

Interview with Robert Moses
Cambridge, Massachusetts
August 15, 1983

John Dittmer: Let me just begin by telling you what I am doing specifically now. I am doing this overall study of the movement in Mississippi which I want to start in about the mid-fifties with the Erown decision, the Emmett Till case, the activities of people like Amzie Moore and Medgar Evers and C.C. Eryant. And then moving through the movement into '64 and '65-- I think spending a good deal of time in the period post-Freedom Summer. I am very much interested in what Larry Goodwyn calls "the received culture" and how it had an impact upon social movements. I am interested in the rise of the moderates such as Hodding Carter and others, their relationship with the Johnson administration; the poverty program; the point at which economics and politics intersect. And eventually leading to-- well I think I am going to end it around, the formal part, around 1968.

Now more immediately I am working on two papers. One on which I thought was going to be on COFO generally. But I have narrowed that down considerably to a totally different topic and that is what I call, "The Ordeal of Medgar Evers." Looking at Medgar's life in Mississippi, his relationship with other groups, the Jackson movement, its decline, and sort of looking at internal politics there as well as trying to figure out more about the Kennedy administration and the role it played. The other paper I didn't realize I was going to be giving until just this week (laughter). Clay Carson and I have proposed a session at the Organization of American Historians Convention on Mississippi in '64. They forgot to notify me about it-- my topic is McComb. And of course it was good to make contacts in McComb but since I didn't think there was any urgency I didn't talk to Mr. Bryant, not in detail.

So what I would like to do if it is all right today is to sort of focus rather specifically on McComb, on a couple of matters that I think that touch with inter-organizational cooperation and rivalry. And you know I have an agenda and we could go on for hours but I don't want to take up too much of your time. And I hope that maybe sometime in the future we might get back together again as I learn more and have more questions. So with that introduction which did not need to be on tape (laughter), let me just ask you whether in 1961 when you went into McComb you were aware that you were moving into an area of the state where white resistance was likely to be the most violent or whether it was a matter of being invited in and going?

Bob Moses: Well I don't, I am not conscious of as early as '61 having that distinction in mind. And I am not sure in light of later events that it is correct. You know that that is the area where white resistance is most, or was likely to be most violent. But basically I went, you know, at Amzie's suggestion with no real idea about a distinction in geographical areas in Mississippi. I didn't have in my mind then the distinction the plantation economy and the small farm owning subsistence kind of economy that you would find in the southwest (part of Mississippi). It is true however that-- and when he had got started in McComb and people came in from Walthall county and Amite county, the people in McComb did indicate and very strongly that Amite county was an area, a county where we would encounter violent opposition.

I guess that went from the local black leadership that we were working with to ... he was the son of the person who owned the local paper there, the McComb Enterprise?

Dittmer: Emmerich.

Moses: Because he had talked to me, you know, interviewed me a couple of times, when we were just starting out. I guess we had been there about a couple of weeks when we took some people down to register. He came down and we talked with him. So that is true, that is within that area, the whole southwest area of Mississippi, they identified themselves, people there identified themselves Amite county as a particularly deeply violent center of resistance. As opposed to say Walthall (county). So it wasn't just the rural areas as opposed to McComb, but particular pockets ... at least in people's minds.

Dittmer: Yes. I misspoke on the question. I was thinking of southwest Mississippi as an entity. Would that apply do you think as being the toughest place to crack in Mississippi? Or is there a distinction that should be made?

Moses: Well, I came to make a distinction between what seemed to me be more organized violence as opposed to local hit and miss violence. But I am not sure now-- I think probably evidence might be looked for which might indicate that clearly. But most or all of the violence in Mississippi was organized and dealt with through the political administration and the various organized citizen's groups. So it became very clear that the highway patrol was an arm of the resistance, that is that their function was to track, keep a close guard on civil rights activity. That certainly was clear when you took people to register and it was the highway patrol that interceded.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: And it seems to me it was only the failure of the highway patrol to effectively deter coming to the courthouse, that

Moses (cont.) is when we had that incident where I was arrested and there was that call to the Justice Department and the case came to nothing. I refused to pay the fine and all that. So then the next time we had the violence done by a local citizen (Billy Caston) who was nevertheless connected up to the political apparatus. Billy Caston who was connected with (E.H.) Hurst who was a state representative in terms of some kind of blood relation.

I think looking back that if the highway patrol had been able to deter or if they thought it would be effective, they might have continued with that.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: But that it was only when that was clearly not going to be effective because then you had to contend with the Justice Department that I think-- in my mind anyway-- that moved it to this next level. You know I was-- Taylor Branch was in here last week, I don't know if you know of him?

Dittmer: No.

Moses: He is a journalist based out of Washington and is writing a book on King and dealing with the United States as a whole in the era which King lived in, took off from '54 to '68, about the same period that you are talking about.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: But he did some research at the Johnson Library and there is an interview there with-- that is with President Johnson Library with Paul Johnson. Have you seen that?

Dittmer: Yes, I have that. Amazing interview. I sort of interpreted that mean as just absolutely crazy or senile when he was giving it, but really revealing in terms of just the intransigence of the moderate Paul Johnson. What was his angle?

Moses: Well, he was particularly struck by the conversation around the murder of Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney and the pretty much out and out statement by Johnson that he knew of the plans, but that to take these workers out of the jail and to work them over. But that the plans had gotten, gone wrong.

Dittmer: I don't recall that, it might have been ... I am sure that I would, I think I would have had I ...

Moses: Well, he was saying that he was, apparently the guy, the interviewer went over this point with him a couple of times and asked him is this what you are saying. Are you saying that you actually knew ahead of time that they were going to take these boys out. Because what he was saying was that

Moses (cont.): the plan was to rough up Schwerner.

Dittmer: Right, I had heard that.

Moses: But then it went, it got, you know, the plan got, went astray because one of the patrolmen, whoever it was, was drunk or whatever and went too far. But the idea that at the level of the government that this was taking place And it also reminds me of something that one of the writers that came through told me in '64. What was his name, a novelist?

Dittmer: John Hershey?

Moses: No.

Dittmer: I just saw something that Hershey did in the paper.

Moses: But he lives up there in the same ...

Dittmer: Oh, Robert Penn Warren?

Moses: Yeah, Robert Penn Warren. He wrote that article on "Two for SCLC," and you know the book. And when he came through and interviewed he was telling me that he had just come from Johnson's office and Johnson had this huge mounted picture of me in his office, this big, blown up photo.

Dittmer: I think I have heard that.

Moses: But it seems that-- I mean the thing is that it seems that in Mississippi the opposition was really organized at the state level. And so therefore the distinction between southwest as being the hardest versus the Delta-- it really-- I am not sure of what value that is.

