

MRS. ANNIE DEVINE

Interviewed 1966 by:
Anne Romaine
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Interviewer: How long have you been living here?

Devine: I been here all my life.

Interviewer: COFO came into...?

Devine: Yes, in 1963, latter part of '63 about December. Now they had been working here since May of '63 but there was no meaningful organization until December of '63 when we really organized what we call now the Madison County Movement.

Interviewer: that worked on this...?

Devine: That's right, not SNCC, this is a CORE project here.

Interviewer: Who was the field organizer here?

Devine: George Raymond.

Interviewer: And they organized mass meetings and elected people to represent you?

Devine: Um hum. We held county-wide mass meetings. That's when the county officials were so hard on everybody. We couldn't have a mass meeting without being harassed by them. Like surrounding the building and giving people... and finding out who ~~that~~ was at the meeting and people getting fired, at their jobs.

Interviewer: Could you be specific... some individuals...?

Devine: ...? Oh my stars, I'd have to goto the files.

Interviewer: I mean give me some examples of trouble you had.

Devine: Well, somebody like Jimmy ... And, of course, even me. I was at a meeting one night and one of the law enforcement officers took the

names of everybody who was in the car and tried to find out where they worked and I worked ~~at the~~ for a Negro insurance company so that meant they weren't going to try to take the trouble to try to get me fired, but there were other people. Week after week, day after day being fired just for attending meetings and going down to get registered.

Interviewer: Was there ever any violence here?

Devine: Oh yes, this county like every other county where there were civil rights activities had its share of violence. That's very true. Well, I know during these early days there was a lady out at Farinhaken who had been active in a voter registration but hadn't registered herself. Policeman went out to her house one morning and just beat her at her own house for no reason whatever. You know, they just beat her.

... George Washington over there who was arrested and beaten because he allowed a greenhouse in the house next to him to be used for... That's right.

Of course, any number of jailings and beatings of workers. We had workers here white... as students who didn't... ~~integrat~~ integration... I don't think a white man going to a white church or business is integrating that business I think he's just going where white folk go but I know on two occasions the white students went to the white church and were stopped on the way back and were beaten on the street. They didn't go integrate Negro and white. They went alone. That's right and so many times they were turned away not because they had Negroes with them but just turned away because they were

identified with the movement.. And we had a minister beaten for going to a cafe downtown here where whites go to eat. He was attacked one morning and beaten on the street... of policemen.

So we've had our share of violence in any number of ways. We had something like five or six buildings burn during the days of '64 and up to '65. The man that was in here just a minute ago, his church was burned down to the ground. It was a lovely church just ~~out of town~~ south of town here burned to the ground. Just because it was used for a freedom school. So when you talk about violence you're just talking about what goes on in Mississippi regularly. That's a part of its history, its culture.

Interviewer: And the South.

Devine: That's right.

Interviewer: Well when the CORE people came in, was there an organizing strategy similar to SNCC? Going from door to door, sort of thing.

Devine: That's right.

Interviewer: They bring in... that didn't exist before?

Devine: No they had a lot of men. What you call "Movement" of any nature except the NAACP a very few members and they were meeting secretly in churches here and there. They weren't really doing anything. They decided to build membership which they couldn't do because of not being able to have a ~~new~~ building to meet in most time and because when these meetings were held they were held in secret.

Interviewer: The colored guy, what'd you say his name was?

Devine: George.

Interviewer: When he came in and organized the mass meetings is that

where is happened?

Devine: Yes.

Interviewer: Was that in '63?

Devine: Yes, that was the early, after they found a place to house themselves and place for an office they started having mass meetings and at first it was too difficult to get a church to meet in so they met in the only the place that was made permanent for them at that time was...building around there on Franklin Street. They had meetings there for several weeks and then the Church of God in Christ was opened to them. That was the...church over on Baltimore Street and started have regular meetings there and then the Movement was organized there; that is they elected a chairman, a secretary and and other committees and really set down to organizational work... They made the mass meetings routine.

Interviewer:

Devine: We weren't organized then but we worked for him. That means that I was selling insurance and of course I had materials in my bag and as I went from door to door I told people about the....and got votes for him.

Interviewer:registration.

Devine: ~~OK~~ Yes, that's right.

Interviewer: How many people....?

Devine: Oh, I don't know the number. Not very many. I don't know the exact number.

Interviewer: That was before....

Devine: That's right, that was before...

Interviewer: Well, had you met Bob Moses before that time?

Devine: No, I only met Bob Moses in '63. I worked for...in '62.

Interviewer: I believe that was in '63. ...November of '62.

