

# Betty Garman

. . . involved—these twenty people then elected the chairman as their spokesman. So in the spring of '64 John Lewis was reelected. . .

Q. Twenty people—that means there were ten states?

A. Yes. There were approximately ten—and the District. But I'm not sure—I'm sure it varied—but in the spring of 1964 there were not anywhere near twenty elected state representatives who came together as the coordinating committee. The organization had grown to about fifty or sixty people working full time in the field, whereas the decisions were made by this appendage of the sit-in movement, the coordinating committee who were full-time students, so there was a real conflict. The staff in December of '63 had . . .

Q. I don't really understand. The decisions were made by . . . ?

A. The decisions were made by full-time college students who were left over from the old sit-in protest groups. They were not the full-time field workers who were doing the voter registration and the political organizing, and so forth. In December of '63, the coordinating committee—these full-time students—decided to allow the full-time staff to elect two representatives to sit on the coordinating committee, plus each state project director—so it meant that Bob Moses, who was the Mississippi director, and Bill Hansen, who was the Arkansas director, and so forth, were also on the coordinating committee. And I guess it was a total of six, five or six then, of the full-time staff, were added to this coordinating committee. And the first meeting of the expanded coordinating committee was held in April of '64. But it was still a very unrepresentative body, because the full-time college students had a larger representation than the full-time staff. And the work of the organization was really done by the staff, while the decisions were made by these people who were old-time sit-in leaders.

Q. It's amazing to me that the staff tolerated that for so long.

A. Well, see, what happened was that the coordinating committee didn't really make crucial decisions. The formal structure was that, but the staff

made their own decisions while they were working in the field, and the hang-ups of the conflict never really came to the surface within the organization because people were not so much concerned with structure as long as they were autonomous in their various projects—which was also a policy: that projects would be autonomous, that people would have the right to do and experiment with what they wanted on the local level. So there was this individual autonomy that was always protected and probably still is. It was a very important part of SNCC.

Q. Then how did the influx of new people . . . ?

A. The influx of new people was largely white Northern and I think what happened . . . well, then there was a great deal of concern over *who* made that decision, or *who* made that decision, so in October of '64 there was a decision to plan a . . . well, it was a tentative suggestion really, it wasn't a decision . . . to plan a Black Belt Summer Project for the summer of '65 that would include eight or nine states. And this was presented in proposal form in a long research memorandum to the staff at its October '64 meeting, and a lot of the problems of . . .

Q. About how many were there who stayed on?

A. Well, there were about 100 summer workers who stayed on. Not all those 100 were added to SNCC staff, but a good fifty of them were. And in addition you have to understand that up until the spring of 1964 SNCC was structurally organized around the college unit, left over from the old protest days, of two people from each state coming to the coordinating committee. And those two people from each state were to have been elected by two representatives from each college in the state that had a protest group. And then the coordinating committee, which was these twenty people, I think, approximately, how many of the Southern states were . . .

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. What were the backgrounds of SNCC workers in those days?

A. Well, in Mississippi, there were Jesse Harris, Willie Morris, Willie Peacock, Emma Bell—all Mississippians.

Q. There were also non-Mississippians. What was their role?

A. They brought integration—showed the country that black and white could work together for a common goal.

Q. Now you said you joined SNCC in '63, '64?

A. Well, I went South in March of '64.

Q. What effect did the '64 Summer Project have on SNCC as an organization?

A. A great deal, because up to the summer of 1964 SNCC was largely an organization of Southern and Northern Negro students and some white students sprinkled in. The fact of the summer created a psychological problem as well as a real practical problem of how would the organization cope with decision-making, those kinds of problems, during the summer, particularly since in a lot of cases you had white Northern liberal college types coming down, who thought that they knew everything that was going to happen, or confident to the extent that they felt they could cope with the problems, and you had them put . . . you had to make them understand that they had to take orders from, so to speak, or take directions from the Southern Negro natives, who were less well educated and not as articulate by any means, and that caused a great deal of friction, both in the organization and in local project areas. And then in September, SNCC was faced with the question of expanding the staff, in September '64, and including all of these people who had been good workers during the summer.