Dittmer: It is a good point I think. Back to Governor Johnson-- one of the things that I found in the Johnson, Lyndon Johnson library is that Lyndon Johnson was courting Paul Johnson throughout this period '64-'66. Just records of telephone conversations, letters, sending him copies of pens that Johnson used to sign various bills. I have a theory that once it was possible for the national administration to hook up with the state administration on a level where they could talk, then it became much more difficult for civil rights forces-- this is sort of '64-'65-- to act because the ground had really shifted. It was one thing when you were dealing with a (Ross) Barnett whom the candidates thought they could deal with and couldn't, and another thing to deal with the Johnson or his successors. Who understood each other-- the two Johnsons did. And all the while I found in both the

Dittmer (cont.): Kennedy and Johnson Libraries that Eastland and particularly Stennis were instrumental in at least in terms of discussions that went on. I don't know what the discussions were, but Stennis during the Kennedy administration would be called in times of every crisis. He was making comments privately on things like school desegregation in the mid-sixties, "Well you have done okay up until now but don't push it any further." While his public stance of course would be that of an opposition. It was interesting going through the logs of Johnson's office during Atlantic City. And as you know the man was obsessed by the Challenge, although he doesn't even mention it in his memoirs. Of the people he was calling. Eastland. Richard Russell. Connally. Everybody in the entire southern tier of the democracy. In all of this I don't have any record of his ever having contacted any movement leader or any black leader surrounding the challenge.

So I, although I don't see a link up in terms of organized violence on the federal level, I think that once you get to the point where you have a cooperative relationship to a degree between state and federal authorities then it becomes a lot stickier. And then I see for example the federal government moving to defeat FDF after the election, after Atlantic City. You see Doug Winn who was a Greenville attorney who was related to Johnson really taking the lead and undermining FDF, CDM. Hodding Carter coming in, Aaron Henry making the switch. And you have a whole new alignment that it is the service of the Democratic Party. I have made that speech. What do you think about that as a whole thesis?

Moses:

Well, yeah, that was clear I think at the convention. That there was a move. The thing that the Movement had going for it, particularly before, up until the convention was a unity among the black population about the program and the goals. And that was shattered at the convention. And I think that there was a basis for a different kind of unity emerging after the convention. But that was taken over by the group that you just mentioned, the people that the federal government was interested in working with in the state. Which I don't think just included the state administration, but also included certain foundations and the churches. All people who were associated with the administration during the civil rights struggle and really formed the coalition that put forth say the March on Washington in '63 and was the backbone of the civil rights bill. Those groups prior to '64 did not have an avenue for working in the state.

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Dittmer:

Right.

Moses: And pretty much whatever they wanted to do they had to do through the movement if they wanted to have any presence there at all. But it was after '64 that these groups saw that there was an opening for working directly with black people. And they moved in to do that.

They didn't move in-- there wasn't when ... in their idea a movement idea. That is the movement idea I think would have been to pull together the COFO base around as a statewide organization around the various poverty programs. The Head Start programs, the economic programs, and so forth. And try to build a grass roots organization which would really run these programs. But that was-- we were cut off from that. I mean those programs were started before we even knew about them. People had moved in and set up, you know, the arrangements and everything. And we were presented with just something that is already started and going.

So there clearly was a move to bypass the movement in this shifting of the terrain into these programs. That was at the time very disconcerting because it involved people that we had worked with.

Dittmer: Al Lowenstein?

Moses: *Added* Al, no. Because Al was not involved in that too much. John Lardis, a valid case in point because John and I were friends. We had met, he was up at Harvard at that time. We had met through his roommate who was Guido Goldman.

Dittmer: Whose name keeps coming up in _____. I don't know much about him.

Moses: Well, Guido was a very close friend of Belafonte. And I met Guido first at a fundraiser that Belafonte gave at his house, which was quite early, it was right after McComb. And I guess Guido through his father had a lot of contacts. Because his father was a I guess big figure in the whole Jewish international movement and Israel. And I guess if I understand right he did negotiate at the reparations with Germany. So Guido had wide contacts and was interested in helping the movement and because he was around the same age there was some understanding. And John and he were rooming together. And John also had contacts with foundation grant circles.

But it was John that came down to head up COFO when it first started.

Dittmer: I didn't realize that. COFO?

Moses: Not COFO.

Dittmer: CDGL.

Moses: CDGL.

Dittmer: That was curve (laughter).

Moses: CDGM when it first started. And I guess the thing that hurt was that we didn't know anything about it being set up. I mean until I just happened to meet him once at the Jackson airport. He was there and it was, you know, already in place. So I mean that at the time was disconcerting and it really meant that the other foundation on which the movement could have regained its unity I think in the state was taken out from under

Dittmer: That is interesting because of course CDGM proved to be too unmanageable for the national administration after a time. And there has always been that ambivalence there depending on where you are looking at CDGM, whether it was far too radical or whether as you say it was sort of put in place to pre-empt the movement taking over. Certainly what I have been focusing on is the creation of MAF, Mississippi Action for Progress, which succeeded CDGM and had as its leadership the same group of people who would be the political leadership of the new Loyalist Party. And these two things were sort of overlapping, coinciding together. And I suspect that that was part of the grand design too.

I have a report, an in-house report that Curtis Gans of ADA did in the fall of '64 after making a tour, maybe early '85, of Mississippi. And he talks about, you know, from the liberal point of view isolating FDP; wanting to build, establish some sort of beachhead in the state and then at the same time you can't go out into an all out attack on what is going on. I suspect that this sort of strategy was present in a number of different so-called liberal forums.

Moses: Yeah. I guess the thing, the other thing was that it probably is not possible for people to -- the way the politics works-- to allow an independent party like say if FDP was trying to be completely independent of the Democratic Party-- allow that to be organizing and at the same time allow the people who are in it to be part of the mechanism for say the Head Start programs and the War on Poverty programs and so forth. That even just sort of coming up with a new hat, I-mean they all became the people that I mean I guess that just in terms of just the way that politics works in this country (that) once you stake down an independent political position you pretty well eliminated yourself from participation in this other kind of activity.

Dittmer: The analogy that I find myself coming back to time and again is that of the Populists who were trying to engage in a democratic movement and were trying to get economic viability as well as establishing new ideas politically. And with their cooperative idea and how that was defeated first of all by the bankers and the merchants and later when they went through

Dittmer (cont.): the idea of the sub-Treasury where the federal government step in, and how that was defeated politically. And I am seeing some sort of connections in terms of social movements in this country. (Break) Techniques being used to co-opt more than destroy. That through co-optation to diffuse the movement for radical social change. And at the same time to bring that group of people into the mainstream. As the Democrats were able to do for a time with the Populists in the 1890's.

I don't know, I have a lot of work to do. But I am seeing links that connect various movements and various ways in which they are counter-acted by the dominant culture in our society.

Moses: Yeah. A lot-- of course the other problem was that at that point SNCC was caught up in its own internal problems. So the kind of, the energy that was needed to even try to focus, that you would have to bring to focus on Mississippi at that time was lacking.

Dittmer: Talking with Dave Dennis while in Mississippi, shortly, a couple of days after the McComb meeting. And we were talking about that period after Atlantic City and he was speaking of his disillusionment with the process. And I asked him why he decided to leave the state. He said simply that he idn't know what to do. That he had decided that nonviolence was not the answer but that he was not personally inclined to go the other way. He talked about being burned out. I think you would probably agree that the departure of various SNCC and CORE people like Dennis and yourself and Willie Peacock for awhile and others left a vacuum in Mississippi. Looking back on that and with the internal problems that SNCC was having, do you think that you would have done it any differently had you-- an ahistorical question-- had you known what was going to happen in the period winter-spring 1964-'65? Did you feel that in leaving Mississippi that you would help foster the kind of indigenous leadership in the communities that would be prepared to do battle with these kinds of forces that we have been talking about.

