

MEMORANDUM

To: Tim West

Fm: Joe Sinsheimer

JAS

Re: Interview with Lawrence Guyot

Dt: February 23, 1999

Enclosed is an interview I conducted with Lawrence Guyot, a former SNCC field secretary from Mississippi.

In the interview, Guyot discusses: 1) Amzie Moore's role in the Delta civil rights movement 2) the development of the Greenwood, Mississippi voter registration campaign in 1962-63 3) the arrest of the Greenwood SNCC staff in 1963 by white authorities 4) the role of Ed Cothran in the Greenwood campaign 5) the role of black women in the Mississippi movement 6) the role of Tougaloo College in the development of civil rights activity in Jackson, Mississippi 7) the development of civil rights campaign in Hattiesburg, Mississippi in 1962-1963 8) the success of the Freedom School program in Hattiesburg 8) the credential challenge by the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party at the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City 9) SNCC's focus or lack of focus on economic issues in Mississippi during the middle part of the 1960's 10) the correlation between information and power 11) the development of the Delta Ministry in Mississippi 12) how to avoid movement "burnout" 13) the 1988 presidential election.

Interview with Lawrence Guyot
Washington, DC
May 4, 1987

J. Sinsheimer: {If you want to start by talking about your role in Greenwood, Mississippi}

L. Guyot: Okay, let's talk about Greenwood. We were all together, by we I mean myself, {Charles} McLaurin, James Jones, _____, Lafayette Surney, ... Charles McLaurin, and Luvaughn Brown. We were staying at 714 Rose Street in Jackson. Charlie Cobb passed through going to a workshop in Texas. I convinced Charlie and recruited him into SNCC right then. You didn't have to go to Texas to learn about nonviolence and about racism. We had the best labratory in the country. Charlie stayed for five years.

After staying at Rose Street for awhile we decided to move into the Delta. Specifically, well we are talking now about the period after McComb. Moses had done a good job in McComb. Some of us had worked with him on that. And there was a girl named Joan Trumpauer who was also involved. Dorie Ladner, Joyce Ladner and they stayed at 714 Rose Street also. Dorie and _____ went with us to the Delta. There was a guy named Dave Dennis from CORE who was also with us.

We went to Amzie Moore's house at 614 Chisolm Street in Cleveland. Amazie Moore had been involved with Adam Clayton Powell and with Perry _____ in bringing together 10,000 people in the Delta. He was responsible for getting Moses into McComb. He was also responsible, I mean we stayed in his house. I mean it was known who we were and what we were and nobody meessed with him. He was working in the post office. They couldn't fire him. They just cut down his hours as much as they could and tried every way they could to get rid of him but they couldn't.

Here was a man who was fantastic. He was bible-quoting folk-- guy-- very pragmatic. A folk hero in the truest sense. He was the guy who pulled in Mr. Joe McDonald from Ruleville and opened up, and made it possible for us to move into Ruleville. And there we recruited a young lady who was to become nationally, internationally famous. Fannie Lou Hamer. I took Fannie Lou Hamer

and other to register to vote. She was of course evicted and thrust into the political limelight which she absolutely deserved.

After Ruleville and Sunflower {County} we then moved into Greenwood. Now the move into Greenwood was utterly fantastic. We left Jackson with a specific agreement that we weren't going to desegregate anything along the way. We were going there around voter registration and nothing else. When we got there-- I never will forget-- the first day I get there I pick up the telephone. I am staying in a boarding house. Coincidentally, one of the guys that I had known at Tougaloo named {Henry} Briggs who was a father figure to all of us at Tougaloo, the college I attended, was staying in the same place.

Sinsheimer: Was he publicity director there?

Guyot: That is right. Henry Briggs. A great fellow.

Sinsheimer: So he was actually staying in the boarding house?

Guyot: And I called someone and told them I had arrived and this sort of thing. The operator called back and said "Look you have a trouble maker in your house and you had better get him out." Of course the lady asked me to leave the next day. She didn't insist I leave that night. So that was my beginning with Greenwood.

We started slowly. By we I mean the Voter Education Project. Wiley Branton who is in Washington here was the head of that. Moses was the We pulled together an organization. Let me go back to Clarksdale. We pulled together an organization called COFO. Council of Federated Organizations. Moses, myself, Aaron Henry, Hollis Watkins, R.L.T. Smith met in Clarksdale. Dave Dennis and Dorie. There the position was that Moses shouldn't be the head of this organization because he wasn't a native Mississippian. I argued on the other side. We won. As we were to find out at this meeting and at all meetings of COFO those who had the manpower made the decisions. While Aaron Henry was to remain the president {chairman} of COFO until its dissolution. SNCC made the decisions.

The fascinating thing about Greenwood.

The issues were very clearly drawn. We first cracked the churches. Okay, and that was a slow thing. Once we got the churches we then followed the traditional pattern that a lot of people have overlooked. First we organized the kids, then the women, then the men. Now, you have to remember that the Department of Justice was in fact the Department of Justice. That was our legal arsenal. They defended us. They told us what court decisions were coming down in terms of registrars, specifically Panola and Hattiesburg. We knew those decisions were coming before they came. And we had that on our side. I think that made the difference.

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But we found was that we-- like Mary Lane. A tremendous woman. Young, creative, energetic. June Johnson, the McGhee's, {James} Moore who is now on the city council. Now here was a man who has been involved in litigation about everything that can be litigated in that county. From redistricting to moving to the ward system from the at-large system. So in far as someone really working themselves into a position and being rewarded politically, nobody deserves to sit on that city council than he does.

And we found other people. Mr. Jordan. Here was a man who was religious, who was courageous. When we were run out of the office I went to his house. And he said, "Go to bed. If anybody is going to get you they are going to get us." He was one of the bravest men I know.

We also found that we were building very, very slowly. Very slowly. We didn't, we were committed to involving as many people as possible. And dealing with cracking the fear. Because there was no question, here was a situation. We are talking about a time when the economy was entirely controlled by whites. It was damn near totally agrarian. And the whole peonage system was an actuality. It wasn't a theoretical monetary scheme. This was what was.

You also have to take into consideration that we are talking about a period that everyone who attempted to register to vote, {their} name {and} address put in the newspaper so they could be instantly open to the collection of debts, physical

violence. The churches were key. Once we got into the churches that gave us and what we were doing legitimacy. And what we tried to do and what I think we did very well was involve as many local leaders as possible.