. . . when this proposal was presented a lot of the problems from Summer '64, a lot of the resentment from Summer '64, a lot of the troubles of Summer '64, had never been discussed openly, or as a group, and so the immediate reaction to the Black Belt Summer Project was, look, I was in such-and-such a position during summer '64, we can't have a Black Belt project if this is the way it's going to be next year. Part of it was a problem of Southwest Georgia and Alabama and Arkansas being slighted during the Mississippi Summer, because Mississippi got all the money and all the focus and all the attention and all the care and so forth, and the other three states kind of dwindled . . . well, Mississippi got all the staff too, pretty much, and the other three states were kind of left to run their projects as best they could on a little bit of money and only a few staff and not very much attention from the Atlanta office.

Q. The Black Belt project wouldn't have excluded anybody, would it?

A. No, no, it wouldn't have excluded anybody, but, see, then there was all this "how are we going to pull off a Black Belt project if I, my project, my Southwest Georgia project, say, only got \$1,000 this summer to spend, and Mississippi spent such-and-such an amount," and, you know, we couldn't get ourselves together in terms of allocating funds and resources. How are we going to run a Black Belt project? Then there was the whole Mississippi

resentment and kind of hang-ups and problems with the white college kids . . . then as a result of these issues being raised, the whole question was raised, who made this decision that we should have a Black Belt summer project? Not that it was a decision yet, but just the fact that there was a group of people pushing the idea . . . People raised that question, who made this decision? And then another part of that same meeting was to determine procedure for putting people on staff, so there was also a question raised about *who* made *this* decision. And then people began to look internally and discover, not that they didn't know it but discovered they didn't have a structure to deal with any of these questions and they had no way to have decisions get made. And as a result of that a meeting was called for November of '64, where structure would be the topic of discussion. And at November '64—it's very hard to describe a whole meeting.

Q. Where was the meeting held?

A. It was in Mississippi, Waveland. Briefly what happened was that two, there were two sides to the structure issue. One group of people . . . and it's not a . . . one group here and one group there kind of situation. It's a lot of people in the center, a lot of people favoring a middle road, a lot of people who also, to whom it depended upon the issues and the circumstances as to what policy they supported, but the two extremes of the issue were one group of people who were for a very loose, practically no structure at all situation, and another group of people who were for a fairly strong executive committee that would be able to make decisions in-between coordinating committee meetings and that would be able to decide policy and have people responsible for carrying out that policy and so forth. The loose structurists were people who believed that everybody could be responsible for their own actions and that people would function if you didn't pressure them and that the work couldn't be defined and various things like that. The strict structurists were more for, let's get on the move and not let people kind of float around and take ten years to decide what kind of program they want and five years to carry it out. Let's move forward, let's have more of that emphasis—I *think*. It's very hard . . . the debate went on for such a long time and the issues were not as clear as I have made them seem still. So it's very hard to put it . . .

Q. Who were some of the leaders of the two groups?

A. Again, see, they weren't leaders. Bob Moses played an important role. He was a spokesman for the loose kind of structure. He played an important role until March, I guess, or February. I don't believe he came to the May

'65 staff meeting. And Forman was one of the leading figures on the tight-structure side. But that's about all you can say, in terms of leaders and so forth. Again, it wasn't so much a question of leaders and followers but a lot of people—maybe as many as thirty or forty people—having very strong opinions and being very committed to having particular kind of things carried out. And Forman and Moses certainly didn't go around and twist arms to get votes, because the debates went on for weeks at a time. And there was no question in anyone's mind that we could come to a vote and cut off discussion. It was more sort of that we reach a consensus. Consensus has always been the way that SNCC has operated.

Q. I'm trying to identify the people who were saying these different things. Do you think that in identifying them, you could say that whites tended to favor one position, and Negroes . . .

A. Yes. Yes, I think you could say that, with reservations and qualifications, that the Northern whites tended more to favor the loose structure, and that the . . . it's hard to say that . . . there were so many people . . . there were people who changed their position in the middle of the debate. There were three staff meetings on this question, and each one was a week to ten days long. So it was maybe a total of twenty-five days of debate, stretched out over eight months. In that period, people shifted and changed. But, pretty much, the Northern whites were the loose structurists and . . . I can't say much beyond that. There were Southern Negroes and Northern Negroes on both sides. It's hard to say that they were for or against the one thing or another.