Moses: Well, the problem I, I mean what had arisen within SNCC and within the work in Mississippi was the question about local decision-making.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: And it might have been possible to stay on just as a presence in Mississippi and wait things out to see what would develop. It wasn't possible to stay on anymore as a state, leading a state leadership role without usurping and really kind of undercutting this notion of local, the importance of people, local people taking on leadership.

Dittmer: This came up in connection with FDP?

Moses: Yeah, Guyot was then head of the FDP and they were moving very, there was a lot of motion around FDP. And I disagreed with the strategy (that) was for them-- and that is where this question comes into play because there was no way to take that disagreement to the people without clashing with Guyot at that point.

FDP - Guyot

Basically they were following the national programs, programs geared at a national level-- the Congressional Challenge (of 1965). My feeling was that they needed, we needed to retrench and now let the party (FDP) have established domain for itself-- that it needed to just basically do basic organizing in the state.

Dittmer: There is a related question there as far as direction and sort of wanting to be within the mainstream of the Democratic Party in terms of its support for Johnson and Humphrey. I believe at one time I recall reading something that you had said that FDP you believed should be independent of the national party.

Moses: Right, yeah they were, that another problem, another question I mean. And I guess partly was kind of brought up around the Congressional Challenges too because you were calling upon the liberal parts of the Party to ... I felt at that time that we should try to establish a political party which was outside of the Democratic Party and do it by local officers, that is begin at the local level in electing people, building the party like that.

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But again I felt that the other principal was more important. I mean the principal about leadership and of the people who are at the local level moving and assuming leadership roles. So there was no way to do that. And then the other outlet was a closed door, that was these economic programs. I certainly would have I think move to reestablish COFO around these economic programs. I think those were, that would have been a legitimate area that people could clearly see and would have been separate from the political activity of FDP. So that you wouldn't have FDP people feeling threatened.

But without that kind of very concrete program then to reestablish COFO you would have had two problems; one would have been FDP, they would have felt threatened and 2) would have been Aaron Henry's role.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: Because Aaron was a key person in COFO so unless there was a clear program around which you could unify (Aaron) Henry and everyone else, then I think it would have been difficult.

Dittmer: I would like to go into that a little bit more, this whole question of sort of the traditional leadership in the state symbolized by Aaron (Henry), Medgar Evers, C.C. Bryant, Steptoe and others. Well let me just get back to McComb and use that as an example. I have done a lot of work in the NAACP papers at the Library of Congress. And when you moved into McComb Medgar Evers in one of his early reports said that in effect that he was disappointed, that you had come in without his knowledge; and this was a charge that was being leveled in Jackson as well, that you were sort of undermining local NAACP influence in the area, that your people were seducing-- he didn't use that word-- the youth, bringing them into the, where they felt a lot closer to SNCC then they did the NAACP.

Moses: Do you know when he wrote that?

Dittmer: This was in early October of 1961. It was I think after you had been arrested, before he came down or about the time that he came down to address the (McComb) high school students I guess.

Moses: Which was after the walkout.

Dittmer: Yes.

Moses: Well, I think ...

Dittmer: Let me just say one thing. I think with Medgar what I have seen is his ambivalence of his beginning as of-- I see him as very angry young man. I know from correspondance that the (NAACP) national office was constantly pressuring him to discourage other movements in the state. Going back to the Regional Council of Negro Leadership which was a group out of Mount Bayou in the early fifties. He (Medgar) proposed a merger with that, Ruby Hurley said no we won't do that.

Moses: That was when Amzie was vice-president at that time.

Dittmer: Later on with SCIC, a letter, that is '58 or so, where Medgar is saying that they had been wanting to establish an operation in Jackson, I have been discouraging it. So I see that you know the politics of bureaucracy might be at work in one sense, that he is telling the national office what they want to hear. And yet at the same time I sense that he may have been threatened by your operation. And I wonder if you could shed some light on this? When you had your early conversations with Amzie Moore and C.C. Bryant was the question of state NAACP hegemony brought up, were they, did you have any idea they were keeping Medgar informed or saying that this is, we really shouldn't be bothering with this? Do you recall any sort of conversation there?

Moses: Yes, there was. In fact Taylor Branch had some correspondance between Jane (Stembridge) and myself.

Dittmer: Yes.

Moses: I don't know if you have seen this.

Dittmer: No I haven't. Where is that?

Moses: It is at the SCLC library.

Dittmer: I missed that somehow.

Moses: I think he said in Box 17. There is a box with most of-- obviously there is other stuff in it-- but has mostly my stuff.

Dittmer: This is in the SCLC papers?

Moses: Well there in the SCLC papers in the SCLC ...

Dittmer: Okay, okay. So that will be on microfilm then. You know the SCLC papers are on microfilm now. In fact they are at Harvard where I have been reading them.

Moses: Oh. Okay.

Dittmer: I am just now getting into that. Go ahead.

Moses: And there is a reference in one of the letters that I wrote to Jane somewhat there but I remember the context about the NAACP and Amzie's attitude about the NAACP. Because Amzie was a leader in the state NAACP, but he was the only leader in the state that I met who was willing to welcome the students and SCLC and work with them openly on this kind of project, and invite them. And he indicated that, you know, the rest of the state was not, the leadership was not in support of this. And when-- but there was any when I went back-- that was in '60-- and when I went back in '61 there wasn't any indication on his part that he had been called or anything like that. I don't think people in general knew anything about it anyway because there had been no real plans or publicity.

But then on the other hand he was not taking me down to meet Evers you know. And people would-- he would take me to meet people that he knew and considered as ready to move and willing to work basically. Although, I mean we would also meet people, you know that we would talk about afterwards and say, you know, I am not sure where this person is going to be. And some of these people would be NAACP people, a lot of them would be NAACP people. Because it is certainly true that the strongest people in the state pretty much were I mean in one way or another NAACP. So, but then J.C. Bryant wrote Amzie because of the Jet article. And he wrote

Moses (cont.): Amzie as a fellow NAACP person. Although it was clear from the article that it was not an NAACP project.

Dittmer: Yeah.

Moses: I mean the article was labeled as a SNCC project. So Bryant certainly knew that it wasn't a NAACP project. Bryant's problem came when the sit-ins and the demonstrations began and then he turned against us. And I think that probably opened the way for Medgar to write that kind of report. Because Bryant-- I am not sure when the meeting-- but Bryant went to Jackson to ask the NAACP ... to condemn the SNCC operation, to have it moved out. Steptoe and Amzie (Moore) and some other people befriended it and so that was not successful, they couldn't get the state group as a whole to condemn it. So that kind of knocked the wind out of any real effort to isolate us. Because it would be difficult for Medgar with such a small operation that he had to go against the real feelings of his key people around the state.

And Bryant was speaking but he was not-- I mean there were people like (Webb) Owens from McComb who went up and defended us, so it wasn't as though it was, Bryant was representing the united front. So I think probably that is the context in which Medgar wrote that report.

Dittmer: You mentioned that the direct action-- the demonstrations, the sit-ins, arrests, expelling kids from school-- was what triggered that kind of thing. What were your reactions when Marion Barry and (Charles) Sherrod came in to town with their program for direct action.

