

MENDY SAMSTEIN

Interviewer by Anne Romaine
Highlander Center
Part I

(Samstein) My name is Mendy Samstein.

(Anne) And what are you doing now? What exactly is your capacity with labor? Are you working for ~~xxx~~ ...?

(Samstein) Do we have to do into that?

(Anne) I'd like to for-- It's necessary for the bibliography.

(Samstein) Why don't I say that since June of 1963 I have been working with the ~~XXXXXX~~ Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee.

(Anne) You're still on their-- You're still working with them?

(Samstein) Well, no, not right now.

(Anne) Who are you working for now?

(Samstein) Nobody.

(Anne) You're a nobody? Well, okay. Where are you originally from?

(Samstein) New York City.

(Anne) Where did you go to school?

(Samstein) Brandeis University.

(Anne) Undergraduate?

(Samstein) Yes.

(Anne) And then, did you do any graduate work?

(Samstein) Yes. I went to Cornell University.

(Anne) Did you go directly to Mississippi when you started working for SNCC?

(Samstein) No I left, after Cornell I was at the University of Chicago for 6 months and then I went down to, in January of 63 I went to Atlanta, Georgia and I taught at Morehouse College.

(Anne) What did you teach?

(Samstein) Western Civilization, 19th Century European History, and English history.

(Anne) You were a history major at Brandeis?

(Samstein) Right.

(Anne) Could you trace your relation with SNCC up until the--

(Samstein) Well, let's see. While I was still teaching in Morehouse I became involved in efforts that were being made then to integrate the restaurants downtown--sit-ins. And when I finished I had a-- I came down on a one-semester temporary assignment. I was scheduled to go back to school.

(Anne) Back to Cornell?

(Samstein) Back to the University of Chicago. And instead I decided to stay and I worked in Atlanta. I came on to the SNCC staff and worked in Atlanta from June, as a SNCC person, from June until the end of September of 1963. And then, in early October I went to Mississippi.

(Anne) With SNCC?

(Samstein) Right.

(Anne) When did you meet Bob Parris?

(Samstein) I guess we first met in the spring of '63.

(Anne) When you were in Mississippi?

(Samstein) No, that was at the Atlanta conference. Actually we didn't-- After the March on Washington in Atlanta, we were coming back and -- but really when I went to Mississippi in October. The other contacts were just casual.

(Anne) How did you start working with Bob and with the ~~MFDP~~ MFDP?

(Samstein) Uh, well--

(Anne) Could you sort of trace your relation with Bob and the MFDP up until the MFDP?

(Samstein) There wasn't a Freedom Democratic Party.

(Anne) I mean with preliminaries.

(Samstein) SNCC people in Atlanta asked me to work with a work-study program that was being developed in Mississippi at Tougaloo and which was being attempted at Miles College in Birmingham. Work-study program was an attempt to-- Well there were various hopes behind the program. The attempt was to get college students involved in the Movement and so a program was worked up with the Field Foundation whereby people could leave school for a year, work in the ~~MMX~~ Movement and also have a certain amount of educational experience while they were in the field through seminars and so on. They would have some fulltime person working with them. So this was an attempt to integrate both the field and the action work with some kind of thinking that they can do.

So this had been developed initially for Tougaloo College and then it was expanded to Miles and I was asked to go over to do the--work with the people while they were in the seminars.

(Samstein) ... so I left Atlanta to go over to Birmingham and while I was in Birmingham it was necessary to-- felt the need to go over to Mississippi to talk with people who had been in on the initial formulation of the whole work-study concept which included Bob and Donna Richards and a guy named Oscar. So after a few days in Birmingham I ~~had~~ left and went over to Jackson in early October and at that time--

(Anne) Jackson?

(Samstein) Jackson, Mississippi. And, at that time people had the idea of developing a freedom vote for Governor campaign to set up a Freedom Vote which was, you set up your own election procedures and you run a vote throughout the Negro community in order to dramatize the disenfranchisement of Negroes in Mississippi and also to raise issues and to use it as a platform with which to raise issues and to organize people ~~themselves~~ around. I kind of got involved while I was in Jackson in the planning and discussing of that whole campaign. After returning from Birmingham, ~~once~~ when it became apparent that the Birmingham work-study program was going to develop in a different way and that the people at Miles (?) had their own conception of the way that program ought to be run, I returned, after a few days, I returned back to Mississippi and began to put all my energies behind that Freedom Vote campaign.

(Anne) This was in the spring of '64?

(Samstein) This was in the fall of '63. October of ~~1964~~ 1963. I stayed in Mississippi from that point until February of 1964.

(Anne) When did the idea of the Challenge first come into play, of going to the convention? Would you trace it to the events in the spring of leading ~~it~~ up to it? What sort of part you played in organizing it or helping to form the FDP.

(Samstein) Well, there were a lot of things that intertwined at that time, that were happening simultaneously. It's hard to pick out. In the course of that campaign, the Freedom Vote for Governor campaign, the whole possibility opened up of mobilizing a significant and large number of students to come down to Mississippi. As a result of a guy named Lowenstein, Al Lowenstein, who made a couple of trips in October to the coast and to New Haven, to Stanford and Yale, about seventy students were mobilized and came down to Mississippi and spread out in different communities and worked on the campaign.

(Anne) Who were some of these?

(Samstein) Yale and X Stanford students.

(Anne) Who were some of these students that came?

(Samstein) Their names?

(Anne) They didn't play a really big part, any of these?

(Samstein) Well, I mean, people came in for a week and left.

(Anne) I see. I thought you meant they came for a summer.

(Samstein) No, they came down, they left school and they came down because,

I mean I think that there was the beginning of real ferment, growing ferment of a larger significance nature, on the campuses about the whole civil rights movement. There was a growing need that people felt to become directly involved, and to confront some of the issues which, you know, the whole question of terror and the police state and disenfranchment (sic) that was so dramatically involved in the whole Mississippi thing. I think that a large number of students--seventy at that time--came down and it was also very apparent from discussions and so on that we got from the students that came down that much larger numbers of students were willing and interested and anxious to become more directly involved.

They came down and they spread out in different communities and the interesting thing that happened was that for the first time the whole Mississippi situation got some real national focus and attention because it seemed that when you brought down large numbers of northern students from white and from middle class families, somehow or other that brought with it a considerable amount of national attention. The press, CBS came down, NBC came down, followed the students down. The Justice Department was there fulltime. They didn't have a fulltime staff there. I mean they just came down for this period, brought
~~four~~ about ten, twelve boys down. You have to realize, you have to think back to that period to understand how significant that was and how isolated people were who were working in Mississippi from any kind of relief from the daily and brutal confrontation they had with the whole local state system. There was

no relief from that, there was no outrage in the country, no federal presence that could any way ~~ix~~ relieve that situation. And Mississippi and the people who ran that state weren't at that time in any way, anymore than they are now in a sense, prepared to allow people to organize and to bring about anything that involved significant change in that state. You didn't have the right to organize, not only the question about whether you could bring about change, but you didn't have the right to organize, which meant that you didn't have the right to hold meetings without retaliation, you didn't have the right to march or picket or demonstrate, any of the first amendments processes by which people protest and organize to bring, to redress grievances, you know, bring about change.

In that context the students coming down represented an interesting kind in of commentary on the whole society and ~~the~~ fact portrayed that society does not seem to pay any attention, or didn't seem to pay any attention when Negroes were beaten or killed, because that happened; or they just couldn't vote. That just didn't seem, nobody seemed to care about that, nobody seemed to give a damn, except that you started to get some students outraged because students were in that fluid and flexible situation and where they were really coming to grips with the contradictions between what America claimed or pretended to be and what they were becoming, what they had a sense, [/]For instance Mississippi was all about, and the raw contradiction between those two things was something that created a deep sense of moral concern and outrage and a desire

to get into that, to put witness behind that and to try to do something about it.

But now, when the students came down, that raised a whole lot of things when they left, for the people who remained behind to discuss and so on. Because, there was the whole problem about the tension that was introduced when large numbers of whites came into the state, between them and the old staff that was there. I think that tension should be understood rather than, I mean people have to understand that because people had been there for two or three years and they had worked and they had suffered and people had a legitimate right to raise the question about why is it, what is it about us that the ~~SOX~~ society doesn't seem to give a damn that our bodies can get mutilated and nothing happens. What makes these people more valuable than us. Then there was just the tension that was created between the fact that people came down, had a certain educational thing, so that there was the tension created between, the people that came down the the people were there and there was some anxiety around the fact that this, the young Negroes in Mississippi who are on the staff, this was their movement. They had suffered and so on and finally found something in which they really felt that this belonged to them. Then the problem of those large numbers of people coming down posed that the tension about these people. were they able to find a place and a home in a thing, a Movement that belonged to them... again be taken over by some people outside them, white again. Eventhough people say, well, but they were well-intentioned an so on, the human factor of that tension was still there in terms of the people, the r feelings and their identity and so on.

That debate on some of the things I'm raising now went on throughout, from the beginning of November through the winter. People debated that. We had several meetings. Because right after the students had left after the election of early November, the possibility presented itself that about a thousand students could be mobilized, a thousand or more students could be mobilized to come down during the summer. The question then was, what would that mean. Where would that fit in. It was very, very hard for people to tackle that question. You had no way of knowing. People talked at that time about confrontation in the sense that the students coming down would ~~be~~ to help would create a confrontation in the sense that the federal government would be forced to recognize that ~~it~~ it had a responsibility to protect people in Mississippi. Because, with all those whites coming down, once those whites came down while they were respected and concerned citizenry in the North, and people kid about them in terms of, that they got protection of the law. And that sense that the North was concerned that the white students get protection of the law, that people are outraged when a young white college student~~s~~ gets beaten over the head, follow them down to the South. But it didn't apply to them in terms of the Southern ~~is~~ situation. I mean the Mississippi police, once they got in there and they were involved in civil rights, Mississippi police no more respected them than they respected the poor Negroes struggling for change. They lost their special status which, if they came down as tourists to go to Natchez and look at the Colonial buildings they

would have gotten all the respect and attention that white people ~~would~~ coming down as tourists get. But coming down in that Negro situation they lost all protection of law in the Mississippi context.

In terms of that gap between the time that the country was able through federal government and other pressures bring to bear some relief, legally, in terms of law and protection, they were a lot, a lot of those whites got beaten in terms of Philadelphia and what have you. Of course, all that tended to create more and more outrage in the country at the whole Mississippi thing.

At any rate, going back to the winter of '63-64, that whole thing was a very, very hard thing and it was very heatedly debated and discussed. We had a meeting right after the campaign was over we had a meeting that lasted about six or seven days in Greenville. Then we had another meeting on December 15th in Jackson. Then we had a couple of what were called executive committee meetings at that time--

(interruption for five minutes)

I think it was in this context that you have to begin to look at the spring and leading up to the Summer Project and the Challenge, in this context.

There is just one other factor that should also be considered. That is the operations that are taking place during that winter. What ~~were~~ were, in fact, doing in terms of the programming at that point, in terms of the winter and the spring. Those are three prongs, the concern-- Because we were not only thinking in terms of the summer and the spring and summer but we were

also concerned with the immediate day to day concerns. We were all involved in that; people in Jackson, ~~from~~ the field people. All of that intertwined to make the context out of which each of us, depending on where we were, in Jackson or Greenwood, whether you talked to myself and the perspective I had because I was working in Jackson or the perspective of somebody in Greenwood. I think that the way I see it is that's the general state, context in terms of movement and that context has to be understood.

After the Freedom Vote we gathered in Greenville and that was the beginnings of the discussion about political projections and so forth. I don't remember now specifically what came out of that in terms of-- I guess the sharpest thing that came out in terms of immediate programming was the emphasis on Freedom Days, which was a concept that you could, that rather than bring down a trickle of people steadily who would just get turned down and doing that just became repetitious, it tried to create, to build up the community and on a given day you brought down a large number of people to vote. It sharpened the confrontation of the ~~idk~~ issue that when people in large numbers could be seen blocked at the courthouse. I mean they just can't get in there to vote. Looking at it in terms of ... a big point which absorbed a lot of energies and which this whole thing is happening simultaneously with the Hattiesburg thing in January of '64.

X (Anne) What was the Hattiesburg thing?

(Samstein) Well it was people from Hattiesburg came up and began to

discuss the idea of having the Freedom Vote down there; building a community. ~~XXXXX~~ Guyot, who was involved there, got in touch with people in the National Council of Churches. It was not so much the National Council of Churches as the Presbyterian Commission on Race and Religion, though the National Council also ended up participating. That's the whole question about church politics which we need not get into, because that was a problem with the Presbyterians--

(Anne) Who can I get into this with?