Q. You couldn't make any generalizations about Southerners and Northerners?

A. No. No.

Q. How about the problem of educated people versus relatively uneducated people?

A. I don't know. I don't think that people chose sides on that basis. There were discussions about people who had education and people who were less articulate, people who had gone to college and people who had not gone to college. The concern on most people's part, anyway—and this was not so much a knock-down, drag-out fight—but the concern was that all of the debates and the discussions and so forth were . . . a lot of them were excluding people who were less well-educated and less articulate and who couldn't dig what was happening. And then there was also an issue of how do we make SNCC open enough so that less articulate, less well-educated



people can participate on an equal basis with people who are educated. And that was a problem that I don't think the orientation really ever faced. I think that people were pretty honest about that and tried to grapple with the problem, but I don't think that the problem was ever resolved—and I'm not sure there is a solution anyway.

Q. Was there any split between male and female on this issue?

A. Not that I was aware of.

Q. Did all these debates eventually result in some structural changes?

A. Yes. In February of '65, at the staff meeting in Atlanta, an executive committee was elected. There was a decision made that SNCC should have an executive committee comprised of two representatives from each state and ten people elected at large.

Q. None of this on the college unit system?

A. No, nothing college. Two representatives from each state, one of whom will be the project director, ten people elected at large, plus the executive secretary, the chairman and Miss Baker as the . . . they all had votes.

[Interruption]

Q. We were talking about the structural reform. You were talking about the executive committee and who was on it. Were there other structural reforms, other changes?

A. Not really. Well, see, I should go back to October—at least in October or November, I don't remember at which meeting, there was a firm decision which was not disputed by anyone that the coordinating committee would be the basic decision-making unit, and the coordinating committee was every member of the SNCC staff, everyone who worked for SNCC—put it that way, because there were some people who didn't get paychecks who were considered SNCC staff. Then, once the coordinating committee was recognized as the basic decision-making unit, the felt need was for this executive committee, to carry on things between meetings and to do administrative kinds of talks rather than making basic policy. In other words, they would decide how to and who was going to carry out certain decisions of the coordinating committee. The other structural change was the establishment of a secretariat, which was a three-man . . .

Q. This was in February '65?

A. Yes. This was a three-man administrative committee, that included the chairman, the executive secretary and the program secretary, and they were all of equal . . . they would all have equal power, equal vote, equal as spokesmen for the organization, although their job functions were defined in

different ways. The chairman was the spokesman, the public figure, the one who appeared in publicity and so forth and so on; the executive secretary was in charge of fund-raising and Northern programs; and the program secretary was in charge of the Southern organizing program.

Q. Had there been a program secretary before?

A. There was a program something . . . chairman? . . . something . . . before, and it never really amounted to very much, but there had been . . . that job had been filled.

Q. Did these changes correspond to any shift in the actual people who were leaders of SNCC?

A. Not really. There has always been, and I suspect continues to be, . . . well, to the extent that there are leaders and followers, there have always been a highly articulate, hard-working, strong leadership group. Now there have been severe differences of opinion within the leadership group, so it's not a solid body, but the names of the people who stick out as the people who are recognized nationally, and so forth, as SNCC field secretaries, are primarily that leadership group, and by that *only* I mean they're respected, listened to, looked up to, by people who have been with SNCC a few number of years, or who haven't had the experience, and so forth—but again there's no set direction for that leadership group. Everything I say really relates to before March of '66. I really just have no way of saying this is such now or this is what's happening now. There's just no way for me to tell.