Devine: November? I believe it was '62.

Interviewer: Anyway you had met Bob after the ...

Devine: Yes, I met Bob after that.

Interviewer: Did you have a meeting...?

Devine: It was at a COFO meeting where I met Bob. COFO was a state-wide organization.

Interviewer: When did you first learn about COFO?

Devine: In '63.

Interviewer:did this become a COFO group?

Devine: That's right. It was the COFO group until the Freedom Democratic Party was organized.

Interviewer: It was organized as a COFO group? Or just as--

Devine: Well, it had the name Madison County Movement but it was part of the COFO group because all organizations...of the COFO group. I mean you understand what COFO was. It was a coalition of--

Interviewer: Independent groups.

Devine: That's right.

Interviewer: When did the idea of a political party emerge?

Devine: That emerged in '63. But FDP was officially organized, well

I don't mean officially, but it was set up temporarily and that probably is officially in April of '64. Now there had been some planning for that over a period of months but--

Interviewer: Who organized the planning?

Devine: Well, COFO.

Interviewer:

Devine: That was Aaron Henry of the NAACP, that was Dave Denis of CORE and Bob Moses of SNCC. And of course SCLC.

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Interviewer: Did this group nominate you or what?

Devine: Well, when you say this group what do you mean?

Interviewer: The group up here.

Devine: When you say nomination for Congress you're talking about the political divisions of the state. This was a district nomination, not a county or town. This was done by the 4th district which at that time was the size of 12 counties.

Interviewer: And they all came together--

Devine: That's right. We had a district meeting and this was in that one.

Interviewer: Were there other people that were nominated that were running?

Devine: No. They just had. The problem there was that people did not allow themselves to be used. They were just afraid then as they were in '63 even before. They did not allow themselves to be used and you must understand that do to some things in Mississippi meant that your life was out there and people weren't willing to give in to that kind of thing. Dr. Henry and Ed King, people learn their lesson as they always do. It just depends on how well they accept... If you see ~~the~~ Ed King now and you know, there's his face and all of that, it shows what it meant for him to be out in the front in the Movement. Of course, Dr. Henry as well suffered the same kind of--not that he was physically beaten up in so many ~~cases~~ cases as Ed King was--but there was enough in King and Henry's running for Governor and Lieutenant Governor of this state to let people that even if you do it you're going to suffer. And people just weren't ready. As now, many people are still staying that...."....and allow myself to be used I have to decide to take the consequences or else I don't go.

Interviewer: Did you have much harassment...?

Devine: Well, women never do suffer as much as men. The Negro woman does not in many cases have to go through all the things that men go through. That's not true in every case but it is true in some. So I have ^{or} never really suffered any undue harassment ~~by~~ intimidation. One reason is because after I been very careful and I've kept myself out of the way of people. I really haven't shouted at people, & it's just my nature to get out

here and make noise. I'm just not like that. In other words I was much better along....

Interviewer:

Devine: This was after we came back from Atlantic City, we decided to run people for Congress from each district in the state.

Interviewer: When you were nominated were you a delegate?

Devine: Oh, I was a delegate.

Interviewer: And it was in April that you were chosen?

I think you're

Devine: ~~Myself~~ still confused. You see there were sixty-eight delegates to the National Convention from the state of Mississippi. They were elected from the precincts of the counties to the district and to a state convention. After Atlantic City it was decided that we would challenge the seating of the ^{national} five congressmen from this state which had nothing to do with the convention. So that meant that people had to run for these offices from their district and I ran from the 4th district, Mrs. Hamer from the 2nd district, Mrs. ... from the 3rd. I don't know all the problems around the thing that happened in the 1st district, there was supposed to have been somebody to run from that district but it didn't happen and nobody came up from the 3rd district. However we did have challengers but not in the form of a candidate.... And so that is how it took place. We ~~were~~ ^{went} for Congress and we went to Washington to for congressmen.

Interviewer: How did you get elected?

Devine: This is what happened. As you know, you must have, , your political party is set up by a precinct. You have a precinct meeting and you elect your delegates to a county convention and you go from a county convention to a district convention. Now those people who are sent to your district convention as delegates--I mean to your county convention--are also delegates to ~~from~~ your district convention and they go to a state-wide convention. And ... you already have your slate of delegates and then of the people that are elected at large, five.

Of the people that are elected at large, at the state convention by the sixty-eight delegates --I don't know, I'd have to back and read all that stuff to figure how its ~~down~~ done. Well, these people go to the national convention to help nominate the person who's going to run for president of the U. S.

