

Interview
Bill Hansen
White, Male
SNCC staff member

0416-1
Sides 1 & 2
Arkansas

Q: I guess we're ready to go. If I understand right, you, you're the head project leader at Pine Mountain now?

A: No. No, that's been...I was the state project director for the first year and a half that we were in the state, and I was the first SNCC worker in the state, and I resigned about a year ago as the project director. And I function, I suppose, as some sort of assistant.

Q: Why was it that you resigned as project director?

A: When?

Q: Why.

A: Because I was white.

Q: Do you find that this makes much difference?

A: Well, yeah. It, I mean, it was...it was getting out of hand. The press exploited it. That's why I had enough of it. It was symbolically very bad. And it was, you know, it caused problems. It caused problems in terms of public image, and it caused problems in terms of...Are you taping this?

Q: Yeah.

A: Oh. And it caused problems in terms of...Many people were critical of that, many people in the Negro community. And it caused an added problem of people who were organizing in the field. And the press projected me all out of proportion to what I was. So I decided that it was becoming detrimental to the project. I mean, it was, you know, my own decision. What was that?

Q: I just wanted to say that, you know, we get a lot of tape during the summer, and we added a lot of stuff, and you don't have to worry about stuff going out of context. And if there's anything that you don't want your name associated with, just say so.

A: All right.

Q: I wonder, what was it like the first year and a half here, was it anything like Mississippi?

A: Well, in some places, we ... I initially came here at the request of a group in Little Rock, who felt that Little Rock was one of the few large cities left in the South that still had segregated lunch counters. It was in late 1962. And they

had been, well, writing to SNCC in Atlanta. And they sent me over here, they wanted, the people in Little Rock wanted SNCC to send somebody over here to organize the students in the community to attack the lunch counters, so I came over here and did so. Well, there was, I got together with students on the Philander Smith campus, and they started sitting in at the lunch counters and downtown Little Rock and there were arrests and so on. And then standing in at the theaters, and it was, you know, completely a public accommodations program. And in the lunch counters, after about three months of this, the lunch counters were desegregated. And in the meantime Ben Greenwich had dropped out of school, decided he wanted to work, wanted to work full-time. So the two of us moved to Pine Bluff, and started working in the delta then, and started organizing in Pine Bluff. And Arkansas A.&M. College, the state school for Negroes, is in Pine Bluff, and the students there got involved in lunch counter sit-ins, and many of them were kicked out of school. One of them was Jim Jones, who came to work for SNCC, and Jim's wife, who is now his wife, and she came to work, and my wife, who was kicked out of school there, and she came to work for SNCC. We got a number of students, enlarged our staff right then. Then we started spreading out into the outlying areas, the counties around Pine Bluff, and it was at that point, in early 1963, that we started getting involved in political action, and got off the whole idea of public accommodations, and started getting involved in political action and voter registration.

Q: You're still involved in voter registration now, aren't you?

A: Yeah, yeah. The registration in Jefferson County, Pine Bluff is the county seat, has increased about ninety per cent since SNCC first began working there two years ago. Almost ten thousand registered Negroes.

Q: Now, what is that in relation to the potential?

A: About forty-five per cent of the, well, forty-five per cent of those people over twenty-one years old, those Negroes over twenty-one years old in the county are registered.

Q: Well, let's see, then. So you started that 1963?

A: Well, we came here, I came here in 1962. I arrived here the same day that James Meredith arrived on the Ole Miss campus, in 1962. Ben came to work around the first of the year, 1963, Ben came to work for SNCC. The rest of them started working for SNCC in February, March, of 1963.

Q: All the people that are on the SNCC staff in Arkansas, are they all Arkansans?

A: No, the...I would guess that, well, it's fluctuated, you know, the number of people who are from Arkansas. This summer we've had almost fifty people working here. I would say that about half of them are from outside of the state. All of the whites who are working are from outside of the state, and I would say, a third of the Negroes. The rest are native Arkansans, and of the twenty-some people who'll be staying this summer, uh, this fall, this winter, who'll be becoming permanent people, about eighty percent of them are Arkansans.

Q: Is this the first summer that you've had student volunteers?

A: In any kind of a large number. We had three volunteers last summer.

Q: Why did these three come here last summer?

A: Um, let me see. Two of them because they had personal problems with people in Mississippi, and the third one was a friend of a friend who wanted to work here, and who that friend channeled into Arkansas.