Q. What role did Bob Moses play in all this?

A. It's very hard to say. I'm not sure I know how much effect and influence he really had. But Bob was a different kind of person, because he was . . . well, he was the kind of person who inspired awe and a great deal of respect, and commanded himself in such a way that you respected him. So, for example, in a meeting situation, he would never get involved in the kind of petty details of the problem at hand that was being discussed, but he would hold back all of his comments until an appropriate time when he felt he could summarize and direct the entire course of the discussion. And he was capable of doing that. He would come in with a brilliant statement, which just clearly cut through all of the mess and all of the tangle and all of the debate, said exactly what probably three-quarters of the people wanted to have said and allowed the discussion to move on. Beyond that, there's no doubt that he was influential because of the qualities that he had. I mean, he has real leadership qualities, probably still does. But beyond that all I can

say is that he had a great deal of influence and a great number of people listened to his every word and developed their philosophies along the line of his and so forth.

Q. Do you think SNCC looks for different kinds of qualities in its leaders now than it did back then?

A. No.

Q. Or in the beginning?

A. It's hard to answer. The reason it's hard to answer is that there's always been a suspicion of leadership, there's always been a tendency to . . . by leadership, what I mean is this sense, when I say a suspicion of leadership, I mean a suspicion of any strong, central authority that says, "You must adhere to such-and-such a policy because this is the organization's policy." Leaders, people who are capable of articulating something in a good way or people who are capable of helping and giving ideas and suggestions, working with people on their organizing, are leaders and they've always been respected, but they're not thought of as leadership in the traditional sense that the structure has a president and that's where the leadership . . . So it's hard to say and I really don't know now what it means, look for qualities in a leader. Yet I'm not so sure that . . .

Q. Well, there are types of leadership other than authoritarian.

A. Sure there are, sure there are. I'm not sure, as I say, whether there's any change in what qualities people respect about someone.

Q. Now these structural changes in '64-'65; at that time, were there real changes in the kinds of relationships that existed between the staff and office?

A. No. The first structural changes alleviated some of the problems of resources and personnel and communication and so forth, but didn't alleviate the problems enough so that they didn't . . . so that they recurred. The same problems recurred again and again and again and, I suspect, still recur now. And there was another structural change in November of '65, which was very minor, really. And that was a change in the manner in which the executive committee was elected and I can't even remember what it was changed to. I know it was ten people at large. Maybe the other had fewer people at large or more people at large, I can't remember. Anyway, it was changed some way. It wasn't really crucial. One thing that did happen was that there was a finance committee and a personnel committee established, I believe in the spring of '65. Those two committees did function, particularly the finance committee. It functioned for a while in alleviating some of the financial problems. They set up good systems of allocation of



money and made certain that requests were reasonable in terms of the amount of money that we had coming and tried to keep it balanced so that everybody would get his share.

Q. What was the significance of the Freedom High?

A. Well, the Freedom High, you could call them the loose-structure people. The significance in terms of SNCC was, I think, that it put SNCC . . . well, the fact of the Freedom High movement and its existence over a period of this year, put SNCC in a position where the organization did not move forward in terms of actual gains in the broader community. That's not really true, I don't mean it that way, I don't mean there weren't any gains, but I mean that the organization's ability to develop new programs, the organization's ability to get more people involved was curtailed in some ways by the debate over the structure.

Q. Did the Freedom High movement have other concerns, other than the actual structure of the organization?

A. Sure, but I think that the other concerns . . . it's very hard to sort this all out, because probably a Freedom High person would say, "Well, I care that people . . . when people work they can choose the kind of work they want to do and they don't have to work under pressure and so forth and so on." Well, the non-Freedom High people will say, "Sure, OK, I agree with that, but the question is when you're in a movement situation, you know, and you've got scarce resources and you've got only a certain amount of money to allot to people, do you let a cat who's trying to find himself in some way stay on the payroll for a year and do nothing?" See, so . . . well, I mean, that's not even a good way to put it. The concerns of Freedom High people also were . . . well, what I'm really trying to say is that I think that anything that a Freedom High person says, "This is my concern or this wasn't my concern," that the non-Freedom High people will say, "Sure, that was a concern of mine, too." And it's very difficult to say that the Freedom High were the people who wanted no exploitation and the people who wanted all these marvelous, wonderful, idealistic kinds of things . . .

Q. Was there any disagreement on what short-range goals to go for between

. . .

