kind of society that we should live in; and the reason I'm saying that is because it was proven in June during the demonstrations against the extraordinary session of the legislature, that not local officials--local people--are always responsible for the violence; because when we went to Jackson--the Freedom Democratic Party went to Jackson--for the demonstrations, we didn't plan what was described as demonstrations; we planned a peaceful, quiet walk to the capitol. We walked two abreast, down the sidewalks of the streets; we didn't make any calls for any help from the

outside, from businesses, we didn't ask the FBI or anybody else to stand by and witness what was described as a demonstration. It was not meant as a demonstration; it was meant as a peaceful, quiet protest to the extraordinary session of the legislature. All right; our people were arrested. No local citizen, I mean white, had anything to do with the march; there was no violence, there was no indication of any local people in Jackson--I mean white people--trying to harm anyone in this march. What really happened when we got inside the Jackson jail, and the compound out there at the coliseum, the policemen beat and cursed and kicked people. The National Council of Churches sent representatives in there--now we were hearing these things from one or two people--the National Council of Churches sent their representatives in and what they found in that jail and them compounds out there, was almost too bad to even try to talk about. That was not done by local people; that was done by elected and appointed officials, policemen. And you know I get very sick when I hear people talk about Los Angeles, and what happened out there. The truth is, all over this country policemen are guilty of beating and cursing people unmerciful. And that was proven in Jackson. Alan Thomas, as mayor of the city of Jackson, not one time, not one time told people that these people have a right to peaceful protest. Not one time did he call for the policemen in that Jackson jail to treat people as people. He didn't do that; but it was always this harsh thing about demonstrating and about walking on people's property, you know, depriving other people of their rights, when that's not true. And he could have spoken just one word. The governor of the state and the mayor of the city of Jackson could have spoken just one word, and the policemen, not local people, because nobody can say that Jackson white people are the Klans or whatever you want to call them, intimidated the people in the march. They can't say that. What happened in the hands of the Jackson police force--and no official, not even a state official or a member of Congress--did come out with a statement telling the local policemen there in Jackson that they had no right to beat people there inside their jails. So I'm saying that the Congressional challenge will be just a beginning of law enforcement...constitutional rights being granted to people, and that people will have a right then maybe, I don't know, people will have a right then maybe to exercise their rights of peaceful assembly, peaceful protest,

Q: Do you think Mississippi has changed much in the few years since the movement has been in the state?

A: No; I don't think Mississippi has changed. In fact,

I don't see any real change, there will not be any real change in Mississippi that people can see until these people who are silent, and who are moderate, and who believe so strongly in rights, human rights, human dignity, start speaking out. There can be no change, because you don't know who the silent people are; they never come out and say... We had an official, for our city here in Jackson, to come down to a local person's house last week to say "Now, we have many white people who would like to see Negroes treated fairly, but they can't afford to speak out." Well, if they never speak out, who knows how many white people there are who would like to see Negroes treated fairly? If they aren't strong enough to speak out, if they aren't strong enough to say that the Klans are wrong and that we don't condone their activity around here, and that the local people have no right to get out on the street and walk into Negroes and accuse Negroes of walking into them. And Negroes are put in jail, fined, until...until the silent good people, try talking, you can't say you have change.

Q: Martin Luther King once said something similar, that it's the so-called white moderates in the South, who are the biggest stumbling block to the movement.

A: I believe that. I believe that. I believe that not only the so-called white moderates, but very frankly I believe that some of our own people, our own people as well, I don't consider this as just against whites, I consider it against all people, who are a stumbling block in the way. And I believe that our black people, our leaders, our so-called educated people, should pull out and make some statements, as well as the moderates; but they are silent too; and they are opposed to the militancy of well, the radicals, they say. They are opposed, and they sit down on programs, I mean, the Head Start program is one example, here in the state of Mississippi where some of our Negroes took this program and really used it with people who didn't need it. And the program was designed to help poor people. Who are poor people? They pushed the poor people out and insisted that people who make \$4,000, \$4,500 a year are the kind who need it. The Head Start program jobs--I'm saying that both sides, white and black, going to have to speak and act for change, before we're going to get it.

Q: Do you think this opposition to radicalism is the main reason they don't participate? Or are there other reasons too?

A: I think there are other reasons; I don't think they're opposed to what they call radicalism, because I don't think or see where a person...you know this word radicalism, I think it needs redefining.

Q: How would you define it?