Moses: Well, I was not personally enthusiastic. And my problem was that, I mean I didn't think that it would have done, I didn't think it was a program. I mean, and I was right on that.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: You know it was a one, one event thing, it was not something that the movement could sustain. So on the one hand I would never had initiated it. On the other hand within SNCC you had the open kind of discussion-- in some cases dissension-- about nonviolence, direct action versus voter registration. It wasn't important in terms of the unity, building the unity within SNCC to give free access to Marion and to-- this was Marion who came by himself first to set up the workshops-- to our people to see what to do.

And then it was important for the young people, Hollis (Watkins) and Curtis (Hayes) who had been working on the vote and who had gotten frustrated-- to do something them-

Moses (cont.): selves. I mean they had been, you know, they couldn't vote, they couldn't register, they were not old enough. And they were faced with the intransigence of the adults. They were itching to do something themselves, so it was important in that sense, it was a release for them.

And on that score I couldn't have any objections and I didn't. I mean as long as you had local people who wanted to carry the burden and the action, then it would seem to me you were moving forward. So on that score I was glad to see them have a chance to get into something that they were enthusiastic about. So then they had that sit-in. And then they were tried and so forth.

But the school walk-out then, it was clear that I had to participate because my identification with the movement and the students and with Hollis and Curtis and so forth. I mean (laughter) they were asking me well are you going to go? And it was clear from the way that they were asking that it was important to them that I go, that I participate with them. Not just (Charles) McDew and people that they really didn't know who were coming in for the demonstration.

And I didn't have a problem with doing that. It was not something again that I would have done, initiated, it wasn't something that I guess primarily because it wasn't programatic, you know. But then it was helpful because it stimulated a lot of people. And that enthusiasm and stimulation, we were able then to translate back into the voting program which tends to get very dreary. We were knocking on the doors and all of that. So that you you could get people, more people out to meetings, to discuss; the community was aroused because of the children's involvement. Then you could ask them to support them in a way in which they could support them. So it turned out that you could use both avenues to support each other. That the voting program which in a sense was your entrée into the community-- out of that and the frustration of it we get Hollis and Curtis willing now to go and have a sit-in, where as I don't know if they would have been willing to just cold turkey if we had just come in with that idea.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: That they would have emotionally been ready to do something like that. And then out of that we aroused the whole other community and feeding that energy back into the voting program and getting more students. I mean because you got also students who came to work in the office around the voting program after they had done the demonstration. So with that we picked up some workers and community interest.

was a good person.

Dittmer:

I think that, although I don't, in fact I just met him for the first time in McComb and I am going, and he has agreed to talk with me. I think that his career is a very interesting one. I am sort of picking it up in this period post '65, post '64. And Harry Bowie is on the scene and they are fighting battles. And Bryant is sort of being regarded-- through letters at least-- as not an Uncle Tom certainly, (but) compromising too much. And yet I have read the correspondence that he was turning out at this point to the mayor and the school board, all sorts of officials across the board. Very strongly pointing out, you know, where they were not living up to their agreements and what needed to be done. And I think that this is a role-- I don't have a handle on it yet-- but this is a role in Mississippi that I think needs to be explored more fully.

I think you brought that out in McComb when at the beginning of your remarks you mentioned the names of a number of people who were instrumental in putting up money so that you could continue operation. And I guess this leads me to a larger perhaps related question. And that is the question of class within the movement. Sort of broadly defined as people who are established; who have, certainly not wealthy but (have) an income that would enable them to have certain benefits and to have a lot more to lose. I am dealing with this within the Jackson movement that (John) Salter and Medgar and Ed King were involved in. But people like R.L.T. Smith for example, I guess you were his (unofficial campaign manager). (Break)

Dittmer:

... (T)he Kennedy administration that got people out of the streets. And I found some evidence so far to back that up, not as much as I want but the the NAACP files are remarkably fair when it comes to those final days when Current and (Roy) Wilkins and the rest of them were in town (Jackson). There is a conversation at the Kennedy Library that I want to get that hasn't been released yet. One of the Kennedy tapes when John Kennedy talked to Mayor Allen Thompson of Jackson for a half an hour the week after Medgar's death. I think that would be interesting as well.

But what do you think in terms of class as a problem in organizing?

Moses:

f Well, the entré into the general community is via that class structure however thin it is. That certainly was my entré into Mississippi. Amzie himself belonged to that

Moses (cont.): class. And Amzie had a filling station that he had had a lot of economic trouble with and SCEF had bailed him out once. And he had a substantial brick house there and his job with the post office, although they had kept him down in terms of his hours or in terms of any kind of advancement or anything like that. But he had some kind of economic status very clearly. Now he used that for the benefit of the community and so he himself had very close ties with just the plain people and was not on such good terms with the rest of that class structure, teachers.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: Because in Mississippi a big part of that structure was the teachers, maybe ninety percent.

Dittmer: The hardest to move?

Moses: You couldn't, I mean you couldn't even talk to them at that point because their jobs, they were so terrified of losing their jobs. So it was just this small group of people who were not teachers, but still they were the entre into the community in most cases. There may be some cases of people that moved in apart from that but I don't know of any. I don't know how the Muslims moved in for example when they set up. It would be interesting to find out.

Dittmer: Yeah.

Moses: Now then what inevitably happened is that you may once you are in and organizing you make your own contacts. And so around this a different base for leadership would emerge. Then, but then, see in Mississippi at least until Atlantic City problem came up, we made every effort I think to seek the widest common basis for the program and to stick to that, which was the voting and around which everyone could unite. So what might have been, you know, this kind of friction between different economic groups within the black community was not forthcoming during this early period except of course it came forth in, when we had the (McComb) demonstration. I guess-- because Bryant still to this day does not think that that was the right move, having those demonstrations. I mean he talked about it when we were out there, you know, when I stayed over at his house one time. It was clear from listening to him talk that he did not agree to that. I don't know if he thought that ruined the movement or not. I didn't try to question.

And there is I think just an inherent part of his personality also, not to like want to have that kind of disorientation, kind of dislocation about that.

Dittmer: I found the same-- excuse me-- I was just going to say that I found the same thing true in Jackson when it came to the question of boycott versus demonstrations. That you had this conservative leadership of I.S. Sanders and R.L.T. Smith and others, who were supporting the boycott and the negotiations process, but once you got out into the streets why they just drew back in a very big hurry.

Moses: And that is also a NAACP orientated trait. And it may be that they, it may be training through the NAACP and that whole orientation, or maybe that the NAACP would also attract people who had that orientation, or both things. So that clear you had to work-- and Amzie talked about that all the time, about the NAACP bringing lawyers in and so forth. But Amzie had just gotten to the point where I think he felt, you know, they weren't going to get it. And you had to move beyond that kind of procedure even on the voting.

But the class thing I think came to head at Atlantic City. I think the analysis that went for proposal by the Democratic Party seemed to me basically they were the NAACP, more established people from the large cities in the delegation. And the rural delegates, delegates from the rural areas voted against it. But there is no, I don't think there is any, there is no roll call vote.

Dittmer: Yeah, I was-- and too you had people like Smith who was not in the delegation, was he?