(Samstein) I don't know if that's very important. It's just a little minor thing in the whole development of the Commission and the ~~church's~~ church's involvement. I don't know if you want--

(Anne)?

(Samstein) Well, you can talk to Art Thomas. He'll be critical.

(Anne) Who is he and who is he with?

(Samstein) He's with the Delta Ministry which is a Mississippi program for the National Council's Commission on Race and Religion. He would know a lot about the Challenge too. He came in, his involvement began in that Hattiesburg thing. He came down to Hattiesburg and he's been in Mississippi ever since, or in and out. So that he would give a certain perspective on a certain point of view about how these things unfolded.

A guy named Robert Stone was the Presbyterian guy and the main guy in putting together the ministers for that Hattiesburg thing. About fifty ministers eventually came down on January 22, and about several hundred people

picketed the courthouse and a hundred or so tried to register. That picket line was maintained for months and was ~~an~~ a very important focal point in organizing and mobilizing the Hattiesburg community. People were very surprised because the--well, people were surprised and not surprised because what happened was that again it demonstrated that when you brought down outside presence that tended to alleviate the absolute police state reaction that otherwise one could expect in Mississippi. Because, when people picketed the police came out ~~and~~ in large numbers but nobody was arrested. People expected all kinds of things to happen. This is not to say they don't to me in Jackson just this past summer in Jackson in 1965, right in the capital of the state and after everything they were still quite able to use the most vicious kind of police brutality and police tactics to crush that demonstration and to beat up people and what have you. Arrest all the people who were just marching and never even got out of the Negro community. In general I think you can say that whole outside presence was a working force toward alleviating some of the ~~x~~ untempered terror and police state reaction that Mississippi was capable of and did in fact resort to. Like when people are marching...and nobody knows ~~about~~ about that. Fifty-five people went, no more than that, no about forty-fifty people spent ^{fifty-five} ~~five~~ days in Parchment and went through all kinds of torture.

(Anne) In what?

(Samstein) Parchment, the state penitentiary. There are a number of other situations like that.

(Wnne) Why didn't nobody know about this?

(Samstein) Well the whole problem was there was no way of getting that out. ~~XXX~~ Nobody would pick it up. The press didn't play on it. There was no levers by which to highlight that. People tried. The SNCC office in Atlanta I'm sure ~~xxxx~~ tried. All the press was contacted but nothing ~~xxxx~~ dramatic in terms of national attention on that situation could be obtained.

It's in the context of the day to day operations in terms of the whole question about bringing large numbers of northern white students down to Mississippi and in terms of this context that the thing has to be looked at.

Beginning with that meeting after the Freedom Vote for Governor in November of '63 you had various kinds of discussions about the next twelve month period. I can't recall every-- you know there was a lot of discussion at the Greenville meeting, for instance, about COFO and in terms of future political activity. I mean the question was raised does COFO at that time set up a, does COFO run candidates. Should there be a COFO candidate? Or should it set up an independent political arm, which in a sense the way the Freedom Vote was run. It was not an FDP, it was the Committee to Elect Aaron Henry for Governor. COFO organized independent committee. I mean it had overlap and COFO people served on it but it was sort of like you organized a committee to conduct this political effort. There was that possibility and then there was some discussion, at that meeting, about forming

a political party which would be independent of COFO.

(Anne) Were you at this meeting?

(Samstein) Yes,

(Anne) Would you continue, would you describe and tell what you were doing at the time...?

(Samstein) What, at the meeting?

(Anne) Well--

(Samstein) I was just a participant.

(Anne) Well, that's all. That's what I meant; just that you were there.

(Samstein) I was just at the meeting.

(Anne) Or, you want to tell me about it?

(Samstein) No, I was just at the meeting. So we discussed this and we didn't resolve it. I mean we were just beginning to probe with the whole problem. As I think it turned out, I mean my own interpretation of the Freedom Democratic Party is that it emerged, the form it took, the way it went was not, I don't think planned. I don't think anybody foresaw the whole development before it happened. We all had a sense that what we're organizing has to be built into some kind of political organization. I mean, we were organizing people not only to register but to work politically. So that some kind of political organization has to be developed which would run candidates, which would set up, organize and run political campaigns. That means you have to have a organization which, who will choose the candidate rather than them being staff-chosen. You have to build up an indigenous group who

has strong enough people that would want to put up the candidate from their own midst. You have to then have people who will not only be that candidate and choose that candidate but will actually be committed to running. Then whole series of people underneath that that will help implement that campaign. In other words, campaign committees, publicity committees, fund-raising committees, all kind of committees that would help in terms of community involvement in political activity and political effort.

There was this general sense that this had to be done, that we were moving into a new stage of political, with the Freedom Vote campaign and well, there was some political activity before but at this point we were moving into a major political effort simultaneously with the constant voter registration drive. We were also, Because voter registration doesn't mean anything unless you have, I mean politics represents the people, their way of getting expression and their way of getting, of course, their interest as an individual in the society so that-- So it can't just be I mean the whole voter registration is a mechanical thing. Politics is what really counts. Politics is the vehicle by ~~white~~ ~~people~~ white people have control in the society and their destiny. That they can have some control over what happens, the question of how things get allocated and how taxes, how education, you know, all those other things, the whole legal process... So that they reflect people's aspirations and their interests and their concerns. Since Negroes are blocked systematically from any politics, from any participation in the local processes, the need was not just to register but become, to have some real democratic participation in

the society. There was this general sense that you needed to develop and expand the political effort and that to do that you need to, there had to be some kind of developing political organization.

This was discussed and it wasn't clear at that time whether it would take the form of-- And every ~~times~~ time there was a campaign there would be independent committees, committee to elect Mrs. Hayne or Mrs. Devine or Mrs. Gray for Congress, committee to elect Mrs. Palmer for sheriff, committee to elect ...for state legislature.--or whether it would be, COFO would be that political thing, the COFO Party, or whether it would be an independent political party entirely independent of COFO which had its own structure and its own life. Nobody resolved that at that point.

There were more discussions. I can't recall all the discussions that were held and meetings that were held. I don't remember where I first became in discussions around the Challenge. I remember talking, After the meeting in Greenville I went back to Jackson and then I started working in that office. See, also as part of our day to day operations we were involved in building and expanding our operations and setting up a statewide operation-- that was a very important concern of mine at that time--and helping to set up a statewide network. To explain you'd have to really go into some history in Mississippi about how they started in McComb and then you built things in spots and it was only in the summer of '63 that, right around the time of the march in Washington that it for the staff it seemed like it was time now to move into some kind of statewide effort, expanding into the five congressional

districts with people in each of these districts making contacts and trying to build up community groups. In terms of myself in Jackson I was involved in trying to develop the whole network of communication and coordination. At the very end of the campaign we got a Wats line and I spent a lot of time on the Wats line in terms of coordination between projects and the whole question of allocating funds and a lot of administrative stuff, I guess I was involved in.

I came back from Greenville and I was involved in that kind of thing. Then there was the whole question of building up that Jackson office because we didn't have a Jackson office until we had something temporary during the campaign but then when everybody left we had about seven or eight people in Jackson so we had the beginnings of bureaucracy, in a sense. I didn't understand that at that time. There's a whole lot of arguments about that whole development that can be made against the whole development which involved bringing down the students and the growth of offices and phones and memos and reports which are the beginnings inevitably of bureaucratization.

(Anne) One more thing. This was that MFDP office in Jackson. There already was a SNCC office there?

(Samstein) No, this was essentially a COFO office. It was COFO in the sense that like CORE people and SNCC people working together in an office, and it was called ~~EX~~ COFO. There's a whole thing about COFO which we can go into. I don't know if we want to go into that.

(Anne) MFDP.

(Samstein) Well, Bob could give you a better rundown of the history of that. Essentially as I see it ~~that~~ originally COFO rose in part out of the whole history of that. I don't know exactly all the details. COFO goes back to '62 but in part it rose out of the need to get money to fund a Voter Registration Project and the fact that the Southern Regional Council was the major source of funding these voter, the SNCC projects, that they wanted, Also the NAACP was asking for money and then CORE came in and they were asking for money so that for purposes of setting up a central agency for funds, everybody was working together, to fund, that COFO was set up as a sort of involved staff. It was a coordination of staff people in the state. But at the same time that people began--

(interruption)

(Samstein) So let me just go back to the fact that when Bob came to Mississippi in summer of ~~1960~~ '60, then I think he was away for a long period of time and then came back in '61. He travelled around and made contacts, . . . in the delta, Aaron Henry in . . . and so on. My understanding is that there was apparently discussion about where to begin voting drive. I guess out of discussion in the delta with ^{A. L. [P. 100]} Hamsey (?) primarily, the decision was arrived at that to start in McComb. . . . was president of the NAACP suggested that he come in there so Bob moved down there and you had that whole McComb period which involved voting, which then began to involve

some of the younger people who were excited by the whole sit-in movement that started going down and the freedom rides came in on top of that and made McComb literally a powder keg. There were some real very violent situations that developed. Staff people got thrown in jail and so on. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Bob got beaten up in Liberty which was a rural county one county over from McComb where he started going in the late summer ~~at~~ to begin to develop there. Then during the fall they spent about forty days in jail.

(Anne) Forty consecutive days?

(Samstein) Yes. You had beginnings of a staff. What happened was one thing that was clear was that there were a lot of young people that were just willing to, wanted to, were anxious, waiting to do something about Mississippi. When Bob and them began to develop a grouping of young people who became SNCC staff people. Sometime near the end of '61 the decision was made to move up into the delta. Well they would move into Jackson and up into the delta and so on and begin sometime in '62 a couple people started a project in Greenwood and so on.

But during this whole phase, the best way to understand it is primarily the development of a staff of people, a cadre, a grouping of young people who were willing to go, to risk everything including death, to work in that state, which is what you had to risk if you're going to work. That was a very real and daily possibility. Then you had a staff working to try to get some people in different communities to go down to the courthouse. So

that you can build up a growing involvement or interest among local people in the vote and try to do something that the staff had to buffer against the fear and the terror which community people felt in terms of the courthouse. So you were trying to get more and more people to overcome that fear and make that trip down to the courthouse which at that time, the courthouse represented the whole society, the whole Mississippi society and anybody who could get through that was making a major leap in their lives. That was the main thing you can work on was getting a few people to break through the fear to go down to the courthouse and the staff was working at that and begin to develop the proof and the documentation. I mean the Justice Department was scribbling notes during this whole period. They were building up documentation. That's primarily what SNCC did during those two or three years was build up documentation for the Justice Department. Eventually they filed a big suit based on all that happened, all that SNCC activity. But meanwhile you were growing staff that was ~~you~~ growing more and more experienced, ~~more~~ contacts were being made and so on. The people who were ~~activity~~ actively working fulltime were just mainly staff people. The most you can do in terms of the community was get some people to break through and go down to the courthouse. At time for any community person to become a leader, in a sense, was also to become a target and that's what happened in Liberty when Herb Lee and a couple other people really became not only going down to the courthouse themselves but becoming organizers. There's one thing to leave your home and go to the courthouse, it's another

thing to become an active force in the community so that whites sense that you're a key person and once they sense that you're a target and Herbert Lee was killed because he was becoming a focal person. So that the organizers were not only staff people but there were community people who were also organizers.

You have to see it in terms of what any person had to face if he was going to come, not only the first step to go to the courthouse himself, the second step to become an active organizer, a guy who tries to mobilize other people which is a two-phased thing, two different stages for most people. That second step, to get people into that second phase was a catastrophic kind of thing because they became such targets and Medgar got killed because of the role he was playing and the way he was singled out as the moving force behind the Jackson thing. So the tendency is to knock off the moving force.

(Anne) Like the labor organizer in the '30's.

(Samstein) Yes, right, exactly. For the community people, by living in the community were vulnerable to immense more pressures than the fluid staff person who could live on nothing, who didn't have a family and so on. Not to say that they didn't, that the staff people weren't targets too. Bob was beaten ... machine gun and other guys and so on but the point was in terms of building a community organization. You don't have a community organization until you develop community leadership, community people who

not only respond to what staff urges or suggests or proposes but who take the initiative and begin to shape and try to build an organization themselves.