A: I'm very serious about that. I think it needs to be redefined, because what do you call radical, anyway? Because I go to town and walk in the bank and address myself as Mrs. Devine, or I go to town, or I go down there to get on the train, I sit in the white station, I'm being very radical, according to some people's definition. I demand that I have a right to live here in this house in this project and not be put out by these people who say that I can't participate in civil rights activities if I'm going to live here, I'm being radical. I'm being radical when I say Mr. Whit Campbell, down here, who's the Registrar, has a right to register people, no matter who they are-- I'm being radical. I shouldn't say that. There's white people and there's Negro people. I mean, I would like to have this word redefined, because some people who are radical, to me, this is not radical at all.

Q: Could perhaps the word better be militant instead of radical? Is there a connection you see between being militant and being radical?

Q: Like do you think those actions that you just said, do you think that you would call that being militant?

A: Well, maybe that's not so militant either; maybe that's just coming around to realizing one thing: which is most important, to save your face or to save your soul? And it seems to me that many of those people are headed in the direction of just to save our face. And we give in to so many things, they say, we're too militant, or we're too radical--but the Utopia you're talking about just can't exist, it can't exist, it can't be brought about. And I believe it can be; even though right now we can't sit down and talk with the officials of this town, because they say there's nobody down there to talk to; they say all the intelligent Negroes are going on with their jobs, and trying to make a living, and these other people are not. Well, those are not the people for us to talk to. And the people who are really active in the civil rights movement and the people who are really bringing about the change, and yet they're considered radical, over and above that word militant. When people talk about radicalism, they're mostly talking about troublemakers, agitators.

Q: What type of Utopia do you envision?

A: Well, not in the foreseeable future. It may be somewhere. I think maybe we will have the kind of system that at least people can live together, and people perhaps will understand each other better. Right now, the white man doesn't understand the Negro, and the Negro doesn't trust the white man. And until the understanding and the trust is developed, will it become a reality. We won't even start living together,

and I think the people who have come from all sections of the country, and even some Mississippians, and some few Southerners, are beginning to talk to each other, and to understand each other. I'm sure that many of the kids who've come from the North and from the West, spent most of their time trying to understand. Now, not that they come to help so much, as that they come to find out about the people, how they live, why they live like they live, and maybe just now they see something, maybe not all of it, but enough of it, to say it's not good, something must be done about it. I hope they can get their parents and people back home to understand more clearly. So you see, I know people have just rushed in and have given all kinds of gifts; you know, it's just like when there's a storm and devastation all around, people say, "Well, I have clothes and I have food that I can give," but really going to that place, seeing those people, seeing what really happened to their homes and their families, they don't do it. And they satisfy themselves that they've given, and that's enough. They never really see that there were food and clothes, but maybe there was something else needed too. They never really see. And I think that has happened a lot during the '64--'63 and '64, and even up to now, '65, we had many kids from all over the country, and we have adults too, we had more adults this year than we had last year, who came into Mississippi, and for the first time they were trying to talk to the people, understand people a little better.

Q: Then it's your opinion that white people should be down here not to help the Negro but themselves?

A: Right, sure. Now, they have helped the Negro community a great deal, and in more than one way. One big help to me that seems important is this business of protection. Now it's not that they can protect so much, but I mean as such, but what I mean by protection is that many Negroes feel and all over this state--wouldn't have thought of going down to the polls to get registered, if somebody hadn't gone there with them. They wouldn't let anybody talk to them about it; they wouldn't have let anybody stay in their homes. Afraid--and when Negroes say they're afraid, they mean they're afraid, because just like we had a person went to somebody's house the other day, and the man said, "The landlord said," or "The boss man said, that it's all right to get registered but you'll never vote." This kind of things, they take a feeling them, that you never get rid of. So when I say protect, I don't mean that they physically protect; but they has the feeling, the strength, the courage they has given to people, besides the food, the clothes, and the books, and the money that has come in. That feeling of

inner strength that they have given to many old people as well as young people. You should have seen those old people, sixty-five, seventy, seventy-five years old who went to jail in Jackson. Perhaps that was the greatest year in history, in American history.

Q. Because of the COFO summer project?

A. Yeah...because of the COFO summer project, and of course out of that came the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Q. How important do you feel that the voting rights bill is, how does that fit into this?