Moses: No, he wasn't there, he wasn't. And that was a -- because Smith-- I mean the people who organized the FDP in Jackson-- I mean that was the other thing of course that I think the class thing came in consciously in the organizing of the FDP, there were some problems. I think wherever possible people were looking to get people who would represent really the economic status of Mississippi, that is that most people are poor. So there was an effort in the organizing by which to get as, in the context of Mississippi, as radical a delegation as you could. And people that would stand up, you know, when they got to Atlantic City.

So Smith was not in the Jackson delegation which in some ways was not, was sad because of his previous involvement and commitment. I use to question whether Smith was a Democrat (laughter).

Dittmer: Somebody said that he was a Whig (laughter). I just have something that I, somebody recording it was on a SNCC staff meeting in June of '64 mentioning Mrs. (Fannie Lou) Hamer's Congressional Campaign and quoting you as saying, "Note that Jackson Negroes are embarassed that Mrs. Hamer is representing them. She is too much a representative of the masses." So it worked the other way too, that the people

Dittmer (cont.): who were, say the upper-middle class or the upper class in the black community were not only embarrassed but resented this new kind of indigenous leadership that SNCC represented and fostered.

Moses: Yeah. Yeah, I think in that, I think that went pretty deep. I think that also would probably include your established civil rights leadership. Because I think the feeling was that the leadership should somehow be filtered through an education process. Any leadership that is to emerge of black people, especially as a potential national voice, to be a figure, that they should have been filtered in some way. So that I think, that would not just be a concern for your local black educated class, but of the national groupings also as well.

Dittmer: Ed King speculates that one of the reasons that in the Johnson compromise in Atlantic City (that) they named Aaron (Henry) and him as the two delegates was that they didn't want to have to deal with Mrs. Hamer on the floor. Speculation, but do you think that was ... ?

Moses: I think, of course Bayard-- I mean we reacted very strongly when they told us that they had chosen these two people. One way of taking the action was that you were reacting about whom they had chosen, you know. And Bayard was quick to say well you can have Mrs. Hamer if that is who you want. Although it isn't clear whether he had any authority in, and it seems that he did not actually do, was not in on the choosing.

Dittmer: Yeah.

Moses: But, I think-- it is just-- I think that the same thing was operating there. There is a question about calling Mrs. Hamer an illiterate woman, but I don't know if that has been documented, you know, on any transcript or anything like that. But this question came up in conversation with Taylor Branch.

Dittmer: Certainly she had that feeling from, judging from interviews I have read of her, adamantly saying that she was being patronized by people like Bayard (Rustin) and (Roy) Wilkins, and to a degree by Aaron (Henry) I think who she had probably singled out more than anybody else at the delegation as someone who she thought was selling them out.

I think-- maybe I am wrong-- but I think I believe and I am going to say that Aaron (Henry) is probably the most important Mississippi politician over the last quarter century (laughter).

Moses: Yeah, he probably is.

Dittmer: He has survived and I think was the key figure in the transition.

Moses: No, there is no question about that. I am sure.

Dittmer: That to a great extent he made the Hodding Carters possible. Until I started reading the Delta Democratic Times and his editorials in his period 1964-'65, I had not realized how anti-movement he was. Of course the irony is that he comes across as sort of a champion civil rights figure of that period.

And that is one of the things that I am interested in investigating further is just how these connections were made and on what level.

Moses: I think see what really happened to the movement-- and it was something that I was aware of at that time-- was that we were struggling to try and bring Mississippi up to par with the rest of the country. That is, that is what in effect what was accomplished, what happened is Mississippi is no longer the national symbol for racism. And it is right in there doing the same kind of thing that everybody else is doing.

Dittmer: Right. Which is progress of a sort.

Moses: And that was-- and I remember that going into the Summer Project. That Civil Rights bill had been passed, or people knew it was going to be passed, and it seemed to me that white people in Mississippi were reacting against it and we were just defenseless. I mean it was during that period they were burning down churches left and right. There was no way even to bring national attention to that. And it was in my mind as though well they have passed this law, it doesn't affect Mississippi at all because the public accommodations, black people are not going to be eating in those places. And it leaves Mississippi just isolated and it is like the whole rest of the country will be moving into a new phase with race relations and so forth, but as far as Mississippi is concerned it was just, you know, be back where it was.

And in some respects the rest of the civil rights leadership had opted, had agreed, their strategy was to get these things which will have an effect on the enlightened parts of the South so to speak, and then get your strength and move on Mississippi at the end.

Dittmer: This encircling?

Moses (cont.): wave going through the state in reaction to national as well as local, you know, activity.

Dittmer: I have a couple of other questions about McComb. Do you have time to answer them?

Moses: Yes.

Dittmer: I also got a million others but I am not going to keep you too much longer. Well anyway. What I am looking at in the paper is probably focusing on Freedom Summer in McComb. And I know that originally the decision was made, wasn't it, that McComb would not be the subject of a, that there would not be a summer project there because it was...

Moses: Not that there wouldn't be a summer project. The decision was that southwest Mississippi would not have volunteers. Which was a decision that satisfied actually two very different constituents. One being those among the staff who were feeling the need to have an all black project(s) where they could escape from the volunteers. And people in the Justice Department and other places who were worried about violence in the southwest area. So we decided not to have, to have this area-- McComb was to have a project but it just wasn't to have volunteers in the project.

Dittmer: Now about that question, I forgot in relation to this. Once you left in late '61, early '62, was there any kind of a SNCC presence in the McComb area until '64? I know that Hollis (Watkins) and Curtis (Hayes) went to Hattiesburg.

Moses: Right

Dittmer: Was there any thing left? Had your relations with Bryant and others in the area been broken? Or did you still have contacts there?

Moses: We still had contacts and basically i, we did McComb as a part of Reverend Smith's campaign. So for the winter of '61, '62 we had meetings there, you know. But we didn't have an office, I mean we didn't have anyone to man an office and I guess the movement there had gotten to a point where we had a local person that we could set up. And the students, well we were busy with all of the McComb students in Jackson because we had the responsibility for them, kind of watching over them. And then after that we went-- Amzie came down in the winter or spring of '62 and he was ready to have the Delta project take off. So that

Moses (cont.): summer we were up there. So we didn't, we didn't have really the manpower to keep a presence in southwest Mississippi. I don't think we, we didn't have anyone in either Walthall or McComb or Amite (county).

So all that was involved was my moving down, you know, to visit. I mean I would periodically swing through particularly Amite (county) and McComb, you know, and check on various people, talk to people. But we didn't have an actual organizer in any of these places until '64.

Dittmer: Until the early summer of '64? Once the Project, the over-all Project began, the McComb project was sort of part of that?

Moses: Part of that. I am not sure who was assigned.

Dittmer: There are a number of names. Ralph Featherstone for one. Mendy Samstein for another, you know, these people are recorded as being there. Now I don't know who was ...

Moses: Ralph (Featherstone) didn't go because he-- after the murders Ralph opted to go to Neshoba. So he went right on straight there.

Dittmer: Jesse Harris was he ... ?

Moses: Jesse might have gone.

Dittmer: Yeah, that is another name that But I am sort of uncertain on chronology because it just sort of-- apparently people were going, were in and out quite a bit that summer.

Moses: But there had to be, there was to be somebody. I would have to look at the records. There was to be somebody who was, you know, based in (McComb). (Break)

Featherstone went straight to Neshoba. Now-- I don't think, I think he stayed in Neshoba county all that summer.