One of the reasons SNCC was so successful was that we did not go in there to sell memberships. We went in there to educate, inculcate, identify, and fortify, and facilitate what leadership was there. And that meant quite naturally people who had previous strong reputations, people who were trusted by other people, and people who could command respect.

So we started attempting to register people to vote. Cracking the fear of each individual, going with them. Never asking anybody to do anything we wouldn't do. Hardy Lott said to me one day, "Well, Guyot you all should be satisfied. You have registered more people here than anywhere in the state." {Break--telephone interruption} You have to remember....

Sinsheimer:

Well, you stopped telling me about your conversation with Hardy Lott.

Guyot:

Hardy Lott said, "Well, Guyot"-- we were marching black folks into the registration-- he said, "You all should be very satisfied. You haven't registered any voters here but more people have applied here than anywhere else in the state. I said, "Well, we are interested in registration." He was just as open then as he is now.

But we have to put this in some political context. See the Department of Justice had filed the case of United States vs. Mississippi which was designed to overturn all of the voting laws in Mississippi. Had United States vs. Mississippi succeeded we wouldn't have had to have the Congressional Challenge in '65, we wouldn't have had to go to Atlantic City in '64. But there was tremendous pressure put on by Eastland, threatening an investigation of some of the relatives of Justice Black okay. And the real fight was around the configuration of the three judge panel to hear that case. Once Mize was appointed to it, Mize and Reeves, we knew we had lost. Okay.

Now, but the interesting thing is. We were not only informed but involved in how

that was being put together. Which was an indication of how close the relationship was between Moses and Department of Justice. Before we went to Greenwood I had attended a workshop in Mt. Beulah, pretty much run by the Department of Justice. We were given a number to a guy in the White House where reports were to be sent. I mean it was just that....

One thing to remember about Greenwood is you are talking about the utilization of a combination of federal and local officials for overt terrorism. I saw with my own eyes a notice in a social security check, which as you know is a federal issue, saying there are some troublemakers in this area. If you are associated with them this check could possibly be terminated. Okay. Now when you are talking about agrarian folks who are having a problem eating the truest sense, who recognize officialdom and whiteness as one in the same historically and they receive that from the federal government tied in to some money that they are entitled to, they get the message....{Break}

The mass meetings grew. We were into more churches. The city decided that since you all were getting these people stirred up and registered to vote, well we are going to cut off the commodities. And they did that. What we did was with the help of Dick Gregory and others we flew and drove food in there. We set up our own sytem. Now granted we made no bones about the fact that we tried to encourgae everyone we gave food to to register to vote. But we never turned anybody down for not registering to vote.

I never will forget John Salter who has written a book on Jackson, was my teacher, one of my teachers at Tougaloo. And he came down to Greenwood. And he said Guyot why are you all doing this, you and I have read a lot of books, we have done a lot of studies together. Why are you feeding these people. You should not feed them and let them get out and revolt. I said, "John, I will you what. We have two decisions to make. One is do we get these people to fight around their own self-interest, at their own time frame when they are ready to fight. Or do we put them in a no win situation simply to prove that the system can't work." I said, "It is very clear where I stand on that." I think that people-- governance is too important to

be left to the government. People can and do make a difference.

Anyway we won that fight. We were able to bring enough food, not to feed everyone, but to feed a hell of a lot of people. Then one day the perfect thing happens. Dewey Greene's house was shot into. All of the Greene Family had been very supportive and very family. We gathered together at one of the churches where we were distributing food. Jim Forman was almost on his way out of town. Just passing through. And we decided, well we are going to go down, march down to the police and ask for protection. What could be more American than that. We go down and of course we were all arrested.

Sinsheimer: Do you remember whose original idea that was?

Guyot: It was sort of a consensus of about six or seven people. Went down, they let the dogs out. Mary Lane and I walked right through those dogs. She is one the bravest little gals I know. Mary was only about that high. Could speak, could role play, could do everything. Then what we began to find was that once the arrests occurred..... Frank Smith who is now on the city council here was also arrested. Jim Jones, myself, Moses, McLaurin, Frank Smith, Hollis Watkins, McArthur Cotton, Jim Forman.

What we then found was that the community was solidly behind us. Once we were in jail, once we had demonstrated to them that we would not run. We tried to demonstrate that by simply staying there but once we demonstrated.... I mean people came to start visiting the jail, bringing food, bringing cakes. So then more and more people began to become involved. And then we began to move beyond just the young people. But the key to organizing at that time in that community was the women.

Sinsheimer: I wanted to talk to you about that because I started to talk to Ida Mae {Holland} about that generation of women. I asked June's mother and Paralee Patterson and that older generation of women and why they were so important.

Guyot: Well, they were important for a lot of reasons. You see what a lot of historians

have overlooked is we were fighting for the minds of the black South. The Nation of Islam was fighting at the same time for the minds of the black South. The reason we were successful in mobilizing the black South was because we could work in the churches, the only institution owned, controlled, paid for, directed and given importance by blacks regardless of how the rest of the economy went. The Nation of Islam couldn't do that so we had the advantage. Not that it was an open conflict but it was very, very clear. They had excellent speakers, they had money, they had an economic program. They could have done it. They didn't but southern history as we know it would have been radically changed had they done so.

Once we began to get more and more of the leaders in the community put in such a position that they had to be on our side or be against the community they began to come in. It wasn't like we threatened them in. It wasn't like we threatened them in. People simply would say, "Well, this is what the church should be doing. And if you are not doing it we are going to go to another minister." Some churches were more subtle. But one of the other things we learned too was that the ministers don't run the church. There is usually one old member who has been there since day one and he or she runs the church and everything else is pro forma. We just became masters at learning where the power really was and dealing with it.

This leads to another situation. We had-- we were demonstrating in front of the Greenwood courthouse one day and I went to talk to the chief of police, Chief Lary, I said look there is going to be a meeting of some local leaders tonight why don't you come to it. Within a half an hour all of us were arrested and taken to Parchman. Now we were in a situation where we were charged with disturbing the peace. The bond for each of us was \$250 for Forty-five people had been arrested in Itta Bena {a small town near Greenwood in Leflore County} and

Sinsheimer: And about ten or twelve more from Greenwood?

Guyot: No, here is the way it goes. Twenty-three people had been arrested from Greenwood, forty-five from Itta Bena. So we all go to Parchman. That is when the community support

was really high. This is right about the time of the presidential election. Is that right?

Sinsheimer: No, that was the summer of 1963.