A. The voting rights bill is good in one way, and that is that some people got registered who maybe never would have gotten registered if it hadn't been for the voting rights bill. But on the other hand the voting rights bill is not going to do anything for people. What I mean by that is that it isn't going to give you the right that you need, to protect you.. There's nothing in the voting rights bill that can really protect you. You can get registered, the registrar will register you, there's some clause in there that provides you that the F.B.I. or somebody will see to it that you're protected when you go down to vote. But before voting day and after voting day there's no protection provided, and that's where the trouble comes in. If you have to...you know, you live here on this man's place, and there's an election coming up-- and he can tell you five days ahead of time that you don't vote, or he can wait until after then, and then he can move you off his place, he can do what he wants to do to you about it. And you have no way of proving, you know, that the man is the real cause of your not participating in the election. As evidence of that, right down here in Catahulla Mississippi, right down here in Hancock County, a family is missing down there since March tenth, and this man participated in an election. And it's noised around in that community that if he had not voted in this election, the family would not have been missing. Right now, nobody knows where the family is.

Q. The whole family?

A. A man, wife, and six children. Since March tenth..that's right...at Cattahulla ,...that's down near (Pickgemm ?) Mississippi..And the F.B.I's at first said they investigated, which I guess they did, but they didn't come up with anything. And then later on, they said that they knew that the family was safe over in Alabama, someplace in Alabama, because the man had sent some money back to a loan company to pay a note. But there again, that is not true. Members of the family didn't know anything about these people, all they know is that they disappeared, and that's that..They had cooked a meal, it was sitting on the stove, that's where it was found. The dog was in the yard, and the chickens were in the coop, and the house was just left, just left. And it seems to have been about three or four days because the food had spoiled that was left on the table, and some people said the stench in the house was so bad that they couldn't stay in there,



the F.B.I.'s and other law enforcement officers and the other people who went in there. They couldn't stay in the house. The fact is, this is almost September, and that family's been missing since March tenth, nobody knows whereabouts.. All of it had to do with voting rights. So the voting bill is good, for what it can do, but as far as protecting the rights of people there is no voting bill that they could bring about that would do that. There's no voting bill that can really protect people.

Q. I guess that's why the challenge (MFDP) is so important.

A. To me, the challenge is the most important political force at this point that can . . . the Congressional challenge if it's decided, this year in '65 we have free and open elections, it will prove-- you see, this challenge is not just a Mississippi challenge, but a challenge for the whole country; this is a challenge for all of congress and for the whole country, because this will be their first opportunity to prove that they, that Congress, will uphold its own statutes, the Congress of the nation.. And the people in the country by pressuring Congress to do just this will be proving that for the first time the country is looking at what is wrong with the whole country, and this is the beginning of doing something about it. Because you see that I know that people have become, you know, blind, to a law, to a state, to any part of this nation, to get where Mississippi is now. We say Mississippi is the worst state in the union, Mississippi's economics are lower than any other state, and you know why. If our congressmen have voted for from eighteen to thirty-two years, all except for Mr. Walker, this is his first year there, but they've been there voting and making laws all this time, and nobody has ever brought any attention to what's wrong down here. For years and years and years our people have left here by the hundreds, by the hundreds year by year, going north and west to find a better place to live, because here the economics are so poor, are so low, that you can't live here. Starvation: you take the people who live out in the Delta areas, even in the hill areas, you know we call the north west of Mississippi the Delta area, but out here in the hill area, I know that they're plantations here just as bad as plantations over in the Delta; where people work a whole year and don't even come out with enough money to buy the family clothes for the winter. I mean all year, on a farm and can't buy clothing, I don't mean food, to keep warm for the children to go to school and start the winter on. So those people, in there year after year, never get a settlement, never get a settlement, and that's why you have year after year hundreds of people leaving the farm and going to the cities where they can't get jobs because people who come in and build a factory say "for white only". And these people go north, east and west just to find jobs.

They're uneducated. And you mean to tell me that people in other areas, officials as well as local persons, don't question people who try to get on welfare? I tried to get on welfare, and nobody question that? The big city people don't ask questions, they don't want to know why so many people leave the south for the north? They don't want to know?

Q: It seems like people down here are very disillusioned with the way the government is set up, and with the way the laws are carried out all over the country ; I was wondering if you think this disillusionment is with the enforcement or with the forms of government, by which I mean the Constitution, the way the country is supposedly set up, in theory?