Q: Why did you ask for a larger number of volunteers this summer?

A: Well, because we wanted to expand the program, we had a larger staff here, we had more of a concrete program worked out, and knew more of what we wanted people to do. Last summer we were doing mainly searching, and we were much smaller last summer, we couldn't handle many people. We only had seven people in the state last summer, outside of the volunteers. Going into this summer we had thirteen people, and people, much more experienced people, who'd been here for almost a year. Well, the people who were here prior to this summer, with the exception of two of those people, had been here all at least a year. And the two people who hadn't had been here six months. And we just had...well, we consider the project here this summer as being relatively small, because, I suppose, the term "summer project" is always going to be compared to what went on in Mississippi last summer, and that was a question of seven, eight hundred people that came to Mississippi last summer. When you figure that we had thirty-five, forty people that came to Arkansas this summer, who started working this summer, who are involved, who came on at the beginning of the summer, it's quite, it's much smaller in number. But we felt that we wanted to do it that way because, well, there were some things that we personally saw that went on in Mississippi last summer that we didn't want to happen here, and we didn't feel that there was any other way of doing this than by limiting the number of people. And also, the fact that when the Mississippi summer project

started there seventy-five regular staff in the state before that eight hundred came in, which was quite a bit different than our thirteen, also.

Q: Well, what kinds of things had you all seen in Mississippi that you didn't want to happen here?

A: Well, there was a lot of, it seemed there was a lot of wasted time, because with that huge number of people tremendously expanding the program, I mean, eight hundred people is a small army, that's almost, what, a battalion of men in an army, and I mean, such a huge amount of people, and even though they extensively prepared for this in Mississippi, there was just no way of really handling all these people and keeping them functional all summer and having...And when people move into a situation like these people did, you have to have a slot for them and you have to have something for them to do, you just can't get them to come here and find their own things to do, expect people from the outside to exert a whole lot of initiative. I mean, there are on-going programs, it's quite a bit different than when I came here, because I just came here and started wandering around and could work at my own pace. People who're here for a summer, they've got to be given things to do, you've got to have things for them to do. And in many cases that didn't happen last summer, a lot of people sat around. There was nothing wrong with the way it was organized, it was just a huge amount of people, not all of whom could be made functional. The second thing is that ninety per cent or so, some very huge figure, of those people who came into the state last summer in Mississippi were white, uh, all of them were college-trained, at Northern schools, where, in, I would say, probably at their schools, better students, among the sharpest and most aggressive students at their schools, and these people, they came into the state, and without any kind of a real idea of what the rural Southern Negro community was like. And because of their own pace that they have back home, and just not understanding what the situation was like, tended to move at a pace that was faster than the pace at which the community was prepared to move, and tended to dominate the situation in many cases, which, on the other hand, which then in turn caused a lot of antagonism between Negro staff that was in the state already, because in many cases you would have a situation with twenty-five whites and one Negro, regular staff in an area, and a lot of antagonism built up between the Negro staff and the white summer volunteers because of this very aggressive, let's move, you know, radical ideas in terms of the kinds of programs that have developed in the civil rights movement in the North that are quite a bit different than the ones in the South, or at least at that time were. And this caused many problems, and it was just that heavy influx of whites tended to intimidate in many, in some situations. So one of the things that we were very concerned about this summer was

keeping a racial balance among the staff, roughly half black and half white, which is what we've been able to do.

Q: The original idea was for fifty Northern volunteers. Was it trouble with Negroes which brought it down to forty?

A: No, more, well, there were, I don't remember, two or three... I'm just trying to think back as to what it was. Several people have left the state already. We ended up, I think, accepting forty-three people, rather than fifty, and several of the forty-three who applied didn't show up. I think, two or three Negroes, and two or three whites, so I think that if we would have had, if more Negroes would have applied, that we might have accepted, we probably would have accepted more whites for this summer.

Q: How did you go about trying to combat the kind of aggressive, radical kind of, you know, well, how did you keep these kinds of people from being a problem? Did you do something special, or did you just...?