Guyot: Well anyway they were talking about the election. So we worked for a couple of days and then we decided not to work. Again, in jail were McLaurin, James Jones, McArthur Cotton, myself, Peacock, both Peacocks....

Sinsheimer: Frank Smith.

Guyot: Right. Well, Frank Smith wasn't in Parchman.

Sinsheimer: Oh yeah, he was at the county work farm when they had that stoppage.

Guyot: Okay, so we decided not to work. Well, what happened was a lot of people on a Sunday came. I mean hundreds of people came from Greenwood. All ages, I mean very few young people. Quite logically many more women than men. Then we started chanting we are not going to work, we are not going to eat until we get out of here. So they just brought down as much terror as they could, got the people out of there and this sort of stuff. But it worked. I am describing what happened at the work gang, at the camp {county farm}, then we were transfered from there to Parchman.

We knew before Moses left the city, we knew this demonstration was coming. And the agreement between he and I was there was on question we were going to jail but he was to do everything he could to get us out. But there wasn't very much money available in SNCC or COFO at that time. After about three months there the National Council of Churches put up the money, got us out.

Now while we were in jail a young guy we had recruited from Greenwood named Willie ... something started talking to the police about how I was the leader, this was a military thing. This was printed in the local newspaper obviously. Now we knew that our cells were tapped so every now and then they would put us all in one cell. We were all completely naked for three months okay on death row. Charles Parker was brought in there at this time-- I mean Willie McGhee from Hattiesburg. When we had group meetings

I knew we were talking to them so we talked to them just like that. That is pretty much the way that meant.

What did we learn in Greenwood? We learned number one that you had to involve local leaders as much as possible. That you had to have programs that were geared right to their needs. That they had to be involved, that they would be involved on a longer term only if it was around their own self-interest. I mean how do you get benefits? How do you hook the political activity and all of the risks that are tied in to that to something that is going to mean something to them.

We also learned when Jim Travis was shot that instead of everybody leaving Greenwood we brought everybody into Greenwood. And then our stock as an organization rose in that community and throughout the Delta. Because you need to know that two people from Holmes County had come over and watched everything we did from the distribution of food, to how we conducted the mass meetings. Ralthus Hayes and Hartman Turnbow. These are giants.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Guyot: I mean these-- Mr Hayes died in '68. Hartman Turnbow is still alive. Let me tell you something else that happened in Greenwood that I will never forget. The head of the Elks was very close to the white establishment but he was also was close to us.

Sinsheimer: Who was this? Was this Daddy Bishop?

Guyot: No, Cothran.

Sinsheimer: Ed Cothran. He had a white father didn't he?

Guyot: More than likely because he was very well connected. Let me tell you. When Hartman Turnbow was arrested for burning down his house, attempting to burn his house. I got Cothran to agree to get the sheriff from Leflore County, Greenwood, to sign a bond to get him out because they had reciprocity at that time. And all I had to do was take that bond over there to the sheriff in Holmes County and that is how I met Hartman Turnbow.

Sinsheimer: So you got him out?

Guyot: I got him out.

Sinsheimer: And the SNCC workers, or just Mr. Turnbow.

Guyot: He was the only one in jail at that time. I walked in the jail and saw all of these police around with the dogs and what have you. And I said I got for Mr. Turnbow. The guy said okay. And in here comes this little squat man who was later to become a legend. Very, very agrarian, very fundamentalistic, very open, very human. A good speaker, a quick mind, and a man's man.

When they finally decided to register voters in Holmes County he, Shatrack Davis, Ralthus Hayes, and a couple of other folks went up there and the sheriff said okay who is going to get shot first and Hartman Turnbow said, "Well, I is. I mean to get registered or shot to death." I mean it is unbelievable what strength and what power people who apparantly were totally submerged and totally surrounded and decided to charge.

Sinsheimer: Why-- I talked to Hollis-- if you added up all of the people like Mr. Turnbow, in that category, there is an equal number of women or maybe more women in that category. Have you thought about that?

Guyot: There is no reason to think about that. Look, the reason I got elected chairman of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party {FDP} I had to beat Aaron Henry and I had to beat Leslie McLemore. And the reason I got elected was that I had the support of Fannie Lou Hamer, Peggi Jean Conner, Victoria Gray, and the lady from Canton....

Sinsheimer: Ms. Devine?

Guyot: Exactlty right. That is all I needed. I had the support of a few men. There were fifteen members of that committee. But that was all I needed. I mean that was it. Because I had proven myself to them individually both in Greenwood and Hattiesburg so that was it. I mean Joe Rauh tried everything he could to get Aaron Henry elected chairman. Aaron was elected chairman

of the delegation but that was it.

But it shouldn't be surprising at all. What was true then is true now. I mean that is why, there is just no question that the leadership in the black community at that time and this time comes from two sources, either the church or females regardless of where they are. So I don't find it startling. I find it a historical fact. Charles Evers used to say it rather crudely and almost derisively. He said there are only two free men in the South. White men and black women.

Listen, it got to such a point that I remember being here in Washington in about '65 with Eleanor Holmes, Jan Goodman, who did a hell of a job with us in the Congressional Challenge; Paula Murry who was the first Episcopalian black female bishop, ... there was somebody else in that meeting. Oh, Victoria Gray. And I was talking to them about the need for women to understand that we have to work more men into the leadership. But I was very, very cautious and not saying you all have to slow down in order to let that happen.

A Fannie Lou Hamer, there is nothing that a man could have brought to what she did and she was able to do it. You see Stokley Carmichael was later quoted as saying the position for females in SNCC is prone. That was ludicrous and it flew against the history of what we knew and what had developed. I don't know anybody even more braver than Eunita Blackwell, Fannie Lou Hamer, Victoria Gray, Peggi Connor. The lady from Canton. Look at McComb. McComb was primarily women. The leadership-- we had a woman from Tallahatchie County, one of the most fierce counties. She was a funeral director. She was killed in about 1963. I mean here was a woman-- I mean Tallahatchie County would have frightened anybody to death. In Hattiesburg, Mrs. _____ Woods who we rented from, she was involved in the Black and Tan Party. Her husband had been....

Sinsheimer: I am not familiar with that.

Guyot: The Republican section during and after Reconstruction. See in Greenwood we also learned that the federal court system, we didn't have access to the state legislature,

we didn't have votes. But we did have access to the federal court system. And we could-- for instance on the demonstration question in Greenwood, the Department of Justice position was either we are going to come to an agreement that gets you all out of jail and allows you all to continue to demonstrate, otherwise we are going to open up, ask for a permanent injunction that will give you all total freedom, freedom to do what ever you want to do. Naturally, the federal government is always going to come to the most conservative.... So that is what was arranged. So we got out of jail and could continue mobilizing and organizing.