A: I think enforcement. I think it's the enforcement more than the way the country is set up. And yet to be realistic about it, we know that slavery is an institution that's condoned by this country. We know that. But I still think that if the laws that are on the books were enforced, conditions would be better now. But that's how the country got its wealth, and that's how the country got its power, because it set up the institution of slavery. It perpetuates it; it perpetuates it today by non-enforcement of the laws that it makes. In fact it makes the laws so that, as one official here say, that I'm the law and you do what I say, too. Which means the law on the books sometimes doesn't matter. It's what the officials want to do about it.

Q: Talking about the Voting Rights Bill a moment ago—just how important do you think politics is in solving the Negro problems, troubles of the Negro in the south? I know Moses (?) said the best way to keep a man a slave is to give him a horse and call him free...Do you disagree with that?

A: Well, I can't say that I disagree. But I do say that unless there is a program of education the Negro will not be able to use the vote effectively. He must have some political education, and he must have some education, period, in order to use the vote effectively. Now that's what the Miss. FDP plans to continue, because we have been holding workshops all over the state where we are organized, and more intensively, after we got the voting rights bill, and after we got the six question form ; we are here in my county we've set up eighteen workshops, and thirteen of them were successful. And we had planned to hold these workshops all over the 4th District, and they were being held in other sections of the state as well. But we did not intend for people to go down to the courthouse to register without being able to fill out the form...not to sit there fifteen, twenty, twenty-five minutes, but just be able to go in there and fill out the form in from three to five minutes, and to fill it out correctly. And that's

what we did in these workshops. We didn't only teach people to fill out the form and fill it out right in a certain amount of time, but we also explained every line on the form, and especially the last line which said, have you ever been convicted of any of the following four crimes or felonies? We explained all those terms to those people here and discussed them; and besides doing that we started talking about the officials, and our local government, and who's the most important official and what they are supposed to do and what they do, and is he elected or is he appointed. I mean those are programs that we are using to educate our people, along with helping people to read and write. There are many people now who can't read and write, who are getting registered. We're also helping those people too. So our feeling is that it's good to have the vote; we need the vote. But we must be prepared to use the vote when we get it.

Q: Once the movement has pretty well established itself politically do you think that then they could change the concentration and move over to economics or education?

A: We think all of these fields are important, equally important: economics, or education, or whatever it is.

Q: The protest at the present is generally coordinated by the FDP, that someone said was a political party first and a civil rights group second. Do you think it's considered to be a political party first and a civil rights group second, or a civil rights group at all, or what?

A: Well, I'm sure that MFDP is not a civil rights group. It is a political force, but I also feel that the civil rights organizations all have their place. I think the Negro community at this point needs all the help it can get—all the help it can get, in civil rights, politics. And civil rights has taken on such a broad field: education and federal programs, I mean that's been one of the major fields in the civil rights work. Now federal programs. You see, we have been excluded from everything: politics, economics; we have you take the agriculture department, it was amazing, in 1964 Negroes had not been elected to ASC boards and committees. And last year through the civil rights organizations Negroes for the first time were elected to county committees and area committees. Not in very many cases, but if a few, and that's opened our eyes, cause one thing we learned was that the agriculture department is perhaps a citadel of segregation. Really, in the south, cause we learned so much about that department. That really if the agriculture department and HEW...had really worked for the people, and the people knew about the programs and had been able to use them, then what the civil rights organizations, all of them, have been trying to do for the Negro

community could have already been done. Cause after all if he gets an education an if he can make a livin an if he can live decent like other people, then there's no need for crime, there's nothing to protest. Is there? No, no. But poor schools...an I don't believe these things are secret; I think people know that these things exist, they have to know, you know? they just have to know. They have to know that in our schools we don't have science laboratories; we don't have adequate libraries. These things are no secret. Just no secret. There's no secret that a farmer out here can't get an FHA loan to improve his farm; that's no secret. There's no secret that the people up there in the Delta who<sup>an</sup> hour struck because they couldn't get a dollar and a quarter/for their work, there's no secret that those people have made, have farmed for years and years for three dollars a day for two and a half a day, for \$1.25 a day. I don't believe those things are secret, are hiddan from people. I just don't believe that.

Q: Do you feel that the fact that the summer projects which are classified as civil rights activity are conducted under the auspices of the FDP which is considered/<sup>an</sup> civil rights organization is any sort of contradiction?

A: Well...

Q: Do you think the FDP is a necessity?

A: I'd rather say it's a necessity for the time being, cause I can envision a time when there won't be a need for FDP to have to sponsor federal programs.