A: Well, there's no way of telling, you know, on an application blank. The people that, at the orientation session it was, I mean, this was one of the subjects that was dwelt upon extensively. The whole idea of what a SNCC worker was supposed to be doing here, and the added burden is on the white SNCC worker and what he is supposed to be doing in the community, the kind of stereotypes that Negroes have about whites, and the fact that these stereotypes must be broken, and that the people are going to, because of their whole tradition of dealing with whites, are going to expect whites to do certain things and to fit into these stereotypes. And the white organizer in the state has to be careful about not fitting into that stereotype. And I mean, it's got to do with, I mean, for instance, the white SNCC worker has to be much more concerned about how the community sees his relating with Negro women than the Negro SNCC worker does, because of the whole tradition of white men and Negro women. And it's, I mean, what it does, it develops a certain double standard, I mean, there's certain freedoms that Negro SNCC workers have that white SNCC workers don't. And these may be fair or unfair, we see them as a reality, saw them as a reality, and made it very plain to people that this is what we expected of people that came into the state, and that these were things that we felt that people had to, ways in which people had to restrict themselves, and if they weren't willing to restrict themselves, well, we could certainly understand that, but we didn't feel that we could use them. And this was very heavily emphasized. The same thing was, I mean, it wasn't just sex, maybe I overemphasized that, it had to do also with aggressiveness in terms of leadership. We had, we felt that in many cases you're going to see, well, let me give an example. One of the stories that came out of Mississippi last

summer was a situation in Hattiesburg where there was a big conflict developed over a Negro girl working in the office and a white girl from somewhere or another outside of Mississippi, from the North, college girl, working in the office, and a big argument was because the white girl could type better than the Negro girl, therefore, and knew more about office procedure than the Negro girl, and therefore she ought to do it, because it would be much more efficiently done if she did it. And the other argument was that, the other side of the argument was that we just can't do this, because how are people ever going to learn, people, Negro people in Mississippi have to be able to be leaders, and if they never have the responsibilities of leadership they're never going to assert responsibilities, they're never going to become leaders, and it is hurting the program if this happens, and people ought to be willing to go in an inefficiently-run office until that person who's running it learns how to become efficient, and learns how to run the office efficiently. And the feeling here in this state was that we took that position also, and that where a person who comes down here might see something that needs to be done, and see it needs to be done now, and how it needs to be done, and can be perfectly right, and somebody in the community doesn't see this, it just, it does not solve the situation if just the white person does it for them, because that's not going to do anything. Then we're not accomplishing anything. We're not organizing a community. So this was very, dealt with very extensively, this kind of thing, that this community that you're working in in many cases is not going to be willing to move as fast as you may be used to moving, although that does not mean that you have to move as slow as the community is, you can't get so far out in front of them they can't see you any more and they stay where they are. So I mean, it was these kind of things, plus the fact that already here in the state there were some very strong Negro personalities, Jim, the state project director, Ben, down in Pine Bluff, Jerry Casey, the fellows like this who were cognizant that this might happen, and therefore on the, you know, particularly, trying to watch for it during the summer and to deal with it if it came up. So I think that we... Many people, or most people, I would say, with only a couple of exceptions, understood this at the beginning of the summer. It was very good, we had a very good group of people here. Many of the white kids who are leaving we were hoping would stay, I mean kids that want to go back to school, have to go back to school, have got other commitments and so on. But we were very happy with the people who were here this summer, and we feel that by and large we were very productive.

Q: Productive because they did not try to produce in the way that they would have in the North?

A: Well, I don't know, I mean, people were productive because

they, I mean, the main, the reason, they were organizers, and if you get, if you organize people to do things, get people to do things, and get people to be creative, and, so that the people in the communities develop programs, that they exert the leadership, and if you have anything to do with causing this thing to happen, then you're being productive. But if you go into a community and, for instance, if there's an area or a town and you canvass and you get, you canvass all by yourself and work your fingers to the bone all summer long, and you get a thousand people to register, it's not the same as getting the community to get out and canvass and getting a thousand people to register, because when you leave people are going to have to sit there just like they did all summer long, they sat back and they watched you do the work and you provide the leadership. On the other hand, if you can have something to do with getting them to provide the leadership, when you leave, they're still going to be leading.

Q: How do you go about doing this?

A: Pardon?

Q: How do you go about, you know, organizing and getting them to assert leadership?