A. There was *never* any discussion of real goals, never any discussion of real goals, never really any discussion of program, so there were never differences over program, because they were never brought out in the open, because structure hung us up so much. There was an attempt, or there was a feeling . . . I would say this . . . the Freedom High people were concerned that we

discuss program first and structure second and the non-Freedom High people wanted to discuss structure first and get it out of the way and then discuss program. And we always ended up discussing structure first, because people wanted to get rid of it, get it out of the way. The Freedom High people felt that structure flowed from program—which I agreed with—but on the other hand the structure seemed to overwhelm so many people because the structural problems in their functioning were real to them. They didn't have money, they didn't get communications, they didn't have typewriters, they didn't have cars, cars broke down, couldn't get 'em fixed, all those kinds of things. Those daily frustrations overrode their concern about what kind of program they were running. They wanted to get structure out of the way, figuring that if a structure were there, then these little frustrations would be solved and they could run a program. The Freedom High people said, "Well, we better talk about a program first and *then* we talk about structure because it flows from the program."

Q. Did the loose structuralists tend to be people who just worked out in the field, whereas the tight structuralists were office people?

A. No. No, absolutely not.

Q. Was it the reverse?

A. It wasn't the reverse and it wasn't that way either. I think there was probably a good representation of office and non-office people on both sides—although you can't say things, but it doesn't really mean anything, but most of the Atlanta people were tight structuralists or tighter-structure people. Most of Southwest Georgia wanted a tight structure. Most of Arkansas wanted a tight structure. Alabama wasn't really on its feet enough to have representation. Mississippi was split because Mississippi was where all the people were added to the staff and where this new influx of people had come, so Mississippi was split, down the middle practically, and there were field people in Mississippi, of course, but they were even split—so it wasn't Mississippi against Georgia, Arkansas and Atlanta. And there were some Atlanta people who were Freedom High also. I mean, it was all mixed up and I don't think that it's . . . people did say that all the office people were for tight structure, all the field people were for loose structure. That's not true. It's just simply not true, because some of the biggest arguers for tight structure were the Southwest Georgia, Arkansas, and a few (at that point) Alabama staff people, who felt they were getting screwed because there was a loose structure and their needs weren't being met and so they couldn't function in the field.

Q. This is sort of part of the thing you mentioned before about resentment against Mississippi for getting all the resources.

A. Right, right. Part of it. On the other hand, there were Mississippi projects who complained and were penniless and couldn't function, they felt, because they didn't have funds and they didn't have such-and-such and so forth. They were for tight structure too. So it's just not easy to put it in one bag or another.

Q. Was SNCC at this time sort of in a transition period, looking for new projects to work on?

A. Sure. Well, it wasn't so much looking for new projects to work on but looking to expand. SNCC always had ideas about where they were going to go next, if they only had the staff. We want to move into South Carolina, move into North Carolina, move in here, move in there. It wasn't a question of looking around for new places, it was a question of getting the new places under way. And Alabama did get started in the fall of '64. A great number of staff from Mississippi went into Alabama. No, I'm sorry. Around the time of summer, we started putting staff in Alabama and after the summer was over, that's when people like Stokely and George Green and so forth stayed in Alabama—spring '65. There was a hope that people would move into Alabama in the summer '64, but I guess it never materialized until the spring and then people moved in.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. Would you like to add something to this, to complete the picture?

A. No. I don't know what I'd add—unless you want to know about specific areas.

Q. Well, one specific area comes to mind and that is the whole question of whites in the organization. What do you think were the times when important things happened which changed that, the important events that occurred?

A. Well, OK. Summer '64 was the biggest, I think. Before summer '64, there was conflict between whites and blacks, yes, but I believe at that point the whites that were working were more conscious of their role in a sense, and therefore less conflict arose around them. Summer '64 brought all kinds of smart-aleck kids into Mississippi. I mean there was just no question about it. Not only were they smart-aleck to black organizers but they were smart-aleck to anyone. They set themselves up as experts on community organizing,

people who knew what was happening, tried to direct things, and so forth and so on. And because of whatever superior education they had, and so forth, they felt they were in a position to do this. And it really destroyed a lot of the trust that, I think, had been built up between blacks and whites in SNCC up to that point. OK, well, that was one turning point. And then the whole influx of white workers in the fall of '64, most of whom were college-educated, that was part of that whole thing. The next turning point I don't know. I'm sure it was building up before I left but I'm not sure that it happened before that. I'm not sure I can pin it to an event either.