Q: How did the county projects affett the FDP office?

A: Well, what happened there was that they had been a coalition of civil rights organizations in the state, you know, set up in '63, but there was no need for any of the organizations as such to, you know, for this coalition after the FDP was formed, for the simple reason that SNCC, and CORE, and SCLC, has this feeling, that the Negro community now has this political tool which is more important than the civil rights organizations. Civil rights organizations cannot do the things a political party can do. Cause they can't challenge officials; that has to be done through some kind of political organization. What they can do is work on federal programs, work on HEW, and these other govern-ment programs and agencies to make them work for people. But they can do that in an effective way. First of all, all of their enegy and money was spent fighting policemen, and they just exhausted nearly all their means paying fines, getting people out of jail, until they said well now what we really need to do here now is this Miss. Negro needs a force of his own within the state; he needs a voice of his

own within the state. Not the voice of SCLC, or the voice of CORE or the voice of SNCC, but his own voice. And how does he get that? Through his own organization.

Q: In other words, the distinction was made on the level of organization, not on the kind of work that they do?

A: As it is now, of course. And it's necessary for the time being.

Q: I don't think it's a valid distinction on the kind of work though, because someone was explaining how the FDP wants an issue-oriented politics, and the kind of thing that civil rights organizations do, voter registration or education or anything like that--these can be issues for a political party as well; you know, there's not just civil rights work.

A: I think maybe some of the civil rights organizations perhaps they don't like to be called political organizations perhaps, but they're more political than the real parties.

Q: In talking about these civil rights groups you left out the NAACP; how do you feel about this group? Do you feel that they are working against the FDP?

A: Well, I can only say what they say. You know, they speak for themselves. I can truthfully say that SNCC, CORE, SCLC, and the National Council of Churches have backed MFDP all the way, in every way, and they are still with us and all we have to do is call on them. But I can't say that for NAA.

Q: Is there any reason you see for the difference? Someone thought that the difference was that the people in the FDP are young, and the people in the NAA are old, but not all the people in the FDP are between the ages of 18 and 25.

A: Well, people in MFDP are old people, I mean if...look, is the youngest executive person in the MFDP, and he's so much younger than the rest of us, we have ten, twelve, fifteen, twenty years on him. So we're not young at all. I mean you can't say that.

Q: Can you think of any reason why there is this deep gulf between the two groups?

A: I don't think there should be a reason. I don't think there should be the gulf. There's no need for it, really. But I think the NAACP is conservative, selfish. 'Cause really and truly the work that has been done here for the last two years in voter registration, in all other kinds of programs, has been done by CORE, SNCC, and I must say the Nat. Council of Churches and SCLC. NAA has done some things, but they do not deserve the credit, and of course

I think Mr. Novak is saying that they have gotten all these people ready but then nothing could be more far from the truth than to say that.

Q: They're supposed to be having summer projects; I know one volunteer who changed to an FDP project cause an NAA project dissolved in two weeks.

A: Well, we had some volunteers come over from NAA and said those people haven't got anything to do and I want to do something. We have one kid out of Carthage now; he says they haven't anything to do. Well, really and truly I think there's enough work here for everybody to do. There's more than enough. I don't think it's necessary to fight each other, cause NAA played a great role before the summer project, but I'm sure that they didn't put into the '64 project what they could have, and I think they came in in '65 with some selfish motives that really didn't mean anything for the Negro community except to divide it and to keep it from really progressing as it should this year.

Q: How do you feel about the nonviolent philosophy in general? About the deacons philosophy?

A: I like the deacons. But I don't see... I think I'm understanding the deacons, that they don't believe in violence; but neither do they believe in standing by and letting people shoot them, kill them, without doing something about it. I don't personally, I don't believe in violence either, but I do believe in self protection. I guess many people, you know, have different ways of explaining that. But I believe every person has the right to be safe in his home, in his person, and I believe every person has the right to protect himself out there on the street.

Q: Are there any plans under way now to establish chaplains and deacons in Mississippi?

A: I don't know. I just don't know.

Q: The question I was going to ask was in talking about the difference between the civil rights organizations and political organizations; it seems the FDP is considering itself as a political organization; do you see as a trend that there is greater discipline, more tightening up at things like meetings in the FDP? We were in Vicksburg when the roving team was there, talked to Bill Ware, and he was saying he thought that now the FDP was getting stronger and there was more power, more chance of doing things, that they were going to have to become much stricter and not act as loosely or carelessly about the people that got involved say in CORE. Do you think that's true?