Dittmer: What about the decision to bring in, to send volunteers eventually? How was ...

Moses: Well, I think it was (Jim) Forman who did that, and Dorie (Ladner). Dorie was very upset about not having, having an area where white people were excluded and so forth. And she began taking white people down to Natchez. I don't know if she took them down to McComb or what. But Forman came through on that and took the first group down into McComb. He was also upset by it.

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Dittmer: What was the nature of his being upset?

Moses: Well Forman I guess basically was, you know, thought it should be integrated. Because even though Forman went into the organization around the (time) when it took its nationalist turn, he himself always had more of a position as a socialist and a position on integration however loosely because that never got content, I mean what integration was. But on that question I think he was not a nationalist in the sense of well wanting to set up something that was racially exclusive in any area or point, or for any project. Or even I don't think for giving people kind of an umbrella, willing to be under, within a larger context which was racially mixed and having some kind of enclave that they could operate out of which was racially homogenous. I don't think that Forman saw that as a way of operating.

So I remember he came through and we came through with a list I think. Sutherland?

Dittmer: Okay, yeah there is a book.

Moses: Right. And they went on down, I think they took some other people down with them and began to And then I guess there were some of the white volunteers also who were feeling strong. And I am not sure how Dennis (Sweeney) to McComb.

Dittmer: I spoke with Bob Stone who was one of the white volunteers there.

Moses: In McComb?

Dittmer: Yeah. In fact he has some papers that he let me see that were rather interesting stuff. Some of which he had written and other things that were going on. But his impression of McComb was that they did not have the kinds of interracial problems that were recorded in other sections of the state during the summer in McComb. And his, at least that was his perception and his reasoning was that because the level of terror was so high that it drew people closer together. Did you spend much time in McComb that summer and what some of your impressions of the project there, and the white community as opposed to other areas in the state?

Moses: I didn't, I went through there a couple of times. But I didn't spend any real extensive time. I think I went down there after they had been shot into.

Dittmer: There was a bombing too of ...

Moses: Yeah, well Mendy (Samstein) I guess, Mendy was down there when the shooting occurred or when the bombing occurred. I guess he wanted, he was anxious to get out of Jackson. And

Moses (cont.): there also, that more experienced people should go down if they were going to have white people. So that could, that might have been a big factor too if Mendy was down there because Mendy of course knew the staff people.

Dittmer: Yeah.

Moses: And had very good relations with them. And would also I think be able to handle the volunteers in terms of working with them. Maybe help smooth over some of those rough encounters or something like talking to the volunteers. So I think, I am sure that that had a lot to do with the tone of the project.

Dittmer: What sort of cooperation did COFO with the same the kinds of people who you were working with in '61 there? Bryant, Mrs. Quin, and others.

Moses: Well, Mrs. Quin was working, she, I think right straight through she was always, you know, supporting the movement in the way in which she did, could support it. And (Webb) Owens and the Nobles I guess. I mean I think Bryant, one thing he was geographically isolated because Beartown is kind of geographically separated and it is not heavily populated over there. I never had the feeling that he had a great influence with the leadership of the people in Burglundtown that we had gotten together. And I think Owens had much more impact and influence with them. Owens was the person that went around with me, you know, to collect the money. And he made his rounds daily because he wasn't working, you know, this was a big part of his life. He was really committed to seeing this through. And so he would be, he was the kind of person who would be talking to, you know, those key people.

And so I don't think that aside from Bryant and maybe some of the people that he had very close influence over in Beartown, I don't think, I don't have the sense of the rest of the community being affected by that. I remember that he did start a NAACP youth group with his son in Beartown. But I think that Joe Martin was a part of that, it would be interesting to ask him.

Dittmer: Yeah.

Moses: Because he was from Beartown. I think he was a part of that youth group. But it would be good to check, he might have some real recollections of that.

Dittmer: So it would not really be until post-Freedom Summer, after the wave of bombings took place in McComb and on into '65 that Bryant would once again sort of be the community leader in terms of-- maybe community leader isn't the right

Dittmer (cont.): word. But he would one of a handful of people singled out by whites who for one reason or another were more than willing to negotiate. And from the correspondance that I am finding in '65-'66 he seems to be the person that whites are most interested in talking to, and the person who is getting the strongest criticism from FDP kinds of people in the area. With Harry Bowie sort of trying to hold everything together, but being regarded as something of a, as too dangerous by certainly the white establishment.

Moses: You know that period I don't have any first hand acquaintance with.

Dittmer: But that is one of the things that I am interested in looking at. Is what happens in these communities in this period sort of 1965-'68? What kind of leadership do you have, how has the movement changed that community in terms of the way it addresses its problems.

Moses: Yeah. Well the thing in McComb was that we never did get an organization, 'cause they might talk about undermining the NAACP, but we never tried to set up an organization that would be direct competition with the NAACP, not even say a branch of COFO.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: And in fact with COFO we didn't use it as a vehicle for setting up local organizations, that came with FDP. Which in some senses was more an indigenous and local effort, in the sense that it didn't involve any of the national civil rights organizations. And it did have a clear rationale and a clear vehicle for establishing leadership, and the leadership was to, and should be local people. People who were registered or wanted to register to vote, wanted to participate in local politics.

So there for the first time was a clear vehicle for grass roots organization, and that was the only one actually which we encouraged to try to use to organize groups that would have an identity. Because I remember in McComb people after '61, after the summer, people were, you know, very curious to know what was SNCC, and how can we join SNCC, then we have some kind of identification with SNCC.

Dittmer: Sell memberships like the NAACP (laughter).

Moses: I guess where we missed the point which we could have done was the distribution or selling of the Student Voice, something like that.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: Setting the basis in the South for selling then a student paper, because people I think would have identified with it. But we weren't thinking right, you know, in terms of those terms. But we were not trying to organize at that point in competition to say a local NAACP chapter deliberately because we weren't, we were anxious not to.

And of course there was a discussion in SNCC as to what kind of organization should SNCC be? And should it have chapters? And all of that, I mean that was an ongoing discussion. So there wasn't any organization that was left out of the movement. So it would-- I mean there were new people that emerged I guess.

Dittmer: So it was mainly FDP being more in McComb and representing their ...

Moses: Well somebody like Joe Martin I think is a very good case to try and ...

Dittmer: Yeah, I hope to talk with him.

Moses: Because he is certainly coming out of the movement and certainly has had a wide experience through participating in marches in different places in Mississippi.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: And then you are moving into this leadership position in his hometown. It doesn't seem that he has a very visible role, I mean that white people in general would be aware of, as they are aware of Bryant say. But certainly, clearly a very important role in terms of institutions. So I don't know how many other people there are like Joe.

Dittmer: So there was this consciousness from the beginning that FDP was going to be apart from COFO? I mean was there talk for example of founding a COFO party that was ... ?

Moses: No, that was clear. I mean was COFO--see COFO was always tenuous because noone trusted it.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: I mean that was a problem. SNCC didn't, NAACP didn't, SCLC was happy with it because it provided them with a vehicle which they otherwise wouldn't have had working in the state. And CORE was happy with it for the same reason. And it basically was, you know, was put together you had Aaron Henry and Medgar (Evers) and so we could work with them, you know, to get this kind of umbrella group. But the SNCC staff didn't-- you know

Moses (cont.): a lot of us were under heavy criticism, you know, a lot. So it wasn't the kind of thing that you could put a lot of energy into. Because if people, if your basic staff that you are counting on for organizing have a real ambivalence, you know, about this organization and its existence and what it really does, you can't pour real energy into organizing (for it), they won't do it.