\*\*\*\*\*

[Disillusionment of SNCC with white workers after summer of '64.]

It was also a change that was coupled with, I think, changes in the real political world, like the continual disappointment with the federal government, continual disappointment that the white liberals didn't come through, the continual disappointment that the Democratic Party wasn't interested in shaking the power structure, wasn't really for social justice after all, made people more and more and more suspicious of whites in general and then, when that happens, you turn on the nearest white person to you and that's a guy that's in the organization with you and you see him as a representation of that big of a thing, even though somehow he's there working with you.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. And even though he [the white worker] is as much against the white power structure . . . ?

A. Right, exactly. On the other hand, there are legitimate concerns, fantastically legitimate concerns and have been so through SNCC for a number of years, and need to be reinforced, I think, that it's bad to set up for people in the South, whom you are organizing—or people in the North, for that matter—whites as the experts. In other words, to bring a white kid down to teach a Freedom School is bad because it reinforces the image of white people being the teachers and knowing everything and black people being the ones who are always taught. The same kind of thing happens with the organizer. The same kind of thing happens with a lecturer. The same

kind of thing happens with policy-making, and so forth and so on. That kind of thing has come more and more to be . . . well, that was always important but I think it's used as a . . . you know, one of the reasons whites are being de-emphasized. The other concern, I think, is important and is real and I happen to think that this is really crucial and that whites really haven't recognized it, is that, dammit, why don't the whites go—and I include myself in this—why don't they go and work in the white community instead of having to hang in the black community. What is it about their own back yard that they can't see the importance of cleaning *it* up and going out and organizing around whatever issue would appeal or be the most radical for a particular area that they're in, either poor whites or . . . in fact I happen to think that organizing middle-class whites against the war is a pretty radical issue at this time in terms of how it affects the government and so forth. So that's a real concern, and it was always, you know, "how come you have to come into the civil rights movement and come into the Negro community" and that's effective and that gets people together so that there can be coalitions, because this whole business of working together is nonsense if there's nobody to work together with.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. You mentioned "bigger problems" after '64. Was that one of them?

A. Well . . . not really. I mean the political was always still there. The tactics changed. For example, up to and including '64, the federal government was always the focus of . . . a person's focus. This is where we go, we go to Washington to protest. We get the government to carry out its responsibilities, SNCC people began to see that the government wasn't the panacea, wasn't going to be the instrument for curing the ills.

\*\*\*\*\*

There was a concern that the Lowndes County Freedom Movement was a different kind of thing for SNCC. Never had SNCC people conceived of actually taking over power in counties. SNCC people kind of shied away from taking power, because there was a notion that power corrupted and that the whole structure of government of the counties was corrupt and...

So . . . then in Lowndes County, the people were really committed to taking power in that county . . . but it was, again always couched in terms



of, "the people deserve that power, because they were the majority," kind of thing. I mean, it wasn't a take power by force.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. Well, they did run candidates for office.

A. Right, but that was much more on a protest bent, not really to take power. Well, to the extent that we knew that nobody was going to win, we never had to face the question of what do they do when they get power.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. Have there been major changes in SNCC's methods?

A. Well, the changes in methods are kind of historical, I mean, the sit-ins worked for a while and nonviolence worked for a while, and then they became worn-out kinds of tactics and then people needed to be organized politically so things like the FDP and the freedom organizations in Alabama or the C. B. King campaign in Albany took place . . . where it was a different style of organizing, where issues were raised of a different sort and where political workshops or educational kinds of things took place more often than the nonviolent workshops, so to speak, and the picket lines and the sit-ins. And then, as far as more recently, as far as I know, there haven't been any really new organizing developments. It's kind of . . . '64 set the tone for organizing tactics.