This initial phase is seen mainly in terms of the building ~~mix~~ up of staff rather than of a community grouping. In this context COFO is predominantly a group of staff people, some who are paid by CORE, some who are paid by SNCC, but ;in terms of working the difference between CORE guys and SNCC guys was between a red shirt and a blue shirt. It didn't matter what shirt you were wearing, it didn't matter what national office paid you, you were all very closely-knit group of people. They were the same people. One happened to be a CORE guy and one happened to be a SNCC guy. That's what COFO was.

Before I came there was a sense that you were trying to develop COFO into, that COFO could also be used as the umbrella for a community organization; that it ~~would~~ become , that you take COFO, you give it over that it's the name that you call whatever you build once you start building it so the idea is as soon as you build COFO you try to build it not into a staff thing but into a community thing. And there's a lot of confusion during this whole period in terms of people who view it from the outside about what is COFO. All during the spring--

(interruption)

People were always asking what COFO is and COFO is a changing thing. It's partly what COFO was, it partly what COFO is at any particular moment which is always a changing thing and it's partly what COFO is projected to

become, what people are working to build. Initially it was mostly, because the only people who were doing anything in terms of organizing were staff people for the reason that I tried to point out--what happened to a community person who became an organizer--COFO was primarily this grouping of staff people, CORE and SNCC, Dr. Henry and Amsy Moore (?) were NAACP of course, were considered also staff even though they lived in the community and had ~~gone to work~~ jobs and worked. They were very, very active.. did as much as any staff person.

People felt that as soon as we can build anything nobody knew how long it would take or where it could be but as soon as we build that it could become COFO. We built COFO into the community groupings. That's where you try to go.

Then in this context that that Greenville meeting should be discussed. That meeting was attended by all staff people. ~~COFO~~ COFO, even then, was still staff people with a few exceptions. Mrs. Hamer was at that Greenville meeting. In a sense she was the first person, not the first person, Dr. Henry was also there, who was beginning to emerge as not only people going to the courthouse but as active organizers and planners and decision-makers. Those people, I want to emphasize again, those people, that decision to do that made them targets. They got on the lists and that's not an abstraction that was very real. Mrs. Hamer and Dr. Henry and Medgar and people like that, ..., Amsy, were all on lists. They become targets. But you were beginning to get a few. I don't know how you date that but Rev. Smith in Jackson

and Evers in Jackson, those two people in Jackson; Amsy in Cleveland; Dr. Henry in Clarksdale; C. C. Bryant in McComb; Mrs. Hamer in ^{Ruler} Ruralville (?). You were getting a few people now who were beginning to become organizers and planners. They were small groups still but--

But then, when you meet in Greenville, you're talking about, you're looking ahead to the building up of a whole statewide organization with local groups and building up to a state group which is all community people and which the staff just has the servicing relationship. But that's not what COFO is yet, in the fall of '64. That's what people would like to see. ~~ix~~ It's within that context of COFO as a community organization that you're discussing what the ~~ppx~~ political effort of COFO is going to be. Also, is COFO going to be not only the community organization, but also is it going to run COFO candidates, and be everything? There were other things that people were talking about in terms of programming beside the political activity. People were also talking about by the fall of '63 they were talking about community centers; they were talking about federal programs. So COFO would also run these things. Political activity was not the only thing.

But you had one organization that did these things; one organization of Mississippi people that did it. That's what you were working toward. In terms of the political things, was it going to be COFO, was it going to be just separate committees everything there was a campaign, or what it going to be an independent political party?

I mean you suspect that in either case your COFO organization and your MFDP organization, even though they were... (interruption)

Whether you eventually call it a COFO political organization or whether it was a thing that you called the Freedom Democratic Party that the base was the same thing, was the same groupings of people; community organization. You didn't have two separate organizations at the base. It was the same base, except that you had separate structure, maybe the leadership was slightly different in terms of people in the MFDP as in terms of COFO. And COFO would handle, say, the non-political things and the MFDP would be the political structure for the state.

Anyway, I think what led us into this was trying to backtrack on some of the history and I was trying to indicate that the nature of the whole first two or three years in Mississippi where in reality, primarily there was the development of a young group of people, a group of staff people and efforts were made at community involvement but by and large the result of that effort, given the whole terror in the state, were getting groups of people here and there to go down to the courthouse and that was primarily what we were able to do during that whole phase.

Finally, when you moved, after the march on Washington, you began at that point, spread out and set up a statewide organization. At least in terms of the dispersement of staff. You had staff spread out in all parts of the congressional districts. The job now was to really begin the task of

creating a, not just a statewide staff network, but to build a statewide people thing, a people's organization which would be COFO or MFDP or something, and which would engage in all phases of activity. Now what the particular form the political part of that organization would take, nobody exactly knew as far as I understand and recall. Nobody ~~xxx~~ exactly knew that in the fall of '63.

And, different experiments were tried. In the fall of '63 it's important to remember that the Aaron Henry campaign was run as Committee to Elect Aaron Henry for Governor. That was what it was run. It was a committee of ~~/~~staff and a few of these community people who I mentioned before were already becoming organizers and planners like Dr. Henry and Amsy and Rev. Smith were then on that committee. So together they ~~worxxx~~ worked and ran this Freedom Vote for Governor campaign in the fall of '63.

During the fall and the spring people didn't look and wait in terms of building until the summer. People didn't say, we can't do anything we'll just wait until the summer comes before we build. No. People, most of the staff actually then had tried to build all during that winter and that spring without the students, without whatever help or relief that they would provide in terms of the political and police atmosphere. ~~/~~ They went ahead and built. So that's where you got Hattiesburg and the Freedom Days and that's how you got, during the spring of 1964, you had again political campaign along the lines of a freedom vote. That was the congressional primaries. Mrs. Hamer, Mrs. Gray ran for Senator, Mrs. Victoria Gray ran for Senator; Mrs. Hamer ran in the second congressional district. A guy named Reverend

Cameron ran from the fifth congressional district; he was from Hattiesburg. And, a guy, an elderly guy, I can't recall his name, ~~was~~ from Vicksburg ran in the third congressional district. Now, they filed and they got on the official ballot.

I'm sorry, We didn't run a freedom vote campaign. There was a lot of discussion about it. See, one of the problems and one of the tensions that existed in the staff was, some of the staff said the problem with the summer project, one of the problems with it, was that almost all our energies between now and the summer will have to go into this planning and organizing for it, and we don't see why we should take away from what needs to be done right here and now and all during this winter and spring in order to just plan for that summer project. That tension ran on because it was a tension for me too, because at points I had to work in both things at times. Sometimes working on the summer program and sometimes working on things that were happening in the state at the moment. This was tension that all the staff was having.

I just feel funny just talking into a tape, you know.

(Anne) I can imagine.

(Samstein) I like to just talk to somebody when I talk.

So that was a tension that. Some people found that they had that tension in terms of their own work because they were interested in both. Sometimes there was a tension because some staff people who didn't particularly like the whole summer project concept felt that it was taking away from the immediate

present operations. But any rate, the building went on during the winter and spring. Hattiesburg and the congressional races were the two key points during that, in terms of what was happening other than plans for the summer. As I see it the two key points were Hattiesburg--oh, there was also Greenwood; Hattiesburg, Canton (there was a big focus around Canton in March, February, March) January was Hattiesburg, Canton was February and March, and Greenwood also had a Freedom Day in March, and then the next thing was the congressional races.

(Anne) What do you mean by big ...? You just had some extra...?

(Samstein) Yes, you had some extra staff, right, for canvassing and mobilizing the community for Freedom Days. Canton's, the first Freedom Day had four hundred people waiting in line. I think it was February 29th.

(Anne) Did any of them get ~~accessed~~ registered?

(Samstein) I think seven got in. I think one passed.

You had those ongoing things in terms of trying to continue the building process.

(Anne) What was your part in this?

(Samstein) Well, I was, There's no way of really, I mean, it was just, You did a lot of things, you were involved in everything in a sense.

(Anne) ...anbody else...?

(Samstein) Yes. Except that, in terms of Jackson there was, that was center of the summer project thing was going on. Most, a lot of planning

so the people in Jackson were involved in that as well as some people were in addition to that also at various points got involved in what was going on at the moment. Practically everybody was involved in Hattiesburg from Jackson. We all went down to Hattiesburg at one point, and left one or two people in the office and then we all came back and they went to Hattiesburg. So everybody was involved in Hattiesburg.

See, there's no way of saying, We had the beginnings of bureaucracy compared to prior to the March on Washington in the sense that we had an office, we had a statewide phone, we sent out letters, we had typewriters. This was new in a sense in Mississippi. There was only field activity. There was no central operation. But we weren't so, we didn't work, we worked as people. ~~There~~ Nobody was the chief and we weren't functionalized and departmentalized. We all worked. You did what you were interested in. YOU talked you had meetings. Somebody went to Hattiesburg. Somebody took the phone. Somebody working on some of the things and so on. We had started to have something of a little bit of that but ~~it~~ there was always crossing over. Nobody ever stayed into a box. This is you box you work on this part of the summer project, or you work on that part of it. There was nobody to put nobody in boxes. It was fluidity. Fluidness was the situation and people worked in terms of their work. There's no way of diagramming the way people worked. You couldn't make a chart of any kind. You have to just get a hangar wire and twist it all around if you wanted to diagram. You know how people diagram structures or organizations?j They put boxes and, you know how they do that exactly? And then you hanging down here, administrative something and you can't do that

with this. It would just mean absolutely nothing. It would be totally false. If you could get a hanger and twist it in and out that would be more--

(Anne) You mean nobody ... had any position as such. ... like they are now?

(Samstein) Right. Nobody had, right. People just worked. I mean people moved in and out. Nobody. There was some tension between the field and the Jackson office because--and this has to be understood in terms of the previous period when there was no Jackson office--because there's a kind of subtle shading between coordination and what sometimes seems to be a command post. And people were unused to Jackson or any place as a command post and so there was that problem. People tried not to do that but there was still. I mean funds were allocated out of Jackson so that that creates problems. Then there were other things that Jackson did so that there was, that there develops that tension between people who are involved in the field and people in an office situation, who never can really understand the field situation and that, I mean the only way that situation can be tolerable is when the person in the office always gives way to the ~~judgment~~ judgment of the guy in the field which is reverse of the way most organizations or bureaucracies work. The guy in the field is totally subordinated to the guy in the office. So what we tried to do at least to some extent without any theories about it just because we happened to understand that a guy in the field if he says he needs a tire then you can't say, well, that's silly we have any money for a tire. I mean

he knows that his life hinges on that tire. You just don't know about these things and you just don't, you're not qualified to make the decision you see, which is the reverse of the way bureaucracies work. When the guy in the office knows the overall or the national picture and he's qualified to make decision and the field guy isn't well, in a sense we try to work in reverse. But even then ~~youxx~~ there was tension between because even though you try to make the situation as loose as possible the fact that you had an office now and you had phones and so on and you d dn't have that before. Also there was the tension that the office was where a lot of the summer project planning was going on and there ~~were~~ quite a number of ~~peax~~ people in the field that weren't happy. There was a lot of questioning and debate and discussion and disagreement over ~~sumex~~ the summer project among the staff. And, all of the staff that ~~disax~~ disagreed were in the field, not that all the field staff ~~disagxx ax~~ disagreed but all that did disagree were in the field. All the people who tended to be in the office situation tended to be pretty strong about the summer project.

(Anne) ?

(Samstein) Well, very--

(Anne) ... MFDP?

(Samstein) Yes. Very, very strongly in favor. Wherever you went they were very, very, The whole summer project thing was taken to a COFO meeting. I should just add that starting, you remember going back to saying you were trying to build a statewide community? You were trying to turn

COFO into a people's organization, and how you were working toward that? Well, the way, in addition to the Hattiesburg, Canton, Greenwood and those community activities as well as the congressional race, I overlooked one other very important way of trying to build that, that took place during the fall, winter and spring of '63-64, and that was the calling of what we called COFO conventions. Which was, the staff people in all the areas helped to bring together community people to a meeting in Jackson, ~~and so~~ So we held, there was a COFO meeting that decided to run Aaron Henry for governor and there was a meeting held October 6, a convention. People came from all over the state, from the north, south, east, west, all over the state to Jackson; about two hundred people. That was where Aaron Henry thing was decided.

Then there was another convention in December 15. There was another convention on I think February 9. There was another convention in March. And then the next convention was called the FDP and that's generally seen as the founding convention of the FDP, April 26.