Now here was the whole question of who has the right to sit at this convention. Our argument was that the regular delegates from Mississippi had no right to the convention seats because they had excluded ~~for~~ us from their precinct conventions, from the precinct conventions. We had tried to get into the precinct conventions and in every case--except maybe there might have been one or two cases where they were allowed in a precinct convention and then when they got to the county convention they were eliminated.

Interviewer: Well, we only have a little bit of time. Let's go on to the convention.

Devine: Well, now which convention? The national convention? Well, when we got to Atlantic City we set up at the ... Hotel, the Freedom Democratic Party with its delegation and we were denied seats. We were offered

two seats in the convention; that was the compromise, that we would take two enlarged seats and Ed King and Aaron Henry would be the poeple to occupy ~~these seats~~ ^{these seats} and of course we did not accept this compromise. We went for all or none and we came back ~~for~~ to Mississippi--some people say defeated-- but we didn't call it defeat. One of the most significant things is the strong support we had at Atlantic City by the people who helped to organized FDP and that was the summer volunteers and all those people were there on the boardwalk for hours and hours, day and night.

Interviewer: And that gave you a lot of strength?

Devine: Yes, that gave us a lot of strength. And, of course, it was their feeling that we would not accept a compromise. However, not one time did we meet with them to see how they felt about it. We had our own meetings but they sat their saying that if FDP accepts a compromise they were certain it would be a let down in spirit. So we didn't do it.

Interviewer: When did this idea of not accepting any compromise... the Green compromise might have been acceptable...

Devine: It might have been because the Green compromise...that seats them half and half. Give the FDP as much representation as--

Interviewer:compromise was two seats in the back of the bus.

Devine: Yes, you're right about two seats in the back of the bus, because those at large votes would not have given us any power whatever as far as Mississippi is concerned. No recognition.

Interviewer: Well did you all feel strong... out there?

Were there some in the delegation that wanted to take the two seats?

Devine: Now, I think Dr. Henry had some very strong feelings about accepting these two seats because--and I don't know if it meant personal satisfaction to him or how it felt about it. Some people in Dr. Henry's camp were saying now this is a victory that you get something. It means you won't go back home empty handed and show people that all that effort and energy was wasted, you'll go back with something. The majority of us felt like... it was nothing so we might as well come back just like we left.

Interviewer: In the meetings you all had at the church did ~~you~~ he argue to accept the seats?

Devine: He didn't argue^e but he asked for a vote on it but the problem there was he asked after he had made a decision.

Interviewer: How did that work?

Devine: Well, it just didn't work.

Interviewer: You mean he announced that you would accept the--

Devine: Yes, he made the announcement publicly and of course that was one thing that we didn't like. Many of us, many people didn't understand that but there were a few people that understood that Henry had already publicly accepted the compromise, made a statement to the press that we would accept the compromise and then he comes back to the FDP for a vote and of course we didn't do that.

Interviewer: Who spoke....

Devine: There was Bob Moses, there was James Farmer, Martin Luther King, Odet... of the National Council ^{of} ~~for~~ Churches, Bayard Rustin, all spoke to the delegation about ~~Edith~~ Edith Green's proposal.

Interviewer: About Edith Green?

Devine: Yes, and of course our feeling was that what we left home for was to show that the Mississippi delegation was illegally elected. We did not have at that time the vote, we had been denied the vote and it didn't seem like we were going to get it, the vote. So why accept on any grounds, on any terms, something that was not real. Of course, that was not real.

Interviewer: Which one of those ~~spx~~ people who spoke to you advocated that you accept the compromise?

Devine: Most all those people. King. But they didn't just advocate it in so many words but what they said was in the words of James Farmer, "N w if you don't accept the compromise don't let us tell to accept or not to accept it, but if you don't accept the comrpomise you are going to have to go back to your state and organize and third party." These were the words of James Farmer and they were worth thinking about because here we are now, and you k now they were never more true than they are right now, that FDP is fighting now to make itself something that it will take 40, 50 years, ~~ready~~ real, and that is the acceptable Democratic party in this state. So what, it might have been prophecy on the part of James Farmer to make that kind of statement.

Interviewer: How must of a part did Bob have in this?

Devine: Bob did not want FDP to accept the compromise. No compromise period.

Interviewer: He advised you on--

Devine: He didn't advise us. He sat back and watched and waited, might have hoped and prayed, I don't know.

Interviewer: He didn't make any statements at all?

Devine: No, he did not tell FDP anything. He talked to people, he spoke to people but Bob did not say, you know, this is the compromise, let's do this and let's do that. There was not one time that he said let's do this, or you do this or you don't do that. It wasn't his nature anyway.

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