\*\*\*\*\*

Over the years, however, the goals went from, I think, more idealistic in the very early stages to, first, a political thing in, say, '63-'64, where the whole focus and orientation was the right to vote, the right to travel on an interstate bus, the right to do certain constitutional kinds of things . . . and then, in the year after, say, 1964, to a position where constitutional rights were important, yes, but where the bigger problems of people related to each other were more important and also the question of economics became important: how do people live? So what if you can sit at the same lunch counter with a white man, but if you don't have the quarter to buy the hamburger, what good is the lunch counter? That kind of thing.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. On the question of nonviolence: when you were in SNCC, was there a lot of talk among SNCC people about nonviolence? Was it a problem that people worried about?

A. No. Nonviolence was seen as a tactic and nothing more, very little more, and that was about it. Self-defense was important. People should be able to protect their homes if their homes are fired on, protect their family if their family was shot at. In demonstrations, though, there was no question: it was always nonviolent. But if you were living with a family in the rural part of Alabama, [tape ends] . . .

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. There was something else? Oh, when Northern offices started to organize their own programs.

A. Right, right. Now . . . Chicago had very early organized a direct action program around the school situation in Chicago. That was done in '63 and '62, I'm not even sure when, and it still continued . . . it kind of died out in the spring of '64. Chicago had a peculiar history, since that was where Jim Forman was from and there was a very strong support group. Then from there . . . I'm not sure if Washington was the next place or not. Well, Washington has always had a program, that is, the NAG, the Nonviolent Action Group, and they had done organizing in Washington. Washington was also considered like a Southern city, so it really doesn't fit in. The "Free D.C." program in Washington, which started with a bus boycott, was in January '66. January 24, 1966, was the bus boycott, and then from there the Free D.C. movement developed around that. The boycott was because they were raising the fares; it was highly successful. They didn't raise the fares from twenty-five to thirty cents then, but they're raising them now—or, I guess they raised the transfer fee. That's it. If you want a transfer, you have to pay a nickel, and that hurts everybody in the ghetto, because they're the people who have to go long distances on the bus. But anyway . . . I'm really not sure what kind of a program San Francisco started. L.A. had things like freedom schools for a while and I don't think they ever had a program that got off the ground. Philadelphia's program was started much more recently. I don't know what's happening in Chicago or what's happening in Detroit. I don't think there's any local action in Boston.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. When did SNCC decide to expand into Northern cities?

A. I really don't know. It happened after I left, I know that. I mean, the actual decision—although there had been a decision made at one of the staff meetings, I don't remember when, that if there were a Friends of SNCC office in a city and that group wanted to involve themselves in some way with the local political scene, then it was all right. And that was a battle that had been fought over a period of years. A lot of people said that fundraising groups should be independent, they were to raise money, not to take political stands. At first they were volunteer groups, and that caused a lot of problems, because the volunteer groups were either liberal or too radical or represented some faction or something like that, so every time they made a move in the North and used SNCC's name, SNCC got called for it. Like some Trotskyists organized a Friends of SNCC group in Detroit in very early '63 and they had a bank sit-in. It was a flop and the Detroit papers blew it up big, that this was a SNCC group and so forth. And SNCC really had no knowledge of who these people were, had never met them, and so forth, but they had just decided that they would form this little Friends of SNCC group and use SNCC's name for their little direct action campaign. So this was a battle for a time. Once the Northern offices began to have full-time SNCC staff in them, people felt more comfortable about saying, "OK, go out yourselves."

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. When was that?

A. Well, let's see, the first full-time staff people were in New York and Washington. Miss Baker would know this better. And they were . . . well, it must have been fall '63 that the first Northern office people were paid. I mean they were given regular SNCC salaries to work in the Northern offices.

Q. This helped resolve that whole conflict?

A. Right. And then as of, say, fall '65 there were thirty people full-time in the Northern offices. They came to staff meetings and people knew them and they were close enough to the organization and committed enough to it that they wouldn't go off half-cocked and do some stupid thing that would, you know, that wasn't consistent with the direction SNCC was going in. Of

these thirty full-time people, ten were in New York. Make that number twenty-five, because there were never really thirty; there were twenty-five, ten of whom were in New York, which was the biggest fund-raising operation, and two of them were in Boston, two in Detroit, two in Chicago, three in Washington, three in San Francisco, one in Philadelphia, one in Canada, two in L.A.