Dittmer: You hear a couple of things about-- one (is) COFO equaled SNCC. The resentment on the part of NAACP and others that SNCC was making all the decisions for COFO. The feeling that (Dave) Dennis described to me from CORE is that he had some problems with the front office and COFO getting credit for projects that CORE wishes that they would have-- in fact I guess there was a problem with the Summer Project when CORE jumped ahead and announced-- national CORE-- announced more or less as though it was its idea. Then that CORE, that COFO was simply a paper organization, put together in order to please the foundations, to channel funds in through VEP (Voter Education Project).

Moses: Well I never--let me take that last one first. I never thought that because my own feeling was that-- and it was expressed by people around the state many times and was very strong in McComb-- people wanted to have the feeling that all of their organizations were working together.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: In Mississippi. And I think, I am sure that this has to do with the nature of the opposition (that) we were talking about before with these highly organized at the state level, the violence and opposition. So I think people felt threatened to the point where they really felt the need for the unity among themselves to confront, you know, the opposition.
And this is what I was responding to, I think, in seeking to organize COFO initially, the initial, I mean what prompted me in terms of talking to Dave (Dennis), and to Medgar and Aaron (Henry). To try and get a vehicle for this, because I viewed it also as something very positive, that was working for people in the state. I mean if you had in the state this real strong feeling for a need for unity then that becomes a very strong vehicle for building something. Because it makes it possible to think of a common program. So that certainly, certainly started. We would have to go back and look at the record because my feeling is that my, that motivation and everything was there, I remember feeling it in McComb in '61 and beginning to act on it when we went to Jackson.

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Moses (cont.): Now my feeling is that that predated the foundation discussions, or at least our knowledge of the foundation discussions. COFO, the negotiations about setting up COFO was under way prior to ...

Dittmer: Oh, that is interesting .

Moses: And maybe it would be important to check that out because that might just scotch that hypothesis, that was the reason for its coming into being.

The problems about the projection and who got credit for what were always with us, but they seemed, I think they were problems of the national organizations.

Dittmer: Yeah.

Moses: SNCC, CORE, NAACP, SCLC. And they got carried from battleground to battleground. I mean they were just-- certainly CORE in discussing how it should participate in COFO, what they wanted and which we agreed to was a geographical area so they could have visibility, so they could identify this as CORE's project. So that was always a question, always a problem in COFO, that is that this, which organization would get credit for what work. But the thing is that none of the organizations could complain I don't think because all during that period everyone's income rose.

Dittmer: Yeah.

Moses: So SNCC's budget got bigger and they raised money and at the same time that COFO was raising money. And CORE also. And I am sure the same thing for the NAACP and SCLC. So it isn't, no one could say this grouping here in Mississippi is somehow detracting, you know, the overall ability of the different organizations to raise money because that just, it turned out not to be true. In fact it seemed that people were so happy to find one area where all the organizations were working together that it spurred contributions. It certainly spurred interest in Mississippi. A lot of people I think came to try and do something and help in Mississippi because it was a place where they could work with all the organizations.

Dittmer: Yeah.

Moses: You know without alienating this friend over here who was in this organization-- not that that person was in Mississippi--but it was someone that they wanted to work with.

Dittmer: Did you see a consciousness developing among people in the communities where you were working as being COFO, or part of COFO?

Moses: Yeah, it was and I remember June Johnson, she was saying in Greenwood that people were asking her what has happened to COFO. And this was after FDP was, you know, got launched, because FDP kind of ~~took over COFO and the organizations~~. And it was, it was difficult to get, to give a real expression of COFO. I mean you could do it around the program, and as long as we had the voting program as a clear voting program, you could do it. Because all those complicated factors, all those different organizations, national, local, you know, all of that; everyone could get into it.

But then when the voting got mixed with politics, so the money was cut off from FDP, so you couldn't use COFO then. You had to do the voting with MFDP. Money was cut off from VEP.

Dittmer: VEP, yeah.

Moses: Then you had to use FDP and there wasn't any other clear vehicle for COFO at least-- I mean we didn't have the time to organize such a program, or the people. Say as something like a Headstart or some kind of educational program for people in the state. Talking with people, people were talking to us about these kinds of things.

And of course-- the other program which would have been ideal for COFO would have been the literacy (program). If that had ever been able to, you know, complete itself.

Dittmer: You were quite interested in that weren't you?

Moses: Well, you know that it was a former teacher of mine...

Dittmer: At Hamilton?

Moses: Blythe. I had gotten in the literacy early and was looking at talking to someone in Atlanta who was doing program instruction and I was interested in trying to use it for literacy. And then when I found Blythe, that he was in that area. He had left Hamilton and was working with Diabold. I went and talked with him. And then we talked to Courier at the Taconic Foundation and then he agreed to finance it.

And I went over with the idea that, of training our people down there to write the programs and actually building a force of technicians. So he was-- it was exciting-- he was very excited about it. But it turned out to be too good, so then people got to fighting about it. You know the story ...

Dittmer: I am not ...

Moses: Diabold and Blythe got to arguing about who owned the material.

Dittmer: Oh, I didn't know, I didn't.

Moses: So that is what happened. It ended up in a court case. It would be interesting to track that down. Because it is another way in which the society doesn't work. I mean it really pointed out to me how difficult it is to get anything thought to poor people. I mean here you have this program, I mean Tougaloo I guess with a budget of \$80,000 a year. They sent it through Tougaloo College-- the Taconic Foundation. They were paying Blythe, half of his salary with Diabold. And that included you pay his money and just as much you gave to Diabold.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: You know this consulting business. And here all of these SNCC workers, really a talented group of people from within SNCC who were working on this ... (Break) So you had these people, and we got, I mean we had an artist who came down from New York who was doing the drawings. And they were really beginning to-- and the other idea was to turn out these materials working with the local population. One thing that it struck me because I had begun to do some teaching in Greenville before it started just to get my feet wet, to see what it was like and reading the program materials and teaching adults to read. One thing that struck me was that (in) one of the programs they were teaching the word can and they had a picture of a garbage can, and so they couldn't teach it, I couldn't teach it to this-- it was a man---because when he saw that his reaction was a can, this garbage can. He couldn't get the "c" sound or any other sound.

So I mean it just struck me the importance of getting the materials to be relevant, based in the population. So that is the other thing that they were trying to do was get this immediate feedback and get materials which were based to people. So this idea apparently had some viability internationally and Blythe began to be called upon to talk to _____ groups and so forth. And the United Nations got interested in this kind of training. And that is when the thing, things got heavy. And so Diabold got interested I guess and in the materials themselves. And so then they went into a court case.

I suppose it might have been different if we had the foresight to try to have Blythe work full-time on it. And ask him if he would quit Diabold and then maybe if-- I don't know if we could have gotten Taconic and maybe some other foundations to agree to a long range funding, and fund Blythe to give him some security. I mean to take him on as a part of their staff or set him up with Tougaloo or part of their staff or some kind of arrangement. Than maybe we wouldn't have gotten into the problem.