A: Well, I can't really answer that question like that, because it's something you almost feel. People generally don't have confidence in themselves, and have, maybe, well, just generally don't have confidence in themselves to do things. It's got something to do with the whole question of qualifications, and people generally don't think they're qualified to be leaders. They don't think they're qualified to make any kind of decision and they don't feel that they're qualified to think and to plan and to develop programs, because they've been taught all their lives that they aren't. And the thing that the organizer has to try to do is to undo some or all or part of this, and to get people to feel that they are qualified. A fellow in West Helena who's going to be running for the school board up there in six weeks, well, he's running for the school board now, the election will be in six weeks. A guy who finishes first year of high school and he works in a factory, a shirt factory, makes a dollar-thirty-five an hour, but he's one of the, he's about in his early thirties, he's considered one of the, well, he's not the kind of person that people think are qualified, that think of as qualified to run a public school system or to have anything to say about how a public school system runs. And Joel didn't think he was qualified either, but now Joel feels that he can say as much and more about the needs, because he has three children in school, and he knows what the needs of a public school are, and what the needs of children who are going to public schools are, and he's, now, he's got the

confidence that he's got a right to make that kind of a decision, and to decide on how the public school system in Helena and West Helena is run. And he's willing, now he's saying, well, the whole nature of his campaign, by the very fact that he's campaigning at all, is that, well, "Here I am, I've got something to say." And at one point he didn't have anything to say, or he didn't think he had anything to say. And at some time or another, I mean, it was the fact of his association with SNCC people who talked to him about this, and this is what, to me, this is what an organizer should do. So I don't...As to how really you do that, what words you use, I mean, I really can't spell them out. It's kind of, it's a feeling that you have and it's some kind of a rapport that you establish with a person that you're talking to or that you're trying to deal with. And I just, I mean, I lived at Joel's house for a while, a year ago, in and out. In fact, when he and his family were out of town for a couple of months we lived in his house, that was the office. And I've sat up nights watching television with him, and sat up nights drinking beer with him, and I mean, it's a kind of a relationship that people can develop with him, with people, and to hold conversations and to try to get people to think about these kinds of things. And once Joel began thinking about the fact that his children were going to school...And also the job of the organizer is to disseminate information, because Joel had no idea of how, of the possibility that he could get elected, because of the whole alienation and the whole vast gulf that separates the Negro community from the political institutions...and he didn't know how one goes about it, the fact that it was at all possible or anything. So somebody talked to him about the fact that it only takes the signatures of twenty qualified electors on a petition to get you on the, and you have to own property, and that's all it takes for a person to run for school board in the state of Arkansas. And Joel just had no idea that it was that simple, mainly because he's never been involved in politics before, had no idea of how you find out something like this, didn't even think to think that he should find out that kind of thing. But when somebody talked to him about it, and puts the subject in front of him and forces him to look at it and to think about it, you know, it's kind of like pulling a curtain away. And then a dialogue starts, and at one point or another he decided he would run for that office.

Q: Here seems to be the kind of person that got the confidence that, I was going to say, through, in the process of, of political power in, you know, the orthodox political channels. And there seems to me one other thread of how people gain confidence and that seems to be through the concept of Negrohood and, you know, the whole black national kind of person. How necessary do you think that that is to the development of a confident and, you know, human...

A: Well, it's very important that people feel that because they're Negroes, that that is not anykind of a reason, that that's not a reason for them not to respect themselves. And that this is true. Negroes generally haveno self-respect, and have a massive inferiority complex, and this has got to do with the fact that they themselves are caught up on the whole idea that it's bad to be a Negro. And because of this then, it's very important for the organizer, because of this, to then, to try to get people to think really seriously about just how ridiculous that is, and to develop some kind of a nationalism, if that's it, and some kind of a self-respect, because people cannot, I mean, it's impossible for anyone who doesn't respect themselves to ask other people to respect them. So, and as a result, I mean, that's very important. So this is one of the reasons why people stress in the freedom centers so heavily the idea of Negro history and African history and the whole African, black mystique, to try to get people, to make people aware of these kinds of things and to talk to them about that. And even to the extent of using different terms, just very obvious, well, the term "black" at least in the movement, the term "black" is a much more acceptable term to define the Negro than the word "Negro" or "colored" or any of the traditional terms that people have used to designate that segment of the community, and...Now I'm not saying that this is true in the Negro community generally, but it's very true among SNCC people, for instance. And the reason why, I mean, the whole, the badge of shame has always been blackness, and it's been turned around now to be some kind of a symbol of pride. And people generally have got to feel that there is, that it's something to be proud of, not to be ashamed of.