In '62 Charles Diggs came to Greenwood and he gave a speech in front of the office to some of the SNCC workers, to about maybe fifty people no more. Then he visited Clarksdale and saw Aaron Henry's store and all that. And it was very good that he had done that because it hooked up people with something beyond themselves.

Another very significant thing happened in '62. We had violence all over the state. No this was '63. And then suddenly the word was out it has to be stopped and it was stopped {snap of fingers} for about five months. Which was satisfying but eerie because the question was when would it reoccur. Those are the main impressions I have about Greenwood. Now if you have any questions I will be glad to answer them.

Sinsheimer: Well, one would be about the reaction to the federal government's agreement to basically to stop short of going that full injunction.

Guyot: Well, we didn't have a problem with it. It accomplished what we wanted. We wanted to be able to demonstrate whenever we wanted.... Because they had done everything they could to trick us. You know like they would have-- when we were coming down the street they would make sure that the fire engines suddenly came out. We didn't have a objection to that. What we had an objection was how the Department of Justice handled Unites States vs. Mississippi. And we thought they should have fought that one a little harder, much harder. But they didn't when it reached the Supreme Court.

Sinsheimer: How important do you think the police dogs

were in terms of radicalizing {Greenwood's black community}?

Guyot: They were just another, another part of the plan.

Sinsheimer: Several people, particularly the local people {I have talked with} have pointed to that as a trigger.

Guyot: Let's put it this way. It was consistent with everything else. For instance when you say to somebody if you register to vote we are going to put you in jail or we are going to take your property or we are going to call all of your loans in. That is not much different from letting the dogs loose. But I can see how it might be as interpreted as that. But we are talking about-- there was nothing that was undone that couldn't be done to terrorize an individual or a group. You name it. But I could see how the dogs could have made a difference because that was going beyond the pail. But at the time we didn't consider it as such. What we were interested in-- we were very, very satisfied about-- we stood up to them. We simply gained more support.

But you see you have to understand, and I am sure by talking to people you have come to a -- SNCC was divided into two camps. There was a political camp and there was a civil disobedience camp. And that was an internal division because white folks never accepted that. Anybody who tried to register somebody to vote was trouble. If they decided to sit down a lunch counter that was much more acceptable although {more} illegal and unacceptable than trying to register people. Because white folks understood-- black folks understood eventually-- that the vote was really to bring about primary change, to make things happen. I mean why else would people spend so much effort trying to prevent you from getting it.

Sinsheimer: Where were you in the beginning of that question?

Guyot: Never, never, never anywhere but the political. I had grown up seeing what politics could do. I grew up in Harrison County, 119,000 people. Catholic, labor influence, Litton Industries twenty miles

south building all of the armaments for the the country. Heavy Catholic influence. Bidwell Adams, the Lt. Governor under Bilbo was a personal friend of my father's. Bidwell Adams was a loyal Democrat, chairman of the state Democratic Party. Defender, supporter of Kennedy when he first ran. Defender of anybody my father sent to him.

So, hell when anybody got in trouble in my town they came to my father whatever they needed. He and I registered people on the streets. So I didn't realizd until I was seventeen years old when I went to Tougaloo College that black people couldn't register in Mississippi. Everybody I knew was registered. When white people ran they came to seek our votes. That means they either had to talk to my grandfather or father, or both of them. I had seen my father beat a white man damn near to death on the main street of the town. Nothing was done or said about it.

The Catholic church that I went to was desegregated. For all practical purposes I was living in a different Mississippi than the rest of them. The Catholic church was openly supportive of political activity. Tougaloo College and Miles College were the only two colleges in the South that supported demonstration. We started the desegregation of the public libraries in '57 in Jackson. Most people think there were no demonstrations before '61.

Sinsheimer: There was in '57? How did that get organized do you know?

Guyot: It got organized because Aaron Henry-- no, Aaron Henry didn't have anything to do with that-- you have to understand Tougaloo. Ed King was now who is now at Mississippi State {University of Mississippi} was the chaplain. John Salter was there. A brilliant guy, a great guy, the dean A.A. Branch. I never will forget him. Here was a man-- his son-in-law just died, was involved in desegregation. I met him there. I met Martin Luther King at Tougaloo. Aaron Henry I first met at Tougaloo. Speakers from the White Citizens Council I met at Tougaloo. You are talking about academic freedom. You are talking about a citadel of the right of individuals regardless of how unpopular

their views. Percy Greene who was a Tom for the white folks, he was allowed to come and speak. And Briggs said let's be quiet, let's listen to him. You don't have to agree, you don't have to agree, you can argue everything he says, but we are going to hear him.

Now in that kind of setting-- the first mass meeting I ever attended was in the chapel of Tougaloo. A.A. Branch, god bless him, the position of this college is we are against segregation. Those of you who are going to demonstrate, your going to jail, take your books with you. We are not going to give you any leeway on your grades but this is the right thing to do. And of course some of the good students who were my peers grade wise made good arguments about why we shouldn't do this. That is not why our parents sent us here.

Tougaloo was a blessing. I mean look at the people who came out of it. Myself, Dorie Ladner, Joan Trumpauer, her sister Joyce Ladner, Hollis, McLaurin, not McLaurin, Hollis and Curtis {Hayes}, _____.

Sinsheimer: Were you in and out of Tougaloo?

Guyot: Yes. I started in '57 and I didn't graduate until '64.

Sinsheimer: But in '57 there was an attempt to desegregate the library?

Guyot: Absolutely.

Sinsheimer: Was Medgar {Evers} involved in that?

Guyot: John Salter, Ed King, Joan Trumpauer, and some other folks. Medgar

Sinsheimer: See Salter wasn't there until '60.

Guyot: Is that right.

Sinsheimer: And Ed didn't come until '61.

Guyot: Hmmm. Salter was definitely involved.

Sinsheimer: It definitely took place before the Freedom Rides which-- I mean most people start Jackson {the Jackson campaign} with the Freedom Rides, but that was spring of '61 and then Joyce and Dorie led a protest vigil

at Jackson State that corresponded to that.
Is that what you are thinking of?

Guyot: No, that is seperate, that is entirely
seperate. I am convinced that were
demonstrations at the libraries in '57. I of
course will check that.