But, you see, the precedent for the FDP founding convention were these COFO meetings. And I think that's very important and I shouldn't have overlooked it and I really want to emphasize it now. ~~so that~~

If you look at the March on Washington as a turning-point, COFO was a staff and now sets up a statewide network and really begin to dig in at the teeth at the idea of building a people, making COFO into a people's organization. That process ~~goes~~ goes on all during the fall, winter and spring and ~~the~~ ^{it is}

highlights are these ~~EH~~ COFO conventions that I just mentioned starting in a sense with the one in October which nominated Dr. Henry to run for governor, ~~and the next~~ and then leading up to the April 26 one which was finally an MFDP convention. Essentially the same people that you were bringing together for the previous COFO meetings.

(Anne) Would you ... describe how the convention was carried out? And what people...?

(Samstein) Yes. Well, let me just finish~~ing~~ that up so it has to be seen. I want to emphasize that whole building thing ~~xxx~~ in terms of Mississippi, the Mississippi people's organization was going on prior to the summer and maybe Bob will pour some different light on this but I mean I see the real emphasize^s turning from the staff and voting just getting people down to the courthouse, to the idea of building, to building something after the March on Washington. If you look at the period from summer to summer of '63-64 that the highlights to emphasize are the COFO convention which nominates Dr. Henry, the Freedom Vote for Governor, the Hattiesburg Freedom Day, the Canton Freedom Day, the Greenwood Freedom Day and then the Congressional races in the spring leading up to the primary on June 2. That this is part of the whole building process out of which MFD emerges.

Now, in terms of the meetings, the, I wasn't at the first one which nominated Dr. Henry so I don't know about that. Generally speaking, you know--

(Anne) What about the April 26th one?

(Samstein) Let's see now. I have to go back. Let's talk about the COFO

thing. Let's wait on that until we get to the general discussion of the convention and the Summer Project. An average of about two or three hundred people attended the meetings from all over the state. The December one discussed the constitution for COFO which was--the recommendations--were drawn up by two staff ~~apx~~ people. They were discussed at the Greenville staff meeting and a couple of staff people drew it up and it was presented at the December 15th meeting, COFO meeting.

The meeting was opened by Dr. Henry who was the president of the COFO and Dave Dennis, the two of them primarily ran the meeting.

(Anne) ... at the conference?

(Samstein) Yes, it was Dr. Henry.

(Anne) I didn't realize that you had a slate of officers.

(Samstein) Yes. Now, I don't know, They were already in existence when I got into the state. There wasn't any formal convention I think, like the one starting in October, a big formal convention that nominated. I think that goes back to earlier days. You got to think of it in terms of where the state was, The only people that were activitely going to put themselves ona letterhead, if you want to put it that way, as the officers of COFO were the staff and these half a dozen other community people that were really active-- or a dozen, in terms of the whole picture of the way things would go.

So, Dr. Henry and Dave, and then you had, like at the December one

we discussed the constitution which was as I said, the recommendations were drawn up by a couple of staff people. There was some very good discussion, heated discussion at various points about the role, the relationship between the staff and the people in COFO. There was some very spirited, you know, people got up on the floor and made talks and discussed it and there were some amendments passed and so forth. I can't remember what else was discussed at that December 15th meeting. I think there are some minutes, not very good ones. I remember the main bulk of the meeting was taken up with this discussion of the constitution.

The next meeting was February 9th and that was where the whole-- The reason we got into to this is you asked me about what do the people think of the Summer Project. That was the first statewide meeting that the Summer Project was brought out. Bob was there at that time and Dr. Henry and Dave and I guess essentially they ran that meeting. So, again you had people coming up and talking and stuff like that. I can't remember all the details to that meeting but, I mean people were very, very responsive. What you have to remember for the person in the community, the key question is the question of his isolation, that he has to live, he has persecutors all the time and here was an opportunity to get people down that would ~~see~~ see and try to understand and break some of that isolation.

I myself went to four or five communities where we, Vicksburg, we went to Vicksburg, to Batesville, made a half a dozen trips in February, for instance, in the state where we had community meetings and a group

of us went up and we talked about it. We had already done a little brochure very simply written about it.

(Anne) ...files on that?

(Samstein) I haven't the slightest idea. One way of gauging the response is the fact that--oh, I went to ^{Rural}Ruralville. One way of gauging response was the way people offered housing. One of the amazing things about the Summer Project was that thousands of Negro homes were open to people, white people. Now, you would think, a white person comes down into the communities but if you remember that going back to '63, that state was just , you know, there was no breakthrough at all ~~and~~ and people. I mean it wasn't any different in '63 than it was in '33 for ^{most}~~those~~ people and then suddenly boom this thing happened. I think that the degree of the way housing came in. Ruralville got...a list of fifty people. This means that you're willing to open up the possibility of your house being bombed or you being fired. You know, things like this. That's, I think, a fairly good indication of the kind of response there was. Ruralville got in fifty, Holmes County about ~~a~~ 60, Vicksburg, and all other places. Batesville got on the list of housing. All the other places started responding by, And I think that's the clearest ~~idea~~ indication. It's one thing for people to sympathize with the idea factors but a real indication that they wanted the Summer Project I think comes from the housing and that's the key that they really wanted it. They were willing to open up their housing and take

the risk that involved is an indication of how much they wanted the Summer Project.

Now in terms of the convention, getting into the ~~sum~~convention. So it was in this general context that you began to look ahead toward what the whole, something about what the whole political effort was. So, in that Greenville ~~meeting~~ meeting you talked about what kind of form the political activity would take. Then there began to have discussion afterwards about the political calendar. I think if you remember yesterday somebody asked Bob, I think Howie was the one that suggested that FDP was sort of handed down and Bob pointed out that in terms of the, that other institutions were the ones that set the time-tables. They didn't belong to the ~~xxx~~ people. The people had no access to this kind of information so somebody had to provide it. Then the question is, how would that work? Did they feel that it was their own or did they feel it was somebody else's?

We began to look at some of these questions about time-table and how you did that.

(Anne) Who did?

(Samstein) Some of us in Jackson. Began to look at some of the time-~~xxx~~ table, you know the Congressional primary in June, the Summer Project and the convention Challenge, the Democratic convention. Then there was the fall Congressional ~~xxxxxx~~ races and we weren't sure of what would be done. There were various people discussing how that would~~xxxx~~ work,

whether when you would run a Freedom Vote, whether you would run in the June primaries and put all your emphasis on primaries, or whether you would concentrate on the summer and then wait over the summer and make focus in the fall in terms of the general election.

I don't remember exactly where I first began to talk about the convention Challenge but I don't really think that's very important at this point. I know that, had discussions. You know, Bob left for a while and got married in December.

(Anne) This past year?

(Samstein) No, that was '63, December. He left after the Greenville meeting and was out of the state until January but there was some discussions at the Greenville meeting and a little bit afterwards. This whole question about the political time-table, all these things. It wasn't very clear. I remember I had some notes, I'm sure I've lost them since, but it wasn't very clear--I ~~wrote~~ wrote it on a napkin I think--~~for~~ to me and I was trying to find out just in terms of the discussions. And then I remember we had, Bob and I hooked up in Atlanta. Bob came back down for a SNCC meeting that was being held in Atlanta and I went over from Jackson.

(Anne) This was after he got married?

(Samstein) Yes.

(Anne) Where did he go to get married?

(Samstein) New York. I remember in Atlanta we had some discussion about it. I can't remember the discussions to be frank with you. I can't

remember. We did talk about finding out-- The first job that needed done was finding out how the regular Democratic party elected their delegation. We didn't know how they did that. The precincts and districts and the state meetings, that was, When we discussed that when we went back, Rochelle Horowitz did a paper on it. You can probably find that paper somewhere in the files. The immediate job was to find, it was like a mystery. It was really hidden. We were even sure we were going to find out. At that time, now it seems like anybody, you stop any person in Mississippi and in community and he could tell you about how the precinct and on up thing. But at that time it was a complete mystery and it's probably, if you think about your state and try to find out about, do you know how you Democratic delegation was elected?

(Anne) To the convention? ...explained...

(Samstein) You do? How are they elected?

(Anne) I haven't even thought about it since I was in high school. I couldn't tell you. Probably different. Is it different every time?

(Samstein) Well, it's different in different states but I would say that 99 1/2 % of any college people ... average citizen doesn't know how their delegation to the convention was elected.

(anne) It's true that ^{through} ~~through~~ the Young Democrats, isn't it?was almost elected. I think probably unless you're complete involved in it it's not common knowledge.

(Samstein) It's completely, nobody, I mean I had an experience which I thought was very important when I met with a group of whites in the spring

of '64 in Jackson. They were predominantly a Jewish ~~group~~ group of people but some of them, but all of them were extremely wealthy. Some of them had some prominence and I talked about the Democratic Party and they, and about the whole party structure because at the same time that the delegation was being elected the party structure was being elected, the executive committees and the ~~chairmen~~ chairmen of the party who are very key in terms of the whole system, actual system of government, and they didn't know. These were so-called prominent people. They didn't know. That gives you an indication.

We were up in the dark at that time. This was early January. Rochelle Horowitz started researching it and I don't remember where she went but she went to a couple of sources and we found some information in Bill Higg's political handbook. It took a while to really understand it. I don't know, now it seems--but it was very complicated--at least it seems that way and it took a long while to understand it. Precincts, I think they would elect from one to six delegates and then you have the county convention and they would elect two times the number of ~~the~~ delegates to the house and then these county delegates would meet twice. This was very hard to understand that they would meet twice. Sometimes you got mixed up and you said well there's precinct meeting, they would elect district and the district elect the state, no. You had a precinct and these precinct delegates got together and had a county convention and the county convention

met twice. First they met, all the county delegates of a district met and then all the county delegates from the whole state met together and they elected a certain number at the districts level and then they elected the rest ~~xx~~ at the state level. This was pretty complicated stuff and it took a while to figure it out.

I don't think there should be too much emphasis on the actual name FDP. I don't think that's important because in a sense you have FDP already in the fall in that COFO convention. That's FDP. The fact that somebody ~~slp~~ slapped four little words on to in in April is just a relatively unimportant thing I think. As I pointed out at the Greenville meeting we ~~jax~~ discussed how would that form take; would it be independent, would it be, you know, or would it just be different committees. It turned out that it was, it turned out to be an independent thing the Freedom Democratic Party, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. I guess the ~~feelin~~ feeling was that this would provide more leverage in terms of the Democratic Party, in terms of the National Democratic Party. You would have more leverage in terms of the whole effort to knock out the regular Democrats and win recognition for us if it had Democratic party in it. I guess that was one of the key factors in determining the use of that name.

It was a question of leverage. The reality of the grouping in Mississippi was the same whatever you called it, COFO, MFDP, Committee--you could have called it COFO Delegation to the Democratic Party, or Mississippi Freedom Delegation, or something you see. ~~The point~~ But, from the point

of view of leverage it seemed that if you had Democratic Party and then you added Freedom was, provided the most leverage. That's eventually what it was called.

That just happened. It just sort of evolved. I can't make dates or names, it just ~~happex~~ happened I think. Just like, I mean the whole idea that of to be separate from COFO. I mean that there would be COFO and MFDP. Literally it would be the same people coming together but one day they came together as COFO and the next week ~~thaxxx~~ they came together as MFDP and in fact, they had some of the same offices. Dr. Henry had initially was chairman of the executive committee and then chairman of the delegation. He was also president of COFO. It was Movement people.

So they had the Challenge. You worked out what the facts were about the Challenge.

There was a lot of questions about the time-table because we didn't find out when the regular party was going to hold its precinct meetings and county meetings and so on. I don't remember when we found out. I guess about a month, I can't remember now when we found out. We didn't know certainly in February. We were guessing. We assumed it would be in late April. Then there was the whole question of whether the Freedom district precinct meetings should be ~~haxx~~ held before or after. I remember we were thinking of it coming in around April. We were worried about whether there would be enough time to build and develop around it.

And then there was the whole problem of getting this whole complicated thing out. How do you get that out so people can feel like it's theirs and they know how to use it and so on. So there were a lot of discussions with the staff about it in February, already in January. You know I said we came back in January when Rochelle did that research in early January and finally a paper was put together. There was a staff meeting in Hattiesburg right before, about four or five days before, a statewide staff meeting four or five days before the Freedom Day on January 22. At that staff meeting the Challenge was discussed. Then there were some more staff meetings and the Challenge was discussed. Because it was very important that the staff thoroughly understood the Challenge so that they could, you know, they were critical toward it at that point. They were still, absolutely critical even though the Challenge was also discussed at the February 9th convention and people were encouraged to go back and talk about it and begin to organize for it.