Q: I was wondering, in terms of, can both a white student and a Negro student be equally in telling a community person about being Negro?

A: No. By no means, because it sounds ridiculous. And that's, which is also another problem that the, that is very, very prominent in the South in many of the people who are working, is that too many of the whites try to be Negroes, which is absurd. I mean, I personally feel, I don't have time, I've got too many problems of my own, and too many problems with what I'm doing to go around being ashamed of the fact that I'm white, and to feel that I have to expiate the guilt of four or five hundred years of white oppression, for what people did that happened to be the same color that I am. I just don't have the time, nor do I have that...I'm not the last of the just. And I just can't, you know, carry the world's sorrows on my shoulders, but I have to realize that many people feel this way, many whites feel this way, and as a result go around flogging themselves and having other people do it to them, or allowing other people to do it, feeling guilty and ashamed because they are white. To me that's absurd. I'm not ashamed of the fact that I'm white. I am. It's a reality that I have to live

with and that everyone who's any particular color has to live with. But on the other hand, one of the most absurd sights in the world is a white black nationalist, of which there are not such a few. But on the other hand, that doesn't, I mean, I've had talks with high schools kids, particularly high school kids, about the fact that, you know, about giving them things to read and talking to them about who Malcolm X is, what Malcolm X is saying, or what Malcolm X said, and about who Elijah Muhammad was. I managed all the time in Pine Bluff to get hold of a copy of "Muhammad Speaks," which I'd, you know, bring to the office and let, you know, have the kids read it. But on the other hand, I wasn't going to get up and spout the party line, I just thought that this was something on the American scene that they should, you know, that they should read, you know, that they should be aware of. And they should also, you know, not be ashamed of the fact that they're black, any more than I should be ashamed of the fact that I'm white.

Q: I know, some people working with different groups have said to me that being white, they felt that they had kind of an advantage in many of the impersonal tasks that, maybe not so much in community organization, not in community organization, let's say, but when you have a project like voter registration, they felt that they could use their whiteness, use that part of the system to defeat the system.

A: I'm not sure I understand what you're saying.

Q: You know, because they're white, they can tell a Negro to go register and he will go register.

A: Well, I would say I suppose that's true, but I don't know what that says, though, or what that does. It seems to me it doesn't do a damn thing. So then another Negro's registered. I don't see that that in itself accomplishes anything. I don't see that it accomplishes anything to have a white person tell a Negro what to do, and because that person's white, the Negro does it. It seems to me, rather than using the system to defeat it, you're perpetuating the system.

Q: Well, I'm not sure. But perhaps in terms of political power I'm wondering how much these kinds of...

A: Well, what you're doing then is, you're getting a Negro registered to vote, and making him part then of the, of those people who theoretically can choose who are the political leaders by casting a ballot, but you're getting a Negro registered to vote who's controlled by a white person.

A: But a white person who... Well, I'm thinking that Negroes probably will be a bloc vote for a while anyway. I'm just wondering, you know, tactics like that, how, you know, if,

I guess it really doesn't operate in the framework of community organization, but maybe on a statewide or national level.

A: Well, I think then, actually, again, you're just defeating what the, well, you would be defeating what we're trying to do. What we feel we're trying to do. I mean, we're just not trying to get Negroes registered to vote. I mean, it's a whole altogether that affects, and problems and situations that come to bear on the Negro community in this country, and that just doesn't solve it. I mean, it doesn't, I don't think it solves it when a Negro tells a Negro to go register and vote. It seems to me that a person ought to register and vote because a person sees why one should vote, and that the problem of black or white organizer is to create a situation where a person, a Negro in this case, understand why he should vote and understands what he is voting for and kinds, and how to make an analysis of just what is going on so that he can cast a ballot then.

Q: In the concept of community organization what role does things like the coordination of communities on a state wide play, or let's say, how important would you think things like the development of the Freedom Democratic Party or some kind of larger than the community kinds of organizations, political, or, say, economic, like in labor unions, is? How important are these in your programs?