Sinsheimer: Did you join an NAACP chapter at Tougaloo.

Guyot: Yeah, I joined an NAACP group.

Sinsheimer: How did you get to join that do you
remember?

Guyot: I just joined it and I became treasurer of
it. And as soon as SNCC was available to me
I joined that. I have alway loved politics.
Power and politics. Hey, that was the way to
go. Hattiesburg--anymore questions on
Greenwood?

Sinsheimer: No, if I Do I will come back to them.

Guyot: We knew that a decision was coming down
allowing people to register to vote in
Hattiesburg. John Doar introduced me to
Judge Brown, Judge Wisdom, and Judge Tuttle.
Three of the giants. No, I am wrong. Who was
Attorney General for Carter? Anyway he sat
of the three judge panel with Judge Brown
and Judge Tuttle and whatever his name was.
That is when I first met him. Doar
introduced me to the three of them. We are
sitting in the courtroom in Hattiesburg and
they present flawless testimony. They bring
in people who couldn't read and write and
they would show that they were registered to
vote. They bring in people who are phi beta
kappas who are teachers at the high school.
Victoria Gray and all of them, they are not
registered to vote.

Mrs. Woods has broken down by race the
whole voter registration list for Department
of Justice in my presence. Anyway, the court
rules that they have to register people,
they only have to fill out certain sections
of the thing. Well, in Panola County later
we would get the same kind of ruling. But
that was one of the reasons for going into
Hattiesburg.

Sinsheimer: Was it that there was such a clear case in
terms of the voting discrimination.

Guyot:

That's right. Not only was there such a clear case, but they had brought the case and Theron Lynd the registrar was being tried and it was very, very clear he wasn't going to win. Then we started-- one of the things I always wanted to do since I had seen Martin Luther King in Alabama was to bring the church into demonstrations. So Moses and I got together and wrote a letter to the National Council of Churches asking each denomination to send in some people for a demonstration in Hattiesburg. This was the first time in Mississippi which we had a demonstration in which there were no arrests.
{Break}

Sinsheimer: Do you remember when you first started working in Hattiesburg?

Guyot: Yeah, about six months before those demonstrations. And what we did then....

Sinsheimer: Who went with you do you know? Were you there alone?

Guyot: No, Peter Stoner.

Sinsheimer: And where did he come from?

Guyot: He came from New York. He was a white guy who went to Tougaloo. John O'Neal was already there. John O'Neal had done the original work. John O'Neal was later to go and participate in the Free Southern Theater.

Sinsheimer: So he was there when you {arrived}?

Guyot: He was there. And a guy named Lee, Charles Glenn who was from Hattiesburg, Doug Smith, Reverend Ponder's son, Victoria Gray. I met Andy Young in Hattiesburg about that time. He told me, "You know what I want to do Guyot?" I said, "I want to run against, I want to vote in the Congress." Someday we will have the vote and you can go and do that. I say only to point out that he had made up his mind on that that early.

Now Hattiesburg was a different setting. Not agricultural. But a police department that was terroristic. They had a reputation and they lived up to that reputation. And we had to build it church by church but see one of the good things we had in there was Vernon Dahmer who was later to be killed in 1965

{1966?}, the president of the NAACP there, Victoria Gray's brother, Mr. Jackson. The guy who owned the store down from the office. We had-- they were sort of reluctant to give their blessing to SNCC but Vernon Dahmer made the difference. Vernon Dahmer was tough, aggressive and at the same time very stabilizing. So once he said it was all right the rest of the NAACP came around.

We started church by church using what we learned in Greenwood. Finding leadership.

Sinsheimer: Was it easier to get into the churches in Hattiesburg than it was in Greenwood?

Guyot: No, it was case by case. And see one of the other things in Hattiesburg where we had difference was we could get into the newspapers there. I mean a guy named Sanford Rose Lee was constantly writing and reacting--he was a SNCC guy-- was constantly reacting to white people who were writing in to the letters to the editor section. So that was, that sort of opened the doors to us to the black middle class. Also we were able to see the impact of whites in Hattiesburg. When we conducted the Freedom Vote, whites got access to the radio stations, to the television stations. The FBI was everywhere. I mean you talk about coverage. There was damn near an FBI agent for every volunteer.

So then quite naturally if that is going to stop violence-- that was one of the primordial gestations of the Summer Project in 1964. What else did we find in Hattiesburg? We found that again it was the young people, females and males. Then the ministers-- some of them moved to come in and take it over. John Cameron, a candidate for Congress. When we had the voter registration drive going and really going very, very well he wanted to start a boycott of the buses. And simply because we had access to the people and some of us could speak as well extemporaneously as he could we killed that because it wasn't really about bringing about political power.

Sinsheimer: Were you afraid that if you won that people would see it is a victory and....

Guyot: Yes. Plus it would take up time and energy. But you had something else in Hattiesburg. You had the petal paper which was very

liberal. You had some families like the Fairchilds and the Foote family who were secret contributors. They did as much as they could-- very wealthy-- to keep the violence down as much as possible.

Sinsheimer: Do you know what those families did for a living or where their money came from.

Guyot: Very wealthy, very, very wealthy. The Fairchilds were extremely wealthy as was the Foote family.

Sinsheimer: Do you know what kind of business they were in?

Guyot: Department stores for the Foote family and the Fairchilds were in construction. We are talking about the same Fairchilds who recently got caught up in the whole drug thing. The Catholic church in Hattiesburg was pretty much intimidated. I mean that was the first time we had seen that because everywhere else we had seen the Catholic church it had been on the case.

Sinsheimer: I visited with Father {Nathaniel} Machesky. Well, he was basically run out of Leflore County, he is up in Tallahatchie now. But he is a neat man.

Guyot: We were dealing with a different constituency in Hattiesburg than we dealt with in Greenwood. So we dealt with it differently.

Sinsheimer: Because of the poverty in the Delta?

Guyot: Not so much the poverty but there was a different relationship to information. There was a different kind of expectancy. People in Hattiesburg had more what I would safely describe as middle-class expectations. They expected to be able to move around. You had more black doctors there. You had more black role models that couldn't be dealt with. You had some gamblers there who were very, very wealthy men and who when there was a need for money.... The reason I didn't go to the Democratic National Convention in '64 was that they had arrested me during the church demonstrations and sort of held it in abeyance. And if I had not gone to jail then three people would have lost their property that they put up for me. So quite naturally I

just went to jail with no reservations at all.