I had the sense now, we thought then that we expected the precinct meeting to be held sooner than they were finally held. I don't remember exactly when we learned when they would be held. I don't know if that's all too important. I think that the, I mean throughout the spring, First of all Donna drew up a brochure. Have you seen the brochure on the Democratic convention? She drew up a very nice brochure which was distributed throughout the state. With a picture. It said something like this; there will be a big meeting of delegates from all over the country and so on

and so forth and described the basic organizing piece for that whole Challenge.

All during the spring that material was given out and there were discussions at the staff meetings and at COFO meetings and so on. The April 26th meeting was called and there was ^{it} thoroughly ~~discuss~~ discussed. And there you broke down, you actually broke down--it was partly a workshop but also partly a convention. Because you broke down into precinct meetings. First people broke down into counties and the counties broke down to precincts and then the precincts elected people ^{to} ~~for~~ the county, which got together and they elected delegates who got together in districts and then state. What they did at that time is they didn't elect, you know, I mean they went through the ~~for~~ election but what they did elect at that time was a temporary executive committee which is elected. You know you have precinct meetings and county conventions and then all the delegates from the counties get together on a district-wide basis and they ~~selected~~ three people and the three people from the five districts make up a fifteen-man executive committee. So the first Freedom Democratic Party executive committee was elected at that April 26th meeting.

So that body began to meet and make some decisions about the whole Challenge.

And then, people started working. I don't know, at some point people found out about, heard that the regular party was going to have its precincts on June 16th and people started working and it varied what the emphasis was in the state. Like ^{Micki} ~~Micki~~ Schwerner put a lot of emphasis--

(Anne) Who?

(Samstein) Micki Schwerner was working in Meridian. He put a lot of emphasis on getting people he was building and working with the Chaney and they were building precinct organizations. These precincts started holding workshops and that was the thing that was

End of Tape

MENDY SAMSTEIN

Interviewed by Anne Romaine
Part III

(Samstein) So, you have to see- Just revieweing, you had in January you began to understand how that thing was working. You had discussions with the ~~st~~ aff, you had discussions at the ~~XX~~ COFO meeting. You had a brochure done and then you had work being ~~down~~ done on a local level in the community. And that varied from community to community. As I was saying like Micki put a lot of importance and emphasis on it and Chaney and they -- I mean that was the basis for building a real organization in Meridian, trying to build precinct organizations.

So they would hold workshops. We started to do this in our own staff meetings in order to get to understand it ourselves. We'd have a workshops and we play act and we'd role play, rather. Then the staff started doing it in little precinct, or city-wide meetings they held. Micki's emphasis was ~~inter~~ms of going down to the regular, to challenge the regulars, to get people from each precinct to go down when the regular precinct meeting was held on June 16th, you see. He was not only working in Meridian at that time, he was working a five-county area, Philadelphia and Jasper County, Newton County and two or three others. While he didn't have those whole counties organized in each one he had a precinct or two precincts where he had people... So he was working that way.

Other places were placing the emphasis on holding Freedom precinct meetings, our own meetings. Some places because-- I mean there was just too much fear ~~of~~ about what would happen if you went down to the regular

One.

Jackson put a lot of ~~emph~~ emphasis on the regular one. The whole city Negro community was divided up into precincts and all the Jackson staff would help and the office staff and so on. And there were regular presinct meetings and workshops and so on. And this was going on in various parts of the state with varying degree of emphasis. ~~xThex~~ Some staff put a lot of emphasis on it, some a little less. Some put emphasis on going down to the regular ~~me~~ eting, some put emphasis on the Freedom thing.

There was a real amount of excitement. I know in Jackson there was a tremendous amount of excitement about people really grasped the whole and were really excited about it.

So when you had the April 26th convention there-- a lot of people had an idea already about what it was all about. But at any rate there was further discussion. In a sense that whole convention was something of a practice because you broke down into precincts and you had little discussions of precincts and then you got the county meetings and district meetings which elected that temporary executive committee.

Then people who were at that went back and they added to the ~~group~~ group of people, to the staff people. Sometimes the community people really knew their program better than the staff people. There were various degrees of interest among the staff. But then after that April 26th people had the MFDP and they had the idea that they were going to Atlantic City and they were going to elect delegates and it was really becoming a little real and they went back and they started organizing those precincts in the city or

or county, holding workshops and so on.

Then we had a lot of discussions see, because Oxford, the Oxford training session fell out on June 16th so there was the whole problem of working out who would go up to Oxford to train all these hundred and hundreds of volunteers coming down and who would stay. It was worked out. We worked out something where some people left on the 9th, went to Atlanta for a meeting and then went on to Oxford. Some people waited 'till the 16th when the precinct meetings were already over because-- The actual Oxford thing didn't start 'till the 14th and around to the 28th. So some people came up on the 16th and 17th, like Micki, came up on the 16th because he wanted to stay in Meridian and then he went back on the 21st.

So then, on the 16th you had the real thing, you had the regular meetings. And there's a document on that. You know about the document?

(Anne) No.

(Samstein) Well, there's a document on that which is documentation. It's about a 10-page summary and there's all reports from all the areas. There were a lot of lawyers and so ~~and~~ on and people trying to collate all that information in Jackson, were trying to collate it from around the state and put it together ~~for~~ to show that-- to show what happened when Negroes tried to go down to participate in the regular process.

There was no single uniform pattern. It varied from place to place. So you have to look at that report. It would give you a whole different--

Sometimes they locked people out. Sometimes Negroes came and they outnumbered the whites and so the chairman postponed the meeting until they got whites to come in. One place in Jackson they actually elected a Negro delegate. That was the only place in the state. But then in other places they got there and didn't find anybody which means that they weren't even bothering to have a meeting. It was just rigged. Somebody would appoint a guy and there was two or three guys knew about it so why should they get together at the firehouse for the meeting. They just talked to each other and said, well you go along to the convention... this year, or you go on Harry.

There were all kinds of ruses and tricks and so on. Some got into the meeting and then they couldn't make any motions or if they made any motions they were-- Because everybody had a resolution to support the regular Democratic party and everywhere it was defeated where they-- Some places they couldn't get it onto the floor, some where they did get on it was defeated. But there's this report. You should read that.

I think it was not until the summer that you had-- I don't remember what the dates were. The regular party had its county conventions but since nobody had been elected as precinct delegates we were already into the phase of the need to have our own Freedom Democratic precinct, county, district and state meetings because we were already ex-- Well, we were ~~excluded~~ excluded in registration in a sense. There was some argument that we shouldn't even ~~bother going~~ bother going down to the regular thing because only 7.2, the few percentage of Negroes that had been registered were eligible to go down.

The real exclusion came in the fact that Negroes couldn't vote. Now people knew that when you went down there that if a few groups of Negroes here and there went down they would be likely to be excluded too, which was a double kind of exclusion. First you don't let people register and then you don't let the few people who are registered even in when they come down. But other people thought it was an important thing that people do go down and confront that whole situation. People had a lot of fun play-acting. You know they would come in-- You know the people would play-act and somebody, ~~the~~ ~~guy~~ would take the guy at the door and somebody would take the Freedom delegation and they would (knock, knock)/ "Come in." "What are you doing here?" and So on. "Get out of here!" And they would role play this whole thing. So some people felt it was important to do that.

At any rate after the June 16th then you are already in the phase of building our own convention, the Freedom conventions. We were in that phase. I don't remember the exact dates of them. They were in July. You know you had the district-- And I guess they varied. I think they varied. They ran staggered depending on the area. And I think the summer people helped a lot in organizing them.

So you had your precinct and you had your county. Sometimes you had a county meeting and it broke down into precincts. You had one county meeting and people broke down in that meeting into precincts. Sometimes-- Like, I was in McComb and there we had three different precinct meetings and then we met a week later in a county meeting and then the county meeting

went up to Jackson and had a district meeting. Then I think it was on August 6th or so that you had the state meeting.

(Anne) I can probably get that from someone else.

(Samstein) Yes. Then they went on-- They elected part of it at the district meeting, part at the state and that was the 68 people that were elected to go to Atlantic City.

(Anne) Now I'd like to know a little bit about--

(Samstein) Let me just add one thing. There a whole-- I'm emphasizing the building thing because that's what's most important. I think that and that's why I'm taking so much time because I think that this is the real importance of that whole Challenge. The other ~~stuff~~ stuff-- Of course, there was simultaneously ~~going on~~ going on from January while we were searching to find out how the Democratic party processes worked or the structure worked there was another phase that was going on simultaneously from that point on, which was the support process. Because we went into that convention with six or seven months of work behind it. Like the first indication that we could get support for this even before it had really gotten off the ground in Jackson, the CDC in California. Do you know about that? The California Democratic Council it's called, which is the liberal wing of the Democratic part in California. Their convention, or caucus voted to seat the Freedom delegation from Mississippi which they heard was being formed. They voted to seat. They passed a resolution urging the seating and that should be in the file, that resolution. That was the first indication of support. Then ~~two~~ there was talk about setting up an office in Washington and Miss Baker and

that's where Walter went up to work and Frank Smith. So they were working all during the spring, contacting Congressmen and going to conventions and all that stuff. That's an important part. That whole building up, the whole coalition that supported the whole political support that did, was effective at the convention.

But I think that the emphasis has to be the whole building of a state political organization in the state, that whole push that goes on up and is continuing on to this summer. It's two years now since the March on Washington, just around two years now. So I think that the whole support thing--and I don't know it's history too well. Bob knows that better. Bob did a lot of-- Bob was in and out of the state, did a lot of contacts. He contacted Rowe and he spoke to Rowe who agreed-- And that was a good ~~break~~ breakthrough because he was on the credentials committee. He agreed, no, he was on some other committee and he agreed that he would take the case and he would transfer himself on to the credentials committee. I think that came in March or April and that was an important breakthrough.

(Anne) At Bob's request?

(samstein) I don't know exactly how that came about.

(Anne) How did you get involved with the California delegation?

(Samstein) Okay, well, when we got up there we, all the people were called together. I don't remember how many people were assigned different things to do. Some group was asked to help in the lobbying and I got assigned

to California. It was that simple.

I talked to Frank and he had done some work--I worked a little with him too--he had done some work with California. He had been out there at the state convention when they passed the resolution. Five guys came up from the summer and some of them gave some very moving speeches about Mississippi.

(Anne) Was Mary...one of them?

(Samstein) Is this America?

(Anne) I say, was Mary...one of them?

(Samstein) I can't remember their names. Anyway they were very moving and the state convention passed a resolution unanimously that the state delegation, the California state delegation, which ~~it~~ was in the process of electing, it ~~mandated~~ mandated it to support the Freedom Democratic Party. You couldn't get anything stronger. The very convention was electing, supposedly, course it was pretty managed I'm sure and they were mostly Pat Brown's appointees. But the state convention--

(Anne) Pat Brown?

(Samstein) Yes, the governor. --passed a resolution mandating the supporting the seating of the Freedom Democratic Party and the unseating of the regular party.

(Anne) How would you interpret this?

(Samstein) Well, the issue was pretty concrete. I mean the people by this time were beginning to feel something about Mississippi.

(Anne) I mean it was pretty much of a moral thing--

(Samstein) Well, they were moved. Five young Californians had gone who had been in Mississippi, came up and just described what was there and they said to the convention, Is this America? At that point everybody said, unanimously, ~~max~~ And these kids were sincere and they were just, I mean what the hell is going on, is what they were saying. Is this incredible this thing in Mississippi, is this incredible thing part of the America that we're supposed to believe in? Democracy, freedom, justice? I have to hid in the closet when the mailman comes because, that whole thing, you know-- So they supported.

I don't know too much about it. They got Michigan came in early at the state convention. Passed a resolution. Massachusetts. I think they got-- Did Walter talk about this?

(Anne) Yes. He talked about the others but not particularly about California.

(Samstein) So I was supposed to work primarily with the people on the credentials committee and specifically with the two, a man and a woman. And I was supposed to work with the woman because the man was given up for hopeless. I don't want to go on to the whole political stuff. This guy was an appointee of-- the man was-- M I can even remember. He was an appointee of Unra I guess, who was actually a factional opponent-- he and ~~Byron Brown~~ Brown and there was also Salinger and I don't know how all these things got--somebody was trying to explain to me--who was doing what to who and who was friendly with who and you know.

(Anne) Who tried to explain it to you?

(Samstein) Well, various people. Frank and so on and some of the politicians I spent some time with. Some of the delegates, they were state assemblymen.

(Anne) This is really important to you. Maybe Frank Smith or someone else could help.

(samstein) Yes, much better than I can.

(Anne) You seem to be very concerned about the ... history of it that you took part in. You ought to write a book ~~yourself~~ yourself. It's very moving the way you ...