A: Well, I, it's very important. We had a statewide convention in May, and we'll be having another one probably in October, November, at which time we'll probably formally organize some kind of a statewide political organization. Now as to what form that will take, I don't know. I can't say that it will be an exact replica of the Freedom Democratic Party, because the situation is different in Arkansas than it is in Mississippi, and the Negroes have not been denied in the same way as they have in Mississippi the right to participate in party politics. Negroes have been, since the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional the white primary, that was I believe in 1944, 1942. When the Supreme Court did this, see, at one time the Democratic Party said that it was a private organization and it could choose its members, and that therefore it didn't have to allow Negroes to vote in the primary, which of course in this state, as in all other Southern states, is tantamount to election, if they have victory in the primary. On the other hand, since that time, Negroes have been allowed to at least vote in primaries and there's always been a token Negro on the state central committee of the Democratic Party, there had been until 1957, when there was the purge then, after that whole scene in Little Rock. Up until that time, there were, out of fifty, seventy-five people that are on the state central committee, two or three Negroes. So I mean, the whole thing, you could not point to this total exclusion that you

could in Mississippi.

Q: I'm wondering, in the long range, or let's say, there are things that will have to be sacrificed, in direct participatory kinds of decision-making, when as the units become larger, whether you're willing to sacrifice those things in terms of getting bigger programs, state wide programs.

A: Whether we're willing to sacrifice what?

Q: Say, the community making the immediate decision.

A: Oh, yeah, that's, well, I agree with that, there's a certain amount of decisions that are going to have to be made by a person or persons, depending upon the situations and decisions. I mean, it all, you know, it would seem that if a Negro decided to run for an office in, well, let's say, for congress in Arkansas it would be almost impossible to hold an election, some sort of a black primary, to decide on which, if any, Negro should run. But what you'd try to do in a situation like that is get as many people as possible involved in making that decision. On the other hand, you know, there are other kinds of decisions, you know, like the decision to put out a newspaper was made by maybe half a dozen people. On the other hand, the newspaper is now, the people who write for the newspaper are people in various communities all around the state. I mean, it's edited by a person in Little Rock, who, out of all the stuff that comes in, I mean, it's a simple matter of finances, you can't put everything in the paper, so you decide, somebody decides what things go in the newspaper. And it'd be obviously impossible to have a vote of all the Negroes in the state as to what goes in the newspaper that we put out every two weeks. I mean, on the other hand, there's a certain kind of, we try as much as possible to ascertain what the feeling is of people, and then try to go along with that kind of feeling, it's always, you know, to try to involve people in making decisions, a lot of decisions that I personally make every day, so it's something that ideally is I would say impossible. I mean, what we're talking about, the whole philosophy is something that maybe in it's very pure sense is an impossible idea, but on the other hand, we try to make it, as far as we're concerned, that this country doesn't try to involve people in making decisions, and we're at least going to try to get people, as many people as possible, involved in making as many decisions as possible.

Q: I wonder what kind of role then the volunteer is going to play in the future, as communities get the rudiments of organization...Will summer projects be continued, or..?

A: Well, that will all depend, a lot of that will depend on what happens next summer, and on what happens during the winter, what people want next summer. I mean, we didn't go

around, again, to every Negro in the state, and ask them to vote in whether we should bring in x number of people from the outside to work on x number of projects this summer. On the other hand, people, we talked to people, and brought the idea to people, and asked people about it, and people were in favor of it, generally speaking. People in the communities who had been involved in the movement were generally in favor of it, so, you know, we went about implementing what they were in favor of. So again, it depends upon next summer. I would say that, you know, what people feel and what during the fall and the summer, or during the fall and the spring, but I would say that generally because of what happened this summer that people would be in favor of it, I would say. Now eventually, I mean, you know, the best of all possible worlds, of course, would be a situation where there would be no need for anybody from the outside to do anything. I would say that the best of all possible worlds is in the future, and is, at this point, in the future, in the so distant future that I'm not going to be concerned about it in terms of next summer. I don't think we'll reach the best of all possible worlds by next June, so I would say that there's going to be a need for SNCC workers, for full-time organizers, working in a community.

Q: What'll happen to the individuals who are SNCC workers now when there is no longer a need in the Negro community for organizers?