Sinsheimer: Some of those were the gamblers?

Guyot: No, I didn't mean to make that connection. But what I am saying is everything that could be organized in that community we organized from the prostitutes, to the gamblers, to the whiskey makers, to you name it, to the middle class businessmen, to the black doctors. Again it becomes a question of the difference that I foresee-- Dr. Smith who was in Hattiesburg had a relationship with Paul Johnson who was from Hattiesburg and was the Governor at that time. So that one became tricky.

Sinsheimer: Do you know his first name, Dr. Smith?

Guyot: I think it is Charles Smith.

Sinsheimer: When you say tricky you mean he felt pressures from Johnson.

Guyot: Yes, Johnson owned the building that he was in.

Sinsheimer: What role did Dr. Smith play?

Guyot: Oh supportive publicly but always....

Sinsheimer: Got you.

Guyot: There was a lot of adoption, quick adoption and widespread support for the educational programs in Hattiesburg to teach adults how to read, sending people for training to Highlander sponsored by SCLC and then coming back and really operating. People just soaked that up. That was sort of a program that ran itself.

Sinsheimer: Almost because again that is sort of tied into the middle class aspirations.

Guyot: I think so. In a state with a bad school system you had a good one in Hattiesburg. And you had a community that insisted that it be even better. You know it is ironic. Ms. _____ one of the people who taught me in high school had left Hattiesburg and she always talked about how good that school system was and then when I got there I got a

chance to see it.

Sinsheimer: If I am not mistaken wasn't the Freedom School program most successful in Hattiesburg?

Guyot: There is no question. There is no question.

Sinsheimer: Again, is this times in to probably more parental approval?

Guyot: More parental approval and the unquestioned position that education was the most important thing going. That everything else was ephemeral. Everything else was ephemeral. The central issue was get the information. See, you had better prepared ministers who could deal realistically and politically very quickly. You had people like Victoria Gray who had been a salesperson who could charm any audience out of anything. I mean she got-- SCLC contributed to the Congressional Challenge.

Sinsheimer: What was her background?

Guyot: She was a salesperson, very, very involved in the Methodist Church and used those talents to become a hell of an organizer. And she was fearless, utterly fearless. Very comfortable in the middle class but not of the middle class which was to our advantage because she was key in what happened in Hattiesburg but she was also key in other parts of the state.

Peggi Connor, a hairdresser, whose father was very, very involved, very political. When we conducted the Congressional hearings in '65 her father took on J.B. Coleman. And at first their position was we don't have to do this. Then they decided they had to do it because they didn't want us to have ammunition to carry back to the Congress. So I think it is very important that you go to the Center for Constitutional Law in New York and read those transcripts because they cover the entire state. And you ought to really continue your paper from '61 to '65 so you can look at the congressional challenge. Because the most important thing that ever happened in Mississippi was not '64, but '65. Because '65 helped pass the Voting Rights Act. A lot of historians have said, and I can justify it-- go back to the

Congressional record. Talk to Kinoy, read those transcripts.

There was a liberal congressman from Ohio who said look we have two choices. We can either unseat the Mississippi delegation or we can pass the Voting Rights Act. But he made it very, very clear that you could do either one of the two. Once the state of Mississippi found out that we had the votes on the first vote, that this was going to be voted on straight up and down J.P. Coleman served us the papers and the word was passed by the Mississippi Economic Council that there would be no violence in Mississippi for the next six months and there was none. Then we started conducting the hearings. Then people really took us seriously.

Let me go back to another thing. You talked about Moses and his relationship to MFDP after Atlantic City. You see Moses and a lot of other folks thought the purpose of MFDP was simply to go to Atlantic City and then disband. My position was, despite the fact that I was the chairman of it, was that we didn't have party registration in Mississippi. That the real power in Mississippi was in the Democratic Party. That they were vulnerable on the question of loyalty. So why don't we simply go back and build a base.

A lot of SNCC people disagreed with us on that and left and went to Selma and other places. Hey, but the basic point was true and quite real. Because what we were able to do....

Sinsheimer:

Guyot:

Let me understand. What was the disagreement?[?] The disagreement was that Atlantic City had proved that why waste time working in the Democratic Party. Even more important than that we accomplished all we can. Let's just let it die. My position and I was able to persuade the other folks to come around to my position. Hey, you got it, why not build it. Okay, that is what we did.

Bayard Rustin in Commentary magazine attacked us saying these people don't understand the difference between politics and protest. Well, we were vindicated. Because the same people that we fought in '64, Hubert Humphrey, Andy Young, Aaron Henry, we fought in '84. Jesse Jackson. We fought the same people. Okay. The interesting thing is the Joint Center of Political

Studies before it had taken a position that run-off primaries were discriminatory to women and blacks-- that is obvious isn't it-- but around the Mondale politics when Jesse raised that question the Joint Center was then asked and they said we don't have a position on it.

It just goes to show both in '84 and '64 when you really challenge people politically on issues they go to whoever pays the money. The president of the UAW said to Martin Luther King look Martin you got \$66,000 last year. If you side with the MFDP you won't get anything this year. {Break}

What we were able to do was man a legal arsenal that included Kinoy, Ben Smith from New Orleans, Kunstler-- that was early on. That was later to be joined by Lawyers Committee For Civil Rights.... What we would do-- you need to look at a book called political participation-- 1968-- that was written by the Civil Rights Commission. Frank Parker who is in Washington and you ought to talk to him because he is now with the Joint Center for political studies. He did a lot of work on reapportionment, redistricting and what have you.

Our first suit, Connor versus Johnson, Peggi Connor vs. Paul Johnson. It took something like 26 years for it to be finalized, in and out of the Supreme Court. But that suit led to the number of blacks in the state legislature now. What else did the MFDP accomplish. We politicized the civil rights movement. When we talked about the kind of organizing that we did Paul Jacobs and a few others agreed with us that what we were really talking about was parallel institutionalization. You have an institution that is not functioning so you cover it with one that is functioning. And you make the fight around function rather than identification.

The state legislature passed a bill saying that they had the right to consolidate any two adjoining counties-- you get the picture. There would have been no black majority in any county. We went into federal district court to stop them. Why? Because under Section 5 it had not been submitted. As you know no two adjoining counties-- even though the law is still on the books. We got a written agreement from _____ the vice attorney general that the law would

never be implemented. It never has been.