A: I think that's very true. In fact, right now we are planning a state convention August 12; and at this convention we will know who the nominees are for the office of senator and the congressmen. Because you see if the congressional challenge is decided in favor of one seating Mississippi's congressmen, then there must be an election. And that doesn't say it's going to happen that way. But if there is an election, then we must be thinking about people to run for these offices. And that simply means that there must be strong commitments on the part of the people who are members of the MFDP, that they will stick together and have meetings and hold workshops so that they will be able to select candidates and campaign managers, you know. There just must be. It's not going to be difficult to do, because people are understanding more now than ever before what's involved in a political party. And we don't feel too bad about what people call a loose organization, cause I think we have done more for people through MFDP in the short while that we have been organized for getting people together and holding meetings and carrying out our plans; cause other political parties meet every four years and have precinct meetings simply for the purpose of people getting out to vote.

Q: We talked about some of the volunteers a little bit earlier, and Mrs. G (?) said that she thought the role of the...some of the volunteers and the whites in the movement was decreasing. Would you agree with that, or do you think it would be increased?

A: Well, I, I think the role has decreased, and I guess that depends, because I have a feeling that some of these... some of the volunteers--especially the ones with the special skills--will I guess be needed a long...time.

Q: Yes, that's what a lot of people say, that the need has decreased for college students with no experience, but that it's increased for people with special skills.

A: Yeah

Q: Yet, one that we talked to from Yale didn't think this would be just a regular summer project this summer.

A: Well, I don't know yet. There might be, and there might not be.

Q: What sort of role do you see the whites assuming?

A: Well, I think they have played real, real part in the Movement, many of them, because I know last year in '64 we had, uh...some college students from New York and from other places who came in, and for the first time, from these students, uh, Negroes heard about some of the

federal programs we had last...infact, uh, Martha Wright from California, Mike Rory from New York, and another girl named Karen from California came here, and a guy named Chuck, came in the early part of the summer...came in May, and they did some research work on federal programs, and what developed out of that was a farmers' league and farmers' cooperative here in Madison County. Now, had it not been for, you know, these people and the kind of potential they had--they weren't college graduates--or Mike is back at school now, and Martha stayed on, and 'cause Chuck is back, and Karen went back to...uh, it just proves, you know, that had it not been for these students with this kind of background, we wouldn't have had...maybe we wouldn't have had these kind of programs because we wouldn't have known about them. We knew about cooperatives, but what we really knew was that we had no part in them. And (chuckle), and now we have a farmers' league, as I said, and a farmers' cooperative. They slowed them down some this year because, well, for several reasons, but they did buy their own fertilizer, and they sold to each other, and now they're planning to build a warehouse and a gin...all they need is, is some money, because the other plans are already made. And then something else developed: and that is that we have a sewing co-op here that the ladies...they have a building, they have been working, they have sold some of their goods. They're asking now for people to help them find open markets for their, uh, work...Maybe some of the people down at the meeting, to get their money, it was being led by the colored people's co-operative. And see those things really come out of '64's summer project, and this is not..the only place where we have co-operatives. They have an okra co-operative up in Venola County, right up at Batesville in there, and another kind of co-operative that I cannot explain too much about it. But see, a lot of things have come out of this '64 summer project from people that came in that didn't really have the skill, but they had the potential. They knew how to make the contacts that were necessary to be made from the outside, and to get these sort of programs started.

Q: What sort of differences do you see between the '64 summer project and the project this summer?

A: Well, there's ah...there's quite a bit of difference. First of all there was this transition from CORE (?) to MFDP, and of course, the volunteers got caught up into that too. It's not too easy to do, even in some projects yet have not come around to the coming of MFDP projects. And SNCC planned it that way because they had spread their program over the...over several states in the South, and I think that MFDP was not too good at getting our programs off the ground too good with the summer volunteers. I guess that means again that young people and old people



don't work too well together all the way (chuckle). It's quite difficult for some young people to try to understand old people, you know, and work under old people's directions. I know that happened in several counties where the MFDP local people were not, uh, able to communicate with the summer, with the younger volunteers.

Q: Do the local county executives...do they control what the projects do?

A: Yes, yes they do...with the help of the ones left over from COFO (?). (chuckle)

Q: Just about all that's left of COFO now is the SNCC field staff...oh, I guess there must be about 100 in the state.