Q. You don't know exactly when these people started organizing their own programs?

A. Well, yes, I can give you some idea.

Q. What percentage were they of the total staff?

A. The total staff, the total paid staff—and this was never an accurate measure of who were on SNCC staff, because some people worked for nothing—so . . . the total paid staff at the highest point was something like 210 paid field workers—and at the point at which we had 210 field workers, there were twenty-five Northern office people. [around spring '65]

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. That was in spring '65? [that SNCC had 210 paid field workers, twenty-five Northern office people]

A. Yes. Oh, I'm not even sure that there were that many paid people in '65. I guess there were. Summer '65 and after the summer, a lot of people dropped out.

Q. Why?

A. Well, people were either tired—they'd been working for a year, a year and a half—people left, some people got married, some people, you know, their projects were dwindling, some people were asked to leave—not too many, maybe four or five.

Q. When was that?

A. I'm not sure when, but they were for large kinds of things, like one kid was really out of it psychologically and so went to California to recuperate. Another kid had trouble with . . .

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. Skipping back a little to the convention challenge in the summer of '64; what do you think was the effect of that on SNCC?

A. Not a whole lot. I'm sure it had an effect on the MFDP, but the MFDP was a much different organization than SNCC. On the other hand, I'm not in a very good position to answer that question, because since I went back South and I was working in Atlanta, I was not very close to the Mississippi situation, at least that fall, so I don't really know how Mississippi reacted. I can only say that I think that most SNCC people expected it and they weren't completely disappointed and demolished and so forth.

Q. People in Atlanta expected it?

A. Well, yes, people in Atlanta, but I think most SNCC people expected it, except maybe people who had been down for the summer were more hopeful. But I think most of the full-time SNCC people who'd been there before the summer knew even at that point that the federal government was just a . . . kind of a fake and that . . . well . . . a fake to the extent that they didn't come through ever and that the Democratic Party wasn't really serious about shaking the power structure in Mississippi because so much depended on it.

\*\*\*\*\*

Q. Sort of a more broad question: what do you think has been SNCC's greatest success? Its contribution?

A. Oh, heavens. I can't answer that. I don't know. OK, I will make one statement about that. I think that the biggest contribution—and this applies to Mississippi and Alabama and everywhere—or one of the biggest contributions is that so many people have become involved in some way in some kind of political activity and that what it has done is it has made people understand and realize that they can have an effect on their own lives. I think that the recent CDGM battle, for example, and the way in which the CDGM Executive Committee, or whatever it was, stood up and demanded that money and got people demonstrating in Jackson and got people demonstrating in Washington and that they stuck to it as much and weren't content to have the money taken away, was partly a carry-over from the spirit of you-can-do-it, you can have an effect on your lives, that SNCC really developed, with the MFDP and with later kind of work.

The people were always . . . their hopes were raised on the one hand, but also we found it necessary to say to people, "not only should you hope, but also you've got to do it on your own hook. Nobody's going to get your freedom for you but yourself." And that moved people to work and to be



involved. And in the initial program it was that people who've never voted or never participated in politics somehow can't comprehend that all of a sudden they might be able to vote. I mean like it's a complete radical change for them. Overcoming the fact of people's unfamiliarity with the electoral process or unfamiliarity with what politics is all about and their feelings of inadequacy in face of that was important.

Q. What has been your greatest disappointment about SNCC?

A. I really . . . I mean, there were a lot of problems. But one of the most beautiful things about SNCC, to turn that question around, was that people kept slugging and working and trying to grapple with the problems. There were huge administrative problems, personality problems, huge interracial kinds of problems, huge problems of people just physically existing and being able to face the pressure, and so forth, but that there . . . that SNCC was really a place where some honest attempts were made to deal with these problems. Not that they were solved, . . . but the daily frustrations were the thing that kept you down, kind of, but when you look at the big picture, when you look back on it, it's really, it's one of the most exciting kinds of experiences of people pulling together and trying to grapple with the problems that the bureaucrats, for example, faced, because I'm sure there's inefficiency in the government and problems of administrative detail and so forth and so on, but the honest grappling with those problems I don't think is there.