(Samstein) I do want to talk a little about the California thing because the woman's name was Mrs. Vera Canson (?) and she was from Sacramento and her husband was president of the NAACP in Sacramento. ~~Santha~~ People referred to her as a Pat Brown favorite in terms of Negroes. She was part of the upper crust Negro community. Her husband was president of the NAACP. There was very strong rumors that her husband was in line for a Federal judgeship which is very important to consider now because what happened was I called up and Sunday morning--I guess I called her Saturday night or Sunday morning of the convention. You know we got there Friday, the hearing was on Saturday ~~night or Sunday morning~~ and the credential committee hearing, the open one was ~~one~~ Saturday and the first executive committee was on Sunday. So I saw her, I got in touch with her I guess Sunday morning and set up to meet with her and I hadn't ever done any lobbying before but you just call up and you make an appointment and you say, "I'm from the Freedom Democratic Party and I'd like to bring

some people over to talke to you." So I got Mrs. Hamer and Mrs. Devine, two of the most moving people, and the three of us went over and we talked to Mrs. Canson (?) at breakfast. And I just sat there and Mrs. Hamer and Mrs. Devine did all the talking. The woman was really-- ~~there~~ she didn't have any question about what is right or wrong, she knew it was right. She was really moved by Mrs. Hamer and Mrs. Devine. ~~now~~

Now, waht we were asking for her to do was to come to a luncheon that Sunday--did we see her Saturday? I'm sorry we saw her Saturday morning. I called her Friday night and got her Saturday. We saw her Saturday ~~oxxx~~ morning before the hearing. Because at the hearing she was very responsive because I passed her ~~sthouk~~ a couple of notes about questions she could raise to Collins and she raised one of them. She asked Collins whether he was a Klan member and so on and so forth.

(Anne) Who is Collins?

(Samstein) He was the-- He defended the Freedom Democratic Party -- I mean the regular Democratic party. He was the guy who defended that. I guess he was chairman of the delegation or something. I don't remember what his first name was. But you can get all that stuff is in the clippings and newspapers and so on, all these details.

So she was very responsive. During the convention I passed a couple notes and she used them to ask questions of Collins. A lot of people were passing notes to people that they were lobbying with so they could get up and ask questions and it was a good period when a lot of embarrassing questions.

Because these guys were such-- Obviously ~~thex~~ they were clear for what they were and you had that whole amazing experience that Saturday which was like, it was like the last judgment, that's the way I felt. You know, you've been in Mississippi and you've been there and they're the law in Mississippi. And suddenly they were in a bigger tribunal and you had this amazing sense where they couldn't come out and just beat you over the head. In fact, they were quite clearly on the defensive. It was really you had. You ~~were~~ were proud and you feel great and it really was good. It was -- Finally these very evil people were being brought out into the light and it was like, you were in this darkness with this whole situation and then suddenly out in the light and these guys were suddenly having to answer before the bar of justice for all their evil crimes. And that's the sense that I had and I think that a lot of the Mississippians had, probably even stronger than I did.

For the first time they saw Mississippians on the defensive. / ^{I mean, "}There's no question that ~~segregation~~ segregation is right, and all that, " and then suddenly, they're having to cover up and they had to deny that they were members of the Klan and even deny they were members of the White Citizens Council and this was a tremendous kind of experience that everybody could see them.

So she was very responsive. Then I met-- You know the basic strategy, to try to get the minority report and then to get enough state delegations to support a role call so that each-- I mean Michigan would have to get up in front of the whole television cameras and say "Michigan state votes for" . I

couldn't be a voice, a hand, aye and nay, you know because that doesn't matter. Whatever the chairman wants to do, it could be all nays for seating the ~~dem~~ regular Democratic party and he could say the ayes have it. There's no ~~just~~ justice in that. . .

Not only did we need a ~~fix~~ floor fight to get the issue out into the whole country, but nwe needed to get a role call. So the first phase of the fight was to get a minority report. We weren't every going to get a majority report. Between the combination of moral and political strength that we had I think it was pretty-- You know the fact that we had between 10 and at some ~~points~~ points we even had as high as 16 or 18 people who were actually readyht to support us, it's a pretty clear reflection of our general political and moral strength in the county was, or at least at that convention. It's funny how these things have a way of balancing themselves out. Almost-- What we had, we had the National Council of Churches. We had the Negro vote and we had the liberals and Negroes, that whole kind of groupings we had. At the hearing King and Farmer and Wilkins talked... support and the National Council. And Joe Rowe was the head of the ADA. So you had that kind of support. But of course, you were fighting the President.

And theree was a big thing--Bob can talk about this--there was a big questions and Bob raised this afterwards, about, between Rowe and us. Because Rowe wanted to hide (?). Did Bob talk about this? Did Walter talk about this?

(Anne) Waskow did.

(Samstein) Rowe wanted to hide the role of the President. The whole way the press projects it and the way its interpreted is that here in ~~the~~ this credentials committee ~~sitting~~ sitting, this august body deliberating the legal points of this Challenge. Well, this is nonsense. It was a pure power thing. It was a pure political thing. And nothing was happening in that credentials committee. Everything was happening outside of it and it was mainly a question of whether we could hold our support and the specific number of people that that support represented both nationally ~~and~~ in the smaller convention, in the sense of the convention, the 5000 at the convention and then-- I think the proportions were always the same, around 15% in the country in the convention, in terms of people ready to buck the President and stay with us. I mean if the President had let the reins go. If it had been a free convention and uncontrolled convention then there's no question that we would have swept it. But given the number of people that were ready to buck the President, in terms of that convention we, our 15 people in the credentials committee out of a 106 was pretty reflective.

So our job was to hold them through moral and political pressure. And we used both. I mean when Mrs. Hamer and Mrs. Devine talked to Mrs. Canson that was moral pressure. Now the other hand was that the President was using everything he could use. So Humphrey flew in, set up a suite and literally-- I had the feeling that every time one of us spoke to a delegate he would follow in right behind with some kind of armtwisting and some kind of muscle tactics. So that Mrs. Canson was ~~and~~ under tremendous tension. She

was being torn apart. Because on one hand there was Mrs. Devine and Mrs. Hamer and ~~much~~ us talking to her. On the other hand she was being threatened with her husband losing that judgeship.

See little example here was going on all over cause that was Humphrey's job. To destroy our coalition in the broadest sense which he finally did when they muscled ~~under~~ under King and they muscled under-- Well, they had no trouble muscling under Wilkins. He supported the Freedom Democratic Party initially with-- He never wanted to do it. He had no choice. He was force in his own political base, he was forced to do it.

(Anne) Why do you think he didn't want to? Because of his traditional standing with the administration?

(Samstein) Right. He told Bob was back in February that, not to do this whole thing. That it would embarrass the President.

The issue was just too great. Here was a group of M-- I mean how could the head of the NAACP not support it, you see. You just couldn't ^{he} fight the issue. ~~You~~ ^{He had to} couldn't really openly--/support it. He finally couldn't fight it. He had to come out in the open and support it. . .he wasn't going to really look pretty bad.

The church was very active. Bruce Hanson and Art Thomas were on' the phones calling around the county. It was great. They were working all night calling around the county getting people to pour telegrams into weak delegates, weak members of the credentials committee here and there.

(Anne) Where can I contact both of them?

(Samstein) Well, Art's based in Mississippi and I'll give you a number

where-- He has a secretary in New York. I'll give you his number. And Bruce is based, I think, in New York. They were both active and you ought to talk to--

King was working very late into the night using all his influence. He got up on the boardwalk and he said "Seat the Freedom Democratic Party, Seat the Freedom Democratic Party". And in between those things he would make ...

So we had King and we had the church and we had, us we were all out there working and talking and just-- Our presence there was being felt. We were all out there. And a lot of people said, who are these political amateurs? The SNCC staff and the delegates just did a marvelous job of-- They weren't no political lobbyists, they were no professionals. They just went and buttonholed the guy... off the shoulders and just said, Look, you know what our situation is down there, you know this is right, how are you going to vote? This was effective, I think.

We held together-- I don't know the numbers. It kept shifting. There was all kinds of politics around that which, I don't know if Arthur talks about it, with Diggs and his role and it shifts from time to time. Edith Greene came in with ~~xxx~~ a handful one night I understand and Diggs tried to grab the names she had, and "I got four more!" she said and Diggs tried to grab the names out of her hand.

(Anne) Physically?

(Samstein) Yes. But by this time he was mistrusted and rightfully so. He'd turn over the names to Humphrey and Humphrey'd go to work on them.

That kind of thing.

(Anne) Scab.

(Samstein) Well, I don't know too much about that. Diggs eventually as I understand didn't--

(Anne) Didn't what?

(Samstein) Eventually left the party in the lurch. There was some claim that he was working on the administration's side from the very beginning, but I don't know too much about that. I'm not sure about that.

All I know is that we held the eleven together, or at least more than eleven and as long as we held that eleven there was going to be no decision from that credentials committee because under no conditions in the world was the President going to allow a floor fight. He would rather change the rules of the convention. If you needed eleven and we had twelve, he would raise it to thirteen, just arbitrarily. Or if we had sixteen he would raise it to seventeen. He just wasn't going to have a floor fight. That's all there was to it.

(Anne) What a man.

(Samstein) So that the whole issue with Rowe was that the people should know what's actually ~~happ~~ happening. It's very important that people understand what's happening. That we're fighting Johnson and not some vague uncertainty that the delegates have about the legality of this. But Rowe didn't want to do that.

(Anne) He didn't?

(Samstein) No.

(Anne) He felt that it was necessary but yet he didn't want to--

(Samstein) Well, he wasn't sure. He felt that it might be politically-- I guess he argued tactically it was a bad thing to do because then you antagonize the President even more. But I think Bob's feeling was--and my feeling certainly is--that you couldn't have him more antagonistic than he was, not in a million years. He was about as antagonistic as he could possibly be.

I began to wonder about Mrs. Canson. She was very good Saturday, but Sunday I started worrying about her because-- Saturday night what happened, our strategy was to get-- Going back to Saturday, we had the hearing. We obviously made a ~~xx~~ tremendous impact on the country, on the credentials committee and so on. Now the job was to get eleven people that would support a minority report, that would buck the President. And that was the major task because people-- The very guy who sponsored the resolution in California urging, was also a delegate. The guy whose name was on the resolution ... to support the Freedom Democratic Party was also a delegate. His name was-- He's a prominent guy now in some of these factions. His name was Jerry something, Walden, Waldham, something like that. And he had sponsored the resolution but now that he was in the convention, when I went to speak to him he ~~was~~ said, look that's one thing in California, we're here now and I'm not going to buck the President for this little thing you got. This is too important. Do you expect me to go against the wishes of my President? and the head of my party and put your issue above that? And then the whole ~~Goldwater~~ Goldwater thing was ~~chaos~~

chasing you around every once in a while. But that was what he said; I can't put this thing above my President and my party.

Our strategy was to get that eleven and to hold it. Saturday night after the credentials committee hearing, people went back to the hearing. The hearing was still going on. They were hearing Hawaii, Oregon also... So people went back, a group went back. Waskow was one of them, Bob a few others. I eventually came over there to try Saturday night to get people to sign a piece of paper that was going up saying-- They wanted to get eleven names right then that night saying I support the seating of the Freedom Democratic Party and the unseating of the regular Democratic party.

I think they got about 5 or 6 names that night. Then the strategy was-- Then we all went to-- The credentials committee was breaking up and we got fi-- there was a meeting in a room, Waskow was there and a few others. I wasn't inside that meeting but they eventually had about 8 people. They had buttonholed eight people to come out of the credentials committee. This was around 9 or 10 o'clock. Our thing ended at four and they they broke for supper and then they came back around 8 o'clock people went over there with this thing which they tried to get signatures on. They already had Rowe's. That was one. They ~~were~~ were trying to get 10p more. So they buttonholed some people who they suspected, the Negro credentials committee people and they had around 8 or 9 people, and King, and Mrs. Hamer, and Bob and Waskow, and Newman, Stan Newman who was legislative aid for Ryan, and Garr Applewitz who was legislative aide for Gaylord Nelson. These

people were working on it. And they buttonholed these people. Did Art go into all this?

(Anne) Yes, some.

(Samstein) They buttonholed these people and they--

(Anne) He was pretty outspoken about Rowe.