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Dittmer: So once it got tied up in the courts that was it?

Moses: All that money, all that energy, all that vision, you know. And know one, no way to really, you know, get around it. And the movement had its own problems by then because this was '65.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: And so it really was off. But here, that would have been a beautiful unifying program for COFO. You could have sold that COFO. None of the constituents of COFO could have disagreed about that program. And you could have gotten it funded, and you could have set up, you could have reactivated all those COFO _____.

Dittmer: What was the major problem? Was it that after '65 you had the passage of the Civil Rights Bill, passage of the Voting Rights Act, finding areas where everyone-- a broader base for agreement and organization?

Moses: That was one-- I mean because you had to overcome the split at Atlantic City, right. But the only way to overcome that was programatically. You had to get a program, a unifying program that would, all your Mississippi people, your grass-roots people would all agree yes. See now they are all not agreeing. Some of them are saying Democratic Party, some of them are saying FDP, some want this and that. But everyone could agree yes we should teach everybody, teach our people how to read.

Dittmer: Right.

Moses: Right. There would be no opposition to that among your grass-roots (people). So the leaders would have to come in despite of their might wanting it to be organizationally attached or something like that. They would have to come in. And because it was a program really was linked to the COFO operation in the state, you know with SNCC, I am not sure if any, there may have been some CORE field secretaries training too, I am not sure. But basically we were just calling on anyone who was within SNCC, Mississippi field staff, who wanted to train themselves to do this. So it would have I think been a natural thing for COFO to do. But again you don't know-- I mean if that also not part of the whole move to dislocate the movement.

There was some funny things going on at Diabold because there was a guy there who was very curious about me when I was there talking. Talked to me at length and was saying that he was a representative of the Ford Foundation or something like-- knew people in the Ford Foundation-- and that, you

Moses (cont.): know, they were interested in some of the money that they sloughed off. We went through long discussions and everything and then it turned out, John (Blythe) said that the Diabold people found out that he had lied to them. He was parading as a mathematician and had said that he had got his Ph.d. from Princeton and everything. And it turned out that he hadn't and wasn't and they got rid of him. But he extracted an awful lot of information from me.

Dittmer: Huh. Well, I have to, I am picking up on bits and pieces. I have got something here. I don't know if I sent you a copy of this or not. But I went to the FBI, I asked the FBI in terms of my Freedom of Information Act request-- did I send you a copy of that. And this is over a year old. But this-- you can keep that if you like I have an extra.

But this just shows the pages that they have gotten, or that they are willing to admit that they have on each of these organizations. And I have been trying to break it down so that I can have access to them and of course am caught up in the middle of everything.

Moses: Certainly _____ (President of Tougaloo) was a key move. Because it would have been difficult to get that literacy program, you know, through, into the state and have a base in the state in some institution like Tougaloo. I mean Tougaloo was perfect.

Dittmer: Well, for future things too.

Moses: Yeah.

Dittmer: The poverty program I am tracking that through the Brown (University) connection now. You know _____, well just a short story on that. But _____ told me that-- of course he was fired and he had no inkling that he was going to be fired. He said he came to Tougaloo with the idea that, with the agreement, that he would be allowed to serve as president past age sixty-five. He said that he never would have left Wisconsin ... if he didn't have understanding. He had no idea before that meeting in early '64 I guess, the Board meeting, that anybody had any dissatisfaction with his work. When he asked Wes Hotchkiss who was on the United Church-- key member of the Board at the time-- what, who was leading the opposition and he mentioned one of the people most anxious to see him leave was Barnaby Keaning, the President at Brown. Well Keaning wasn't even on the Board. This was at the beginning of the Brown-Tougaloo relationship. And of course this was very important to Tougaloo at the time to have this connection. So _____ said that he wrote to Keaning

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Dittmer (cont.): shortly thereafter, try to get hold of him saying why is this, why are you opposing me? Got no answer but shortly thereafter got an angry letter from Hotchkiss saying that he should never have written Keating and that furthermore that Hotchkiss denied ever having told him.

Moses: Told him anything about it.

Dittmer: Of course the obvious thing-- I don't know how coincidental it is-- that we have learned since then and before he died he admitted it, all during this time Keating was working for the CIA.

Moses: Oh my God.

Dittmer: You know that is not just supposition. It was a fact-- not In these Times but maybe it was In these Times that brought this out a couple of years ago. And of course I was at Brown at the time and it got a big play. But Keating, in his, shortly before he died said yes I was working for the CIA all this time (and) I am proud of it, I was serving my country. So these are-- you know, again, maybe it was just the president of Brown wanting to establish Tougaloo as a respectable educational institution and not a civil rights college. But I don't believe that (laughter).

When you look at the massive FBI and I am uncovering that-- I mean a lot of it is already out of course-- the FBI surveillance at Atlantic City. And using the tap on King's phone to get information concerning FDP. And the people involved. Bill Moyers was right in the middle of that as the connection between ...

Moses: The White House ...

Dittmer: Yeah, Deke DeLoach was the FBI agent and Moyers was his contact. (Break) Yeah, here is an interesting letter. Were you aware or did you suspect the extent of the surveillance and of the high level efforts of the administration to get rid of you with as little problem as possible.

Moses: We heard, I mean during the time of the convention we hear about Johnson, you know, calling people, but I didn't know We heard that he was down to federal judgeship appointments, you know, and that kind of thing. But I guess I just was naive about the way in which the FBI works.

Dittmer: During the Congressional investigation (of the) late seventies why, I have some information on that. Apparently they had fifteen or twenty agents there who were actively working on mainly gathering intelligence to send back to Johnson. And as I said there for awhile when it was getting hot and heavy he (Johnson) was on the phone to Atlantic City about every five minutes. His logs are just full ... to Moyers, to Walter Jenkins who was his major operative on the floor. And to Connally and Russel and the other southern big whigs. And of course Reuther being flown in and whether it was paranoia or what he was generally alarmed at what you your doing.

Moses: Yeah.

Dittmer: And I can't believe that is was just that he honestly believed he would lose to Goldwater.

Moses: Oh no. What interests me is that there was no, no center of rallying within the Democratic Party, there was no place you could really get anyone to come out openly and lead and attack, you know, to support this. That is what, I just maybe feel that there was no real, the Party was hopeless.

Dittmer: At the end you couldn't count on anybody to make this an issue.

Moses: You couldn't-- it didn't have within it what was needed to lead some kind of frontal attack on the basic problems of the country. Because if you couldn't get people to do anything on this issue ... if everyone just, you know, saw their own particular personal position as somehow more important or in the long range evolution of the country... . Then it seemed like they really were, really devoid of any real substance. That is why I felt afterwards that the FDP should concentrate on an independent political organizing. It didn't seem to me-- and still nothing has changed.

Dittmer: Yeah, that is what I asked. It seems like ...

Moses: There is nothing ...

Dittmer: Here we have Mondale who was instrumental in the ...

Moses: I mean it is like this, that was his part of his price to move into this position

Dittmer: No, I can't get upset about any of the liberal gnashing of teeth that if Jessie Jackson runs why that will deprive Mondale the great candidate (laughter) the support he needs to win.