On the question of Viet Nam. The first group in the country to speak out against Viet Nam was MFDP. Then Martin Luther King, then Julian {Bond} later on. Now, one of the reasons we sort of soft pedaled it after awhile was we had every reason to believe given the agreement that had been offered me by Lyndon Baines Johnson that if we just dropped the other four congressmen and just went after John Bell Williams he would help us. Our position was no. We have got them all. Section two of the 14th admendment was clear. And what Lyndon was fighting against and what we were fighting-- if we won Texas, Alabama, Louisiana

Sinsheimer: Right.

Guyot: You couldn't win one without winning them all. Needless to say just as people were told in Atlantic City "Look your husband is up for a federal judgeship. If you don't vote right on the credentials committee he won't get it." The FBI tapped every phone. This is not heresay.....

Sinsheimer: Right.

Guyot: And then see we were able to do other things. The whole question of bringing people from Mississippi to Washington in support of the challenge. The county that used that better than any other challenge was Holmes County. They came in here, they has a master plan. They went into every federal agency, developed contacts, went back to Holmes County and utilized those contacts and maintained them. Ralfus Hayes, Hartman Turnbow. Howard Taft Bailey. You have got to go talk to him.

Sinsheimer: He is still down there.

Guyot: He is still down there. He is a member of the board of supervisors. And you talk about crafty old men. I mean these guys ran that county. You see again it was a question of independence. That county had a history during the Roosevelt era. They broke up the plantations and started a lot of small land owners. And they also had a health service thing and those whites were run out of the county, but people had been exposed to it

see. These were fearless independent men. You should definitely talk to him.

The MFDP was able to get people interested in running. Was able to get people beyond the question of fear. We elected Robert Clark to the state legislature. The question was asked, "Well, a lot of people ran at that time but of sixteen people you ran only five of them were elected." I said, "Look at what we were dealing with." Not to make any excuse but look at the reality. I mean we are talking about bringing people in who had never thought they could even run much less get elected. There was the whole question of money, there was the whole question of....

And we learned very, very well in the case of Hamer vs. Campbell where they ordered new elections based on discrimination. Some of the candidates that we selected to run for city office were called by the white candidates and said "Look there is a water tower. Do you think you could fix that if it breaks." See when you get into questions of specifics, hell any city has to hire people to do that. Some people were able to turn that into he is not qualified, he can't fix the water tower.

We dealt with the Viet Nam question straight up and down. We pulled off the Congressional Challenge. We got people involved in a hell of a lot of counties around politics. The first section 5 case-- I know you know what Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act-- it says that any change in the pattern that has the potential of diluting the black vote shall be cast out. That is interesting because the first case files was a case called Cleifton Whitley vs. Johnson. It was our, MFDP's case.

Let me tell you the history of that. I read a book called Gideon vs. Wainwright and I got a picture of the personality of Lyndon Baines Johnson. Then when the voting Rights Act passed I said anybody who is as astute and stubborn and knowledgable and creative about politics as Lyndon Baines Johnson there has got to be something in this Voting Rights Act to help me along. So I asked Jim Lewis who was with the Lawyers Constitutional Defense Committee to find it. Low and behold there is Section 5. We filed the first nongovernmental Section 5 case in the country. The only other case before us was

United States vs. Utah which tested the constitutionality of the Voting Rights Act and then they had ours.

Well the Department of Justice joined right in with us because they sense one thing that I was later to find out. There is a whole, that covers the whole gamut, redistricting, relocation of polling places, changes offices from elected to appointive. All of this was done now. Every chance we got, all you had to do was get to a federal district court and say here is the Voting Rights Act, her is what they have done. There is an inconsistency. Boom.

I am saying that to say this. Despite it small numbers, despite its absence of money, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party played a key role in not only politicizing the civil rights movement but in forcing this country to deal with the reality that when you when bring blacks into politics around their own self-interest you alter it in every one of its parameters.

I make no bones about the fact that we were pushing the political avenue long before Julian was elected, long before Marion was elected, long before Walter Faunteroy was elected. And there were very few other groups doing that. I don't know any that were not doing it in conjunction with us. CORE, SCLC supported us in hearings before the Democratic National Committee on party change. And said we should be recognized as a state party.

But the real issue was not so much recognition by the Democratic Party but altering the function of political parties. I mean right now for all practical purposed in this city and in Mississippi the Democratic Party's sole purpose is electing Democrats. That is foolish. If that is going to hand me this only to use it two days out of 365. Because I believe, and what I have learned in Mississippi proves it to me that when you get to-- there is another guy I met, {Ernst} Borinski I have been exposed to some of the best minds. David Broder a writer for the Washington Post I met in 1957 at Tougaloo. He was a visiting writer.

Borinski had this theory that some institutions are functional only by their disfunctionality. And I constantly tried to disprove that and to me the function of political parties is ... the classic example.

Because a political party should be about the total person. His or her very day life. Not simply selecting which of their members you are going to elect to office that might not serve the people anyway.

And I think given the national voter apathy and given the national disillusionment with political parties I think they are going to have to deal with that question that we trying to force them to deal with a long, long time ago.

Sinsheimer: How would you answer the question, it is twofold, first that SNCC was slow to think about economics and second that MFDP was slow to think about economics?

Guyot: Hey man. Myself, Harrie Bowie, Owen Brooks. Let me tell you something else that came out of Hattiesburg. When I brought the ministers to Hattiesburg that led to the formation of the Delta Ministry which stayed in Mississippi four years. So that was another accomplishment, positive spin-off from Hattiesburg.

I would answer that question-- it is amazing came up, I was at a dinner with William Raspberry, Henry Kirskey-- who you must talk to, state senator- Frank Parker. And Frank sort of took that line. MFDP while it did great some things like registration it didn't do economic development. Well it never was intended to. They are really two different worlds but let me show you the overlapping. Myself, Howard Taft Bailey, Owen Brooks, Harrie Bowie-- who you must talk to he is in McComb.

Sinsheimer: I have talked to him.

Guyot: You have talked to him. Good. We organized the Delta Foundation which became a multi-million dollar program. It hired people-- you know that I am sure you have talked to people about that. It wasn't that we were uninterested in economic development. It was a question of if you get as much political clout as you have and you don't convert that into..... We were talking about a state that could say to a factory come in and you don't have to pay our _____ tax for ten years. We have an uneducated workforce-- I am sure they said this tongue in cheek-- but we have a good one. You don't have to worry

about labor unions.