A: I don't know, maybe they'll all go on breadlines. I mean, I really, I just haven't considered that. Well, you know, I suppose it's what happens in any, many countries, many nations in Africa that have recently become independent, and there were guerrilla fighters...I mean, there's, I suppose right now, for instance, well, let's take where there was a very well known revolution going on, in Algeria. There were mountain guerrillas, I suppose right now there's not a whole lot of need for mountain guerrillas, since independence has been gained, so I don't know what mountain guerrillas are doing right now. I'd imagine in some way or another they're being absorbed into the, into the country, into the society, but I would imagine also this'll probably be very difficult for some people who spent ten, fifteen years fighting the French, or people in Cuba who spent ten or fifteen years fighting Batista from the mountains. Or people anywhere, I, you know, in the American Revolution, people who spent ten or fifteen years fighting the British, and who grew up doing that kind of thing, their whole life was being a revolutionary, then all of a sudden the Declaration of Independence was made and the British were overthrown and a nation, a sovereign nation, was set up, and I would that people were maybe at wit's end or something. I don't know, but I haven't conceived of, I mean, I've been working for SNCC for three, four years now, four years, and I mean, it's in a sense the only

thing I know, I don't, I mean, well, that's going to far. I mean, it's the only thing that I think of now. I'm just not concerned. So I don't know, I really haven't thought about what SNCC people will be doing when there's no need for SNCC people. It's, it's, to me it's such a, at this point, a remote thought that I don't think a whole lot of people think about it very much.

Q: Well, the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, in a sense, is not particularly tied to the Negro problem, well, I mean, most of the people are working in it, but, you know, in essence I guess it could work on almost any kind of problem that it wanted to. I wonder what you think most of the people here are, will work for, other problems other than the problem of civil rights.

A: Well, SNCC is much more politically oriented, really, than it is civil-rights oriented. It's much more concerned with political and economic changes. Well, now we have one person working in the Ozarks, the Ozark region of the state, which is a completely white area, who's up there, a white fellow from Maryland, who's up there organizing now, and we're hoping to develop in the Ozarks, in the white community, white area, very poor, mountain, Appalachian-like Ozark region, to develop there the same kinds of programs that we're developing in, now and have been, in the southern and eastern parts of the state where the bulk, the vast majority, of the Negroes live. I mean, to bring about some sort of a union, of a commonality of interests, while the interest is there, the commonality of interest is there right now. It's a matter of whether or not, of when people see this, when poor whites and poor blacks see that they have similar interests, identical interests, really. And I mean, this is something that we want to bring about, because, it's, I mean, I don't see that a black kid who doesn't get enough to eat and who doesn't go to a decent school and doesn't have clothes to wear and doesn't have indoor plumbing and doesn't have et cetera, et cetera, is any worse off than a white child who doesn't have the same thing. I think that a white kid gets just as hungry, and if father doesn't have any money, is just as poor and so on, and so...I personally happen to be, and I think I can speak for SNCC, I can surely speak for the people in this state, I'm concerned with that also.

Q: Well, I know that in, say, it seems like to me, I mean, I haven't been too close to this but, that there's a feeling that in some of the more expressive civil rights organizations that the sooner that we can get, you know, make it strictly using Negroes and working with Negroes, the better off we are. I wondering what you feel that the integration of the movement...

A: Well, you know, integration for what purpose. Integration

into what. Our President says that he wants everyone integrated into the Great Society, and that as soon as the Negro becomes assimilated, that that's his solution to the problem. I don't, seems to me that fifty million poor people, whether they're black or white, is still fifty million poor people, and that if you make, I mean, I would agree that it's an injustice when the proportion of poor people who are black is much greater than the proportion of people who are black to the total population of the country. That's an added injustice. On the other hand, it seems to me that if only ten per cent of the poor people are black, I don't know that that answers any kind of question other than it would probably eliminate the alienation that the black man as a black man feels, but I mean, I would personally like to see that happen, because it would make what I feel, it would make the organizing and the solution to the problem as I see it much easier if there was no such thing as a color line, because then you could start dealing, well, bad, I suppose, in this country, a very bad phrase, with class lines. Color lines tend to obscure class lines, and as soon as the color line can be eliminated, then you can start dealing with class lines, and as I see it, until the color line is eliminated, we'll never be able to deal with class differences and class problems, and problems that accrue to the poor people.

Q: I'm wondering about the students that do come down here, whether they have the same conception of...

A: Some do and some don't. Some people who are already here do and some don't.

Q: Is this, do you think this, what sorts of things, external things, does this relate to, I mean, in terms of say, maybe, sex differences or age differences, you know, older people...

A: Well, I'm not sure I understand what you're saying.

Q: Would you find that the younger students in general are more, tend to see it more as a Negro problem?