A: Well, this is a CORE project here. This is not a SNCC project; the 4th district is CORE. So we do have the CORE staff in the 4th district.

Q: Is the CORE staff still here? Is George Raymond CORE?

A: Yes that's right.

Q: How much longer do you think the CORE and SNCC people are going to be in Mississippi? How long will it be before the FDP is self-supporting entirely?

A: Well, I don't see any reason that the CORE or the SNCC staff would have to leave the state just because MFDP is perhaps becoming the organization. I see a need for the workers, you know. They, they...many of them are at home anyway. Mississippi is their birthplace. They plan to stay here. They're still...they can work in MFDP just as well as they worked in COFO...as organizers and as people who can carry on the workshops or whatever. They don't have to leave the state.

Q: What about the role of religion in the Movement? Do you think the Movement has changed many people's attitudes toward religion?

A: I don't know that...I...I...I have my personal thoughts about it, but actually I don't think that many people's attitudes toward the Movement have been changed because of religion. I think people hold on to it because...that's all Negroes have had, is religion.

Q: Has their attitude toward religion been changed at all by the Movement? You said that some Negroes had depended too long on their own merits and what they could do for themselves.

A: Well, I think ... I don't think it's hardly possible to really change that attitude of Negroes in Mississippi. You know that to Negroes religion is very dear to him. What he knows about Christianity is that it's real and it's stable and it's going to be there, but, uh...there are those people who feel that they have to do for themselves and that God's not going to be here and that He uses us to do what He wants done. There are many people who feel that way. I mean, I don't think it's important that we allow ourselves to get carried away on the Movement as opposed to our religion, because I've always felt very strongly about my religion, but I've always felt that I didn't get anything that I didn't work for. That's been my feeling.

Q: Do you think that people who feel as you do about religion are more likely to work in the Movement?

A: Well, that's difficult to answer because I don't think people work in the Movement because of religion. Uh... I don't think that.

Q: Why do you think people work in the Movement?

A: I think people work in the Movement because they have something to offer. There's an outlet.

Q: As I understand, you know, really involvement in the Movement...do you think you've been changed by working in it?

A: I haven't been changed by working in the Movement. I'm the same person I've always been. Perhaps I...I... I'm a little stronger in speaking out against the things I've always rebelled against, because all my life I've rebelled against...conditions, but I didn't always speak out.

Q: Do you find that the Movement causes you to lead kind of a double life? I don't know who it was we were talking to, I guess it was Mrs. Gray, talking about the pressures that the Movement people are under, you know, people who are so heavily involved, people who get, you know, so very nervous because of the fact that the Movement is their life, that it's sort of forced on them that way, that they can't lead a private life.

A: Say that again.

Q: Do you feel alone by the Movement, I mean, do you feel that it's prevented you from having a life of your own?

A: No, I don't feel that way. I don't feel that it prevents me from having a life of my own, because I never...

uh...I've been living the life I've always lived in fact. You see, uh, I grew up an only child...not reared by my own mother and father; I was reared by an aunt, and I went to high school right here in Canton. I finished high school here...and uh...for several years I stayed home and worked for my mother, and then I decided to work in the schoolroom just as a high school graduate, and I worked in the schoolroom for 8 years, and I was constantly fighting there because there was so much there that I didn't agree with. It was always fighting.

Q: Was this in a Negro school?

A: Yeah...it couldn't have been anywhere else (chuckle). And then after 8 years of it, I walked out and then I started working for an insurance company. And I fought with myself; I didn't fight with the company. But I kept asking myself--and that's where my religious conviction took over--I kept asking myself, just what is it you go out here and you tell people? You're trying to sell them a casket and a hospital bed, and you're trying to tell them that if they can't bury themselves they aren't first-class people. Um...and if you get sick and, you know, you can't go to a hospital, that you can't afford to pay the hospital bills...what does that do to you? You're just not a first-class citizen. Then, you know, you have to have insurance...everybody has it...I was a pretty good salesman; I never missed a quota for the whole 8 years I worked with the insurance business. And I said, well, that's...you know? And then here came George Raymond and the Movement, and as I say, I got up one morning and I decided that I wouldn't go selling insurance; I started canvassing, and my manager came up and said, 'well, Mrs. Devine, do what you think you want to do.' And so...I'm not too sure...I know that I'm not, you know, disturbed by the Movement. It's just that when things happen... I was sitting there listening to the deacon's talk this evening, and the man said something--I don't know, I can't quote him now--but the thing that came in my mind was this Negro that's up here in jail now, serving a 90 day sentence because he was out with a Negro woman that a Highway Patrolman likes too, and the Negro was accused of rape, and you see, that makes me bitter. And instead of saying that's not my business, I have something else to think about. I'm wondering now what should be done about that because I don't like that. I think that's something for me to do something about. All I need to know is where that other guy is. And one of the volunteers was arrested down there Saturday...uh, he was on the picket line, and he was arrested for blocking the traffic and going in the store. And that's what he found out when he went to jail: this girl told him. Yeah, I'm real angry about that. I thought about it much more, you know, just sitting there listening to the deacon's talk. I just need to know this guy. I don't know how I'm going to know him unless we get