(Samstein) Well, I don't know too much about that. That's pretty complicated. But they buttonholed about 8 or 9 people in a caucus room. The credential committee was being held in an upstairs room and there were little ~~caucus~~ caucus rooms next to the, you know, just like you would expect in a convention. ~~Ashtays~~ Ashtrays for cigars and stuff. So they buttonholed about 8 or 9 people and they got six signatures out of that and the 3 or 4 others had said they'd think it over ~~and then~~ or they rather not sign or they want to keep their flexibility and may not want to go for an absolute position.

Of our support there was a question always whether in the final pinch-- See we had a lot of people who gave us support, I think, to add to our bluffing power in terms of some compromise that we'd eventually get. They weren't prepared actually to take it to a floor flight but they would stay with us till the eleventh hour so that we would get as much from the President as possible. All this politica I'm not too sure of.

So we got around six signatures out of that little caucus. Then people went back to King's suite and the rest of the night was spent in picking out of the other 80 or 90 people about 15 or 20 who people thought were most likely

and who we should concentrate ~~on~~ our energies on them. That was a tactical decision that was made. Rather than concentrate-- I mean you weren't going to work on North Carolina people or the Florida people or even the Missouri people too much, but you wanted to work on, you tried to figure out who-- People had done a lot of research beforehand so there was something to work with. People knew a little bit.

So about 20 people were picked out. I think they included the five or six that had already signed. In other words there were fifteen people who we were trying to work at who hadn't signed who we wanted to get to sign. And they were invited to a luncheon at King's suite, a sort of brunch or late breakfast at eleven o'clock. And my job was-- I don't think Canson had signed that. I think she refused to sign. She was one of the ones who refused to sign. She didn't want to be tied in. She wanted to think it over, which really meant she wanted to consult. Somebody, Pat ~~Q~~ Brown, the governor. She was very close to the governor, see. And the governor of course, had word from Johnson and -- For her, she had to buck not only the President, she also had to buck the governor who was, after ~~the~~ all the guy who appointed her and whom she... things done for an appointment for her husband's judgeship.

You gotta understand how tangled that is for everybody. So she didn't sign. She was one of the 9 or 10 people that they had in that ~~caucus~~ caucus but she was one of the two or three who didn't sign.

(Anne) Did you talk to her about it afterwards? After you realized she wasn't going to sign?

(Samstein) I talked to her-- The next time I talked to her was Sunday morning. I wasn't in the caucus so I don't know, but I was told afterwards that she wasn't one of the people that signed.

So there was 20 people, 6 or 8 who had already signed; the other people didn't. And the idea was to get them all at brunch at King's the next day. So everybody had to go out and get them and tell them. So I couldn't get her Saturday so I went over there Sunday morning and I saw her and already I knew there was problems because she kept avoiding me. She kept saying, kept making excuses. She couldn't go to the brunch. So obviously there'd already been first communication that-- They took her into the caucus. She was afraid to commit herself right there. She had to check and when she checked she was told, no. She started to hedge. She started talking about a compromise and wouldn't it be wonderful if we get this and, you know. So she didn't go to the brunch and I wasn't at the ~~brunch~~ brunch so I don't know what happened. All I know is that we came out of the brunch with more than enough for a minority report. Because otherwise it would have been settled right there.

If we had only eight they would have passed a majority report and it would have been all over. But we had eleven or more. I don't know how. It was very funny. I spoke to Bob at about-- The executive committee started at 2 and I guess I called Bob at the suite and I told him that Canson wasn't coming or hadn't come or something like that, or I can't get her and he told me to catch up with Diggs. Or somebody told me to catch up with Diggs.

I think it was Bob. Anyway, catch up with Diggs and try to get his ~~an~~ name on a signature, that we have ten and we need Diggs. So I come running out and I run over to Diggs' hotel and I just missed him and then I start running back and I see his car and he's in it and I chase him to the parking lot. And ~~start~~ then, he comes out of the parking lot and I ~~saw him~~ walking to the hearing room, ~~xxx~~ with him. I said-- I asked him about whether he was going to go and he said something about-- He also said something about he had to retain his flexibility, that he couldn't tie his hands. That he would do the right thing. I took a couple of notes about what he said, I don't remember exactly now. I know one thing that's pretty close to what he said is that I can't tie my hands, you see.

Anyway we came out of that credentials hearing with a minority report because that's why they didn't settle so they came up with this phony thing of setting up a subcommittee of the credentials committee, which would make a report. This was the-auroa of-- This subcommittee was going out to study in depth the legal arguments, you see. It was just a delaying action until they beat down our eleven people. Did Arthur explain it this way?

(Anne) He had forty pages and I just read it twice.

(Samstein) This is what I understand it. I may be wrong. You're the historian and I'm just participant. But they tried to beat down-- I mean that was the delaying action to beat down our-- I don't know. The whole numbers thing varied. That whole thing that I just couldn't keep up with. I understand that-- I mean the latest thing I got at 5 minutes to 2 that we

had ten. As far as I knew we had only ten. But somehow or other we needed eleven and as far as I knew at 5 minutes to 2 we only had 10 so somehow somewhere or other somebody had gotten a couple more signatures. And we had enough.

Then, I don't know. There were all kinds of meetings Sunday night and Monday night in King's suite where the whole politics of this in terms of people and the ~~xxx~~ shifting position came. And I'm not sure when Canson was in and when she was out and so on. I knew that she would never, never take it to a floor fight. She might up to a certain point just, they might allow her up to a certain point to stay with it. So she was not totally discredited with her own people. Because we were having people in Sacramento send her telegrams like crazy. So she was really on the spot. So they let her stay with it for a little while.

But I don't know if the eleven included her or included Diggs. This is a whole question to me, whether we had thirteen. Because I knew Diggs and Canson weren't going -- And this ~~xxx~~ whole thing whether we weren't going-- Did they mentioned names, Diggs and Canson? The way I interpreted it was Diggs and Canson were liabilities, that you ~~really~~ really ~~can't~~ couldn't count them. So I never knew if they had eleven plus Diggs and Canson or whether they just had eleven.

(Anne) What I don't understand is, if Brown was so at the beginning was initially so overcome by the whole thing ... anxious to seat the FDP, why was --

(Samstein) Nobody ever said that Brown was ever enthusiastic. Nobody ever got to see Brown.

(Anne) M No, no. I mean back in the summer when the...

(Samstein) That was the California convention. Not necessarily Brown.

(Anne) Oh, I thought you said that Brown endorsed it with a mandate.

(Samstein) No the convention, did I say Brown? K

(Anne) Yes.

(Samstein) I meant the California state Democratic convention. The state Democratic convention, just like we had our convention they had theirs. That convention passed a resolution supporting.

So I don't know the numbers business. There a lot of important meetings if you want to know the real politics of this. If you want to do this. They're very important meetings in terms of the politics. That were held Sunday night and Monday night in King's suite. Then there's the first meeting with Humphrey that takes place. No, I'm sorry. Sunday night and Monday afternoon are the important: Sunday night at the suite with Rowe and Mrs. Edith Greene and all those, and Diggs, all those people were meeting and discussing the whole politics and what the compromise would be, if there should be a compromise and that's when the Greene Proposal came up. You know about the Green proposal? So they were trying now to get that across.

Well, that wasn't going to be accepted ^{as} ~~in~~ the majority and would inevitably be a minority report, which meant a floor fight.

Then there was this Monday afternoon meeting. That was a meeting with

and
Humphrey and Bob, went/ King and Mrs. Hamer, Aaron Henry and I don't know
what happened at those meetings. I think that's when they got off with the
compromise and they turned-- I don't know exactly.

~~xxxxxx~~

There's one or two other points I'll make and then I'll call it quits.
One is that throughout that period, not only were the delegates working
actively in terms of lobbying, or at least most of them, I mean some just
couldn't get around too well, They were elderly people, those who could
were working actively along with the staff, but also ~~there~~ they were meeting
regularly in caucus. There were quite a number of caucuses.

(Anne) Of FDP delegates?

(Samstein) Yes, and Bob for one, along with other like ~~H~~nger and so
on, Mrs. Devine, tried to make sure that everybody was aware of what
was going on to the fullest extent. What were the ~~xxxx~~ issues. For instance,
there was a long caucus, I don't know whether it was Sunday night or Monday
night, Sunday, a long caucus. That was simultaneously while-- I know
what happened. Bob had left the suite where all that high level politics was--
this is important because Bob left that suite with all that high politics--and
came back to the caucus and spent a couple hours while all that ~~stuff~~ stuff was going
on talking and trying to get those issues across to people, what was at stake,
what role the President was playing. Because at that time he was very concerned,
he was in the midst of this Rowe thing about whether you'd come out openly and

talk about what the President was doing.

(Anne) Bob was?

(Samstein) Well, Rowe said no. Bob felt that they should but he didn't want to make that decision so he brought it out with the delegation.

(Anne) What did they say?

(Samstein) I think-- I can't remember. It was not very clear cut.

(Anne) Do you know how Bob feels about that now?

(Samstein) Well, afterwards I think he felt there was a mistake not to bring out. He definitely thought that was one of the big mistakes.

The important thing is the role that the delegates played in terms of caucusing and in terms of discussing the issues as much as possible.

Anyway it was clear that they wanted to get seated and they wanted the regular-- I mean they couldn't follow all the shifts in strategy and all that stuff. They wanted to get seated and that's what they wanted. They had come all that way and go through all that to get seated. That's what they knew. Bob tried to discuss all the different compromises and the alternatives if they didn't accept it and so on, so that Monday we went-- there was a second meeting of the credentials committee--executive meeting, that means a closed meeting--and apparently we held through the night. We held our ~~xxxx~~ eleven. There was that big meeting in King's suite Sunday night. See we came in Sunday, we had ten as far as I remember but ~~the~~ apparently we kept up a few more and we came out of the credentials committee meeting with enough so that they had to delay the decision. Then they wanted to work all

Sunday, apparently, trying to muscle on at least some of our support so they would break our...from having eleven. Sunday night we had a caucus of our supporters. And I understand that was in King's suite. That's the important meeting I was telling ~~xxxx~~ you about. And I understand that at that meeting Edith Greene came in and said, I've got a new bunch of supporters and she had this closed fist, you see. And she wouldn't let anybody see the names.

Anyway, it's clear that Monday we went in and we held on. Whether it was a new group that we had Sunday. It may have been that we lost a few, picked up a few. We lost a few that had been muscled under and we picked up a few that Mrs. Green, I think she picked up a few real funny ones, like Guam and Panama Canal Zone and stuff like that. In fact, at one point they were discussing eliminating them from-- Because we started getting Hawaii--not Hawaii, that's a state but we got some funny ones, Guam, Phillipines, stuff like that.

We held on Monday and then during Monday Humphrey entered on to the scene. Came out in the open in the sense that he had called Bob and the so-called leadership in to try to muscle them down. That didn't work. Monday night there was probably more meetings and certainly Humphrey and Rowe were in constant communication through the night and I think even the President and Rowe talked during the night. And I don't know what else happened that Monday night.

Any rate, Tuesday morning, for me the morning started with a caucus. We had a caucus at the church and this was the longest and most thorough caucus. And this is very, very important to emphasize this caucus, you see,

because at this caucus all the different possibilities were thoroughly discussed and Rowe was there and he gave a report and Dr. Henry gave a report. And Rowe sit three hours. And the final decision of that delegation was that on no conditions was it going to accept less than the Greene proposal. And all the other alternatives were discussed including the one that was actually offered and a few others, which had been ~~up~~ popping around.

Now Rowe got up at that point and said-- This is what he said, that "I have been up all night and I'm very, very tired, I'm working very hard for you, and I have been on the phone as late as 6 o'clock this morning, all ~~thru~~ through the night till six and ~~K~~ frankly, my friends, the President won't budge from his initial offer" which is the back of the bus proposal. You know the back of the bus proposal, two honorary delegates. That was when, ^{they were} Monday afternoon when Bob and ~~xxx~~ called in. Humphrey's job was to get them to accept the back of the bus proposal and they refused. And our delegation held on Monday. Even the bluffers held. They figured they could bluff still more. Do you follow what I'm saying? In other words, they felt that they couldn't drop out at this point, that the President just would have to offer more and they would just have to force his hand until he gave more.

There were some people who were in it to the point where they just politically had to go along. That back of the bus thing was just unacceptable for them politically. It would involve for them too much political difficulty in terms of they were Negroes or they had Negro constituencies or something like that. Or they were getting a lot of telegrams and so they couldn't accept

that. They had to go further and so they had to.

And I don't know where Rowe fits in. Rowe was part of that group that had to get more. He was telling the President look, I can't go back with this now. And, who else was in that category? Diggs, might be put in that category and I don't know, several others.