A: You mean the younger students, you mean the workers?

Q: Yeah.

A: SNCC workers? Well, I would say that the people who come out of, a person who comes from a family that makes, you know, ten thousand dollars, is a college student, and is planning on going to law school or medical or something like that, in many cases doesn't tend to see it that way, you know, who comes out of that kind of a background, particularly if they are white, and comes to a place like this, and doesn't see it that way at first. On the other hand, sooner or later he does, it seems to me. Sometimes he doesn't. I mean, I really, it's no, that's why, that's why when people say, when people make

this whole communist pitch at SNCC all the time, it's a, SNCC as an organization is so many diverse ideas that to call this organization anything is really, I mean, to make any kind of a generalization about it, or I mean, not any kind of a generalization, but any kind of a definitive statement, is ridiculous. Because people have different ideas and different feelings, and even when people have different, you know, the same ideas to the same ends, they have different ideas on ways in which you go about doing this. Some people in SNCC are much more disenchanted than other people with, well, with democracy, maybe, or with American-style democracy.

Q: Well, how do you personally feel about the non-exclusion policy of SNCC, and now the attempts to develop, you know, a really broad base of movement, bringing together the peace and labor and civil rights...

A: Well, you know, I mean, I think that's fine. I think, to try to link these groups up. I think that this kind of thing, I disagree with many people in SNCC in that I think that this is largely irrelevant to the people we're working with, because I think that the person, the Negro, that we work with in, you know, Swinglow, Arkansas, is not concerned, well, the war in Vietnam is irrelevant to him, and what is relevant to him is what we have to deal with. So I can't walk up to some tenant farmer in St. Francis County, and say, "I think you ought to grab a picket sign and go down and picket the federal building downtown protesting American foreign policy in Vietnam," even though I might disagree with American foreign policy in Vietnam. I just think that's irrelevant, so as a result I can't get that hung up with it. On the other hand, I certainly, since I myself disagree with American policy in Vietnam, I certainly think that people of similar interests, peace people and labor people and civil rights people have many similar goals in that they have very definite, very many definite common interests and common goals, and really what all of these people in one way or another are trying to do is the same thing. I mean, I just, I mean it would be to me like, like going to a white community in the Ozarks and talking about segregation. I mean, it's irrelevant. People aren't concerned with segregation in, poor people, mountain folk in the Ozarks, whites, they're not interested in segregation in Lincoln County, Arkansas, the way the Negroes in Lincoln County, Arkansas, are. On the other hand, there are some things that they're interested in, having control over their government, being opposed to corrupt politicians and people who are involved with the special economic interests. They're interested in good schools and good houses and good jobs, and these are the same things that the Negro in Lincoln County, Arkansas, is interested in. He's just got the added thing of being black, and that presents, of course, a myriad of unique problems. I'm not trying to

say that it doesn't. But to talk to a guy in the Ozarks is absurd. He's not interested. At this point he's not interested. At one point or another we're going to have to, I mean, he's going to have to become interested, in segregation, because he's going to see that the same kind of thing that can do that to that person, to a black person, is the same kind of a system that can do something else to him for similar, for a similarly arbitrary reason, and he's going to have to come to the realization also, as is the black man in Lincoln County, that when huge amounts of money are being spent in Vietnam to support a completely anti-democratic government, this, I mean, this is the same kind, I mean, being spent on military involvement, is something, I mean, again affects him, and that he's going to have to do something about it if something's going to be done about it. On the other hand, he doesn't realize, the black man in Lincoln County or the white man in Stone County, they don't realize, either one of them, that, because it's irrelevant. And it has to be made relevant, and it's not going to be made relevant by walking up and saying, you know, "The war in Vietnam affects you x, y and z ways." I mean, it has to be something that people arrive at.

Q: How do you think that you can make the problems of the poor, let's say, really relevant enough to the white liberal that, I'm thinking that, as it turns more to the class lines...

A: Well, the white liberal is not the person that we're trying to organize. It's not the white that we're trying to organize. A person who is liberal is generally a person who is, who at least by one definition, in terms of his economic independence or economic affluence, is not a member of that class. I mean, he might be by his own commitment, but I mean, we've got, you know, kids here this summer from all kinds of backgrounds, black kids and white kids. We've got a Negro here this summer who's from one of the most prominent Negro families in Massachusetts...