somebody arrested (chuckle), and get him to go there... you know and get his name. The boy was bailed out, but he didn't get his name. But I just want to know him; I want to really know because if he's here in Canton, you know, if the guy lives here in Canton, we're gonna do what we can do. So the civil rights movement hasn't taken anything from me and from my living because I'm doing what I want to do. And I've always protested... rebelled against something. There was a time in my life that I didn't know what I was rebelling against, but I know I was...you know...fighting something that just didn't fit.

Q: There's a question we asked Mrs. Gray during her interview: are you working only for the civil rights movement, or are you talking about things like Vietnam and the peace issue?

A: I'm talking about the Movement, because I don't want to talk about Vietnam. You see, I have a son in service, and when I get choked... because I don't want to give this country my son.

Q: Do you think these other issues are very important to the Movement? How much importance do you put on them? How do you feel about, say, the McComb statement and about Vietnam being associated with the Movement?

A: I...I don't want to talk about that. I don't want to talk about it because, you see, I think there was too much play-up of the McComb case. So far as officially MFDP is concerned I think those people had a right to... to say what they said if they wanted to say it. And as they said, the statement was not an official opinion of the Freedom Democratic Party. I'm sitting here now saying that I shouldn't have to give my son to a country, a foreign country where I'm finding it so bitter, and where he grew up denied of so many things that he should have had. And yet I wouldn't tell my son that. I would certainly let him make up his own mind if he wanted. If he felt that way, it would be all right, but personally, I don't feel that way. Now I don't think this country has any business in Vietnam, and I think the country is so cowardly it would rather keep its face polished and lose its soul than do what it should do and get out of Vietnam and let those people work out their own problems...unless this country, this selfish country--as it always has been--thinks it has too much to lose by coming out of Vietnam.

Q: This will be the last question, I guess, and we'll finish it up. All three of you, Mrs. Hamer, Mrs. Gray, congressional candidates...uh, why do you think it is that women play such a large role in the Movement in the South?

A: Well, I don't know just why it's like that, uh...it wasn't planned that way (chuckle). It just happened that way. I guess you have observed, and we all know, that Negro men have just been pushed around and hounded so badly that they just don't speak up first, you know. I'll step out first. They're just not always men, it just isn't there. Now that's not saying that's why Gray and Hamer and Devine are congressional candidates, cause it doesn't have to be that way. But the truth is, I was the only person present, and when the time came around to make a decision as to who would volunteer...well, you know, who would take this up? There was only...I was the only woman...man or woman...from my district, so I said sure, 'cause if it has to be, I'll do it. But I think all the Negro man needs is to be reassured that he is a man, and that when he does speak, you know, he'll be looked upon as a man, 'cause right now he's not, and he hasn't been. He's had no control over his woman; he's had no job to take care of her. And right now I know any number of men that get out there and have this nasty experience with these, these whites telling them what they must do and what they must not do, and they accept it because they've got a house-ful of children back home, and they got a wife back there, so they go along quiet. I see these men. When I was selling insurance, I saw enough; I got real educated, and I didn't have to read a book, and I learned things that I...I'm sure that many other people have never learned and heard. I've seen these whites drive up to these Negro men's homes, and I've seen them call them out and talk to them and tell them what to do and what to not do. I've heard that time and again, and I've gritted my teeth and walked off, and I know what it's like...I know. I know much more than many other people about this business about Negro men not being men and not being able to make decisions. If they make them, they don't say it, and they go home and they smile, you know, as best they can with their wives and their children, never mentioning things that were said to them. They don't want the children to know. You'd be surprised, you'd be surprised. Now take that tape off, but his..... (end of tape)