So anyway I was real confused. As I interpret it. I don't know how Arthur interprets it but as I interpret it there were two possibilities; one is that as of 6 o'clock that Rowe and either Johnson or Rowe and Humphrey talked as late as 6 o'clock and that Johnson would not give anything more than the back of the bus, and he was using all the pressure that he could, was threatening in every way. I mean they were putting pressure in the sense that Rowe was being told that he would lose his job with the UAW or he was being threatened and he claims that he never was threatened with the loss of his job, that somebody did say to him, you're going to lose the vice-presidency to Hubert and he said that hurt. That hurt even more than the Goldwater argument that you'll lose the presidency. That you destroying the Democratic unity. You'll put ~~EMKX~~ Goldwater in the White House. It hurt more because he was a very close ~~fix~~ friend of Hubert's. He admitted that.

But anyway, obviously they were working to get-- Humphrey was trying-- and Johnson were trying to put across the back of the bus proposal as late as 6 o'clock, if you take Rowe's word for it. At least, if you ~~take~~ take his word, from the morning of the convention, Tuesday morning at the caucus that started

at 11 o'clock. He came in and said at 6 o'clock the President won't budge on the back of the bus proposal. Then there was all kinds of-- well what if he does, what if he gives this, what if he gives that and so on.

So, if you believe Rowe, and if you listen-- What Rowe maintains is that he didn't-- That that's all he knew. He was innocent, that the President wouldn't budge. That's the way he came and he said it, simply that, when he came to the caucus. Then he went in t- At 2 o'clock he left the caucus and went to the credentials committee hearing. And I don't remember exactly what happened there but at some point or other the subcommittee comes in, barging into the committee and says, Here is the majority report. And that's it. So now you have to either come up with a minority report or forget the whole thing. So Rowe is pleading for a postponement saying he has to consult with his party. Now Rowe says they gave him a certain amount of time, up until 6 o'clock to file a minority report so that he was trying desperately to get in touch with the FDP leadership for counsel. I'm telling you Rowe's story. I got this I guess four or five months ago when Rowe was in Mississippi from his own mouth, so I might as well give it to you unless you talk to Rowe which he'll be glad to talk to you.

(Anne) Yes. That's what I'm going to do.

(Samstein) I'll give you his story. You can collaborate it with what he tells you then.

So he says-- nobody would budge, all you got is the back of the bus proposal, then he goes to the caucus, then he goes to the credentials committee. Then the subcommittee comes in with its thing, X majority report. He has

to file a minority if he's going to do it at all. He says he has to consult with the FDP if they want to accept the majority report or whether they want to-- and he asked for a certain amount of time and I guess they give it to him. At least he claims-- I don't know for sure if they gave it to him. I guess they gave him until 6 o'clock to file a minority report. So he goes out into the street and the guy whose the head of the subcommittee goes out first though. And as he comes out the camera jumps on him as the head of the subcommittee and he makes an announcement that a decision has been reached, here is the majority report and the FDP accepts it.

(Anne) Why did he say that?

(Samstein) I was in at the-- Well, ~~shock~~ obviously. I don't know. It's pretty clear why. I mean they wanted a bust. Just confusion breaks out everywhere.

(Anne) But I mean how could he say that?

(Samstein) He just was! Now wait. This is according to Rowe. According to Rowe he lied. He said the FDP accepts it. Rowe said, "I followed him right on TV and I say, well I haven't consulted with the FDP yet," but he says that everybody picks up what the first guy said because I come on second and the word spread that there's a majority report ~~and~~ that the FDP has accepted. Then Rowe says, he is meanwhile rushing to try to get to the FDP to find out if they want to file a minority report and he's crying... and so on and he rushes over the the hotel and finally he gets back and they have-- Bob was in the suite, meeting ~~directing~~ at that time. Bob, Mrs. Hamer, Ed King. Did Ed King tell you about

that meeting? The Tuesday afternoon meeting?

(Anne) Ed King left before he got to the part about the convention...

(Samstein) Well, Ed King, Bob and somebody else, had -- were called into a meeting while Rowe was going to the ~~executive committee~~ executive committee on Tuesday afternoon. Bob, Aaron Henry and Ed King went to a meeting with Humphrey, Reuther, Bayard Rustin, well those are the key people, and they were having a discussion about, and then. According to Ed, because I wasn't at that meeting and I never talked to any, Bob, I didn't talk to Bob or anybody or Aaron about it. According to Ed suddenly about 3:30 they hear over the television or radio that there's been a majority report and that the MFDP has accepted it, at which point Bob busts out of the room and runs back to the hotel and they get the caucus together. They have to reach a decision now whether to file a minority report, you see. He's got to bust back and get Rowe and see if they can get a minority report. And Rowe goes over to the church and there they debate it.

Now here is the important thing. Rowe said, that he--he's talking at 6 o'clock--says no more than the back of the ~~bus proposal~~ bus proposal from on high; comes to the caucus, tells that. There is a thorough discussion of the issue. The caucus mandate him not under any conditions to accept less than the back of the ~~bus proposal~~ bus proposal--~~sorry~~ sorry, excuse me--mandates him not to accept anything less than the Edith Greene proposal. Three hours he sits in that caucus with no question about-- okay. He goes to the executive committee. They bust in with this subcommittee.

Give the minority report. He asked for a postponement to talk to the FDP. Now, theoretically, ^{he had} ~~they~~ just finished three hours of it. So, by all rights he ~~would~~ should right there on the spot said, Sorry we caucused all day, I have come here with a mandate and he should have right on the spot filed this minority report. But he can claim that, well the situation is changed, we needed to have a new caucus, assuming his role was honest now. This was assuming his role was honest, now, this was assuming his role was honest. This is what he would say if you raised this-- If you accepted his story and you only raised the complaint why is it he had caucused for three house, didn't you act right there? The time was very limited. He would say well, the stiaution was changed and I had to go back for a new mandate.

He goes out and he's trying ~~desparately~~ desperately to get in touch with Aaron Henry and Bob and I don't know. I guess finally he reaches them and Bob is on his way to the church and he calls together ~~xxx~~ a caucus and Rowe and Aaron Henry go over to the church and they discuss it. Meanwhile obviously when they're at the church, I come in and it's quite clear that they won't accept the compromise. Now they would claim, well at this point, 5 o'clock, after all that's happened, I think it's best now for us to file a minority, you know, I think ~~xxx~~ best now to accept it. But here is the way most people interpret it. That a deal was made during the night that Rowe knew all the time about the compromise, that when he came to the church he was dishonest. Because he couldn't have very well have told them ~~and they~~ the compromise and they say under no condition accept it and then for him to go to

the caucus and to indicate that he had to go back and consult when they'd just told him exactly what he should do if they gave him that compromise. So he makes a deal during the night, goes to the caucus, tells them nothing ~~xxx~~ new has been added, goes--but in fact, the deal has been made--goes to the executive committee. Now, it's not clear what he does in the executive committee. It was closed and only credentials committee were in there. Now the whole thing there, from the time he left the caucus to the time he got back to the church is unclear what he did, see. Because it may be that he was in cahoots. You see, he'd like to put all the blame on the chairman of the subcommittee, for giving out the rumor that the FDP had accepted the Challenge. But it's quite clear from his attitude in the church and knowing the kind of guy Rowe is that he was helping people to get the idea that the FDP was going to accept it. Because he wanted to prejudice the whole case. As far as he was concerned he and Aaron can make the decision, and I think that Aaron was talked to privately at some point. I'm convinced. So the feeling is that he made a deal and that he made a deal ~~xxxxx~~ somewhere and that he was dishonest; that he was not at any point really going to go back and really consult with the caucus and if they rejected it that he was going to try to hold on to that minority report, that he was sold during Monday night at the very latest, and maybe even earlier, maybe even Sunday night, but he was sold certainly by Monday night. This is what the people feel who feel he sold out, that he had been sold on this deal so that he couldn't put across to the caucus but the deal was when he got inside the executive committee to screw people, by-- They're not sure what he did inside there.

At any rate there was enough that happened ~~between 2 o'clock~~ between 2 o'clock and the time people got back to the church to know that Rowe and Henry were definitely clearly-- It was clear from what everybody was telling me that Rowe and Henry and even Ed King are behind the compromise. They're supporting it and they're trying to get people to go along with it.

Now, they claim that they just felt, that Rowe felt, that was it. We'd had it. They came in with the sub- ~~no~~ minority report and at this point ~~it's~~ it's best to settle for a compromise. And Ed King and Aaron agreed with him and they went back to try to convince--

(Anne) Are you sure Ed King agreed?

(Samstein) Oh yes, Ed King at that time was definitely in support of the compromise.

So, I don't know. I tend to support the theory that they knew. That it was too big for him not to have-- I mean he was too tight with Humphrey, and all that. He wasn't going to throw away-- I mean what you needed was -- I mean that's to work on the assumption that he was really prepared at any point to take it to a floor fight and jeopardize ~~Humphrey's chances~~ Humphrey's chances for vice presidency. Because it was quite clear that Humphrey wasn't going to get the vice presidency if he couldn't get-- I mean it's quite clear that the President had initially tried to settle on the back of the bus and that he used all their pressure and power to get the back of the bus proposal across, that Humphrey and Johnson combined and that it failed. That Johnson threw this extra thing into the hopper but that if Humphrey couldn't put this across

he wasn't going to get it.

(Anne) You really believe that?

(Samstein) Oh, no question about it.

(Anne) Why would he do that, you know... why?

(Samstein) Huh?

(Anne) People say he was the...?

(Samstein) He would have who? Oh that was just a bluff. I don't know who he would have put in. But it was clear that if Humphrey couldn't perform, couldn't produce. He was already giving Humphrey an extra ~~plumb~~ plumb to throw into the kitty. If Humphrey couldn't do the job then, then he wasn't worth anything for the job. He considers his vice president as his servants so he couldn't-- So I don't know, you tend to feel that at some point there was discussion between Aaron, at least, and Rowe and Humphrey, and that at some point they either, during Monday night, or Tuesday morning, that the deal was made; that they had agreed that this was the compromise and they would accept it, see. And that's where everybody's mad because that was done totally illegitimately. Nobody else was consulted privately. And that's where the sell-out comes.

If it's true, then both Aaron and Rowe were lying during that three-hour caucus so they were withholding the truth, you see.

If there was no deal made, that there was no deal made, then all you can argue then is that Rowe... I mean he thought at that point, 2:30 or 3 o'clock or 4 o'clock that it was time ~~for~~ to accept the compromise and you have to say Rowe ^{ahead} ~~used~~, that that was Rowe's position and you had to

fight ... You had to fight him also. I mean Rowe was tight with Humphrey and Rowe was in Washington, not Mississippi. The only thing was that once they had decided that is was, that Rowe felt it was good, he weighed his alternatives. He wasn't weighing it from the point of view of a share-cropper or a Negro in Mississippi. He was weighing it from the point of view of Rowe. This is understandable. This is the way people weigh it. So he weighs it from the point of view of Rowe. And from that point of ~~view~~ view it's clear that, throwing away Humphrey's vice presidency and so on, that it was best to accept the compromise.

But the problem was now, he was in a position that he had to force the others to accept his point of ~~view~~ view. It's one thing to say, Rowe, here's Rowe and I think given all the things from the way I see it, that to accept it. But that's not enough. The job is to enforce that and to make, to argue that that's the best view for everyone to accept. So then you get-- You call in Walter Reuther and he works to get Bayard Rustin and they work on King and King and everybody are supposed to work on the delegation, all to see that this was the best thing for everybody. Well, from the point of view of the Negroes in the delegation from Mississippi, it was not the best thing. I mean for them it was a question of a right to vote, pure and simple, and the only way that they could help their case and the right to vote was for them to get recognized by the Freedom Democratic Party--I mean, by the national Democratic Party. And that's what they were going for, recognition, and the expulsion of the others. Because if they were recognized, that would mean

that Johnson would have to register Negroes in Mississippi because he had kicked out the others. If he was going to have a political base in Mississippi he would have to register Negroes. That was eight months before Selma. We didn't know that people were going to get registered in the next three or four years at that point. At the end of the convention when we went back to Mississippi and we had no idea whether Negroes would be able to vote, how long it would take. We were no closer to it at the end of that convention than we were in 1961, in a sense. In the sense of the ability of the Negro in any part of Mississippi being able to actually register.

And it was only about two or three months later-- It was only, actually, after the election that you began to get when all the states went Republican, that Johnson started talking about voting legislation. And then Selma and that sparked it.