I don't have a problem with whether what we should have done first. But I certainly don't say damn the economic development. That would be ludicrous. To critics of me and the MFDP I would say you are absolutely right. What were you doing? I mean no one has a monopoly on economic development.

One of the other things we learned was that when you talk about economic development, when you talk about religion, when you talk about education, once you learn the skills that were learned in Mississippi they are applicable in all of those disciplines. The correlation between information and power, how to use it, how to characterize, how to tie into what you are going to do, how do you develop its setting rather than allow someone else to do it. How to formulate the questions. How to formulate the steps to be followed. Now what was your other question?

Sinsheimer: Well, that same question vis a vis SNCC a few years earlier.

Guyot: SNCC was involved in economic development. New communities, Southwest Georgia, Charles Sherrod, that is what that was about. Charles is now on the city council as you know. You see I don't think, I think SNCC being involved in economic development like me being involved in buying ovens to kill black folks. And I say that to say this. The beauty of SNCC was that it was able to bring together very talented, extremely talented, creative and courageous people from across the country. Weld them together and have them explode internally and externally, conceptually and practically. Most people
.... {Break}

I am still sometimes in a wonder at the intellectual ability of people in SNCC. The level of debate, the level of commitment. See the beautiful thing about it was not only its intellectual capacity, individually and collectively, but its ability to move very, very quickly from the conceptual to the implementation stage. I mean we didn't waste a lot of time talking about what we were going to talk about. We talked about it, we planned it, and we did it.

Sinsheimer: The Freedom Vote might be the classical

example of that in some ways.

Guyot: The Freedom Vote and the Summer Project. See the way that politics played down we met in Greenville and the first day was chaired by David Dennis and the decision was not to have the summer, '64 summer. And the classic reason being we had a lot of new people on staff who were not as well trained who now had a base who were just as dominant force as I was or anyone else. And why bring in competition to unravel that. And then Moses came the second day....

Sinsheimer: I am not sure I quite understand what you just said.

Guyot: What I am saying is you bring in white talented, educated folks to come in this system and the question is who is the leader. But then Moses came the second day and he chaired the meeting and he insisted that we-- we had seen what had happened in the Freedom election, that we had to bring the national focus to Mississippi. And that he didn't want to be a part of anything that was all black which was later to be changed. {Break}

Lets look at the positive accomplishments of SNCC in Mississippi. Mario Savio came down, the guy who was later to lead the Free Speech Movement. Allard Lowenstein came and tried to take it over. We were able to repel that. He was later to red bait us. The women's movement as far as its political thrust came out of Mississippi. Mary King....

Sinsheimer: She is writing a book by the way.

Guyot: I got you. The whole question of blacks on television stations. I remember the day in 1964 when A.A. Branch walked into the COFO office and had the papers of a suit that was to be filed against WLBT. Blacks now own and control WLBT but it just didn't happen. That was a process that started then. The litigation. The involvement of the National Council of Churches with the FCC on that question. In '62 when R.L.T. Smith ran....

Sinsheimer: Right. I was just about to mention that. We were told, We would love to sell you all time but we are just afraid that the television station would be bombed. We just couldn't protect you all." In 1962, Moses and some

other folks went to the state legislature and were told to leave from the balcony. Now we have blacks sitting there.

I think when you look around and when you compare the involvement politically and the development of leadership, there is no organization in American history that can deal with SNCC. Yes, the NAACP was a master on litigation. When Moses went to Roy Wilkins, he told him he said, "Look, our program in Mississippi is to raise money. We feel anybody who tries to organize locally in Mississippi is crazy. We are not going to do that. Our position is Mississippi should be cut off and let it drift into the sea." So he left NAACP and went to SCLC. They had him stuffing envelopes. So when Ella Baker created the situation for SNCC to come he moved to SNCC, brought some people with him.

See to me when of the other selling points of SNCC was it wasn't about the job of creating new members. If somebody wanted to come in fine, if they didn't and they wanted to maintain their independence that they for fighting for black folks we had no reservations doing everything we could for them. Not only for them but with them. We didn't send them instructions from New York. We were there. If they got in trouble we were in trouble. If they won, they won. And we always made sure that people understood we wanted to be there permanently. That this is your thing, let's work together on it.

People-- I never will forget. In 1962 a guy from the Civil Rights Commission came to visit. We had hundreds of people coming to Jackson from all over the state. I mean hundreds. And he said I want you to ride to the airport with me Guyot. I said okay. He said, "Do you know that the federal government is not going to allow this to continue." I said, "What do you mean? Are you going to kill all of us?" He said, "No, we are going to do everything we can to break it down. Imagine what would happen if people around this country began to really take seriously how they can impact on policy."

You know it was never proven to me-- and we heard different things-- it was never proven to me so clearly how frightened this country is of an enlightened, indigenous issue-orientated movement of people. Because you are talking about the possibility of making a change and forcing the kind of

reaction from the government that it can't really justify.

But see again look at John Doar, the hero of blacks in Mississippi. He was in fact that. I remember people in federal district court when I was testifying for the lawyer's committee to practice in Mississippi because white lawyers couldn't black folks. One of them asked to talk to me in the courtroom. He said, "Guyot, you know we are having a lot of trouble in our county, Campbell County and I am going to call John Doar." I was very pleased at how people could identify with him in such a way. But the church committee tells us he was the same guy who organized the COINTEL probe.

So after Atlantic City the government who had been helping us along the way suddenly said wait a minute we had better stop these folks. And everything they could do to stop us they did. But we had learned in Greenwood that there are no such things as secrets. Whatever you do do it as such there is a camera on you and that is the way you learn to survive. And we always tied ourselves into the black community. So if you come at us you have to come through some folks and vice versa so if you come at them you have to come through us.

You know we were making a salary of \$9.48 a week. We were very, very careful of paying federal income tax. Ella Baker provided us with membership cards in the YWCA so we would have identification. Look out for the nuances because that is where they kill you. See one of the other things that both SNCC and MFDP taught and taught very well is that anything is possible. I mean that may sound simplistic but we taught two, no three things. The correlation between information and power is immediate. Everything is political. And you can make a difference providing you are willing to speak out. I have tested those truisms.

Sinsheimer: That is not taught in today's schools. That is not taught today. It is simple but it is radical.

Guyot: See Courtland Cox and I argued about my connection between information and power in Atlanta in 1963. GE {General Electric} now uses that as an advertising slogan. Knock out the word correlation. It is amazing how

given the problems we were faced with then and the problems we are faced with now and the resurgence of racism. It all goes back to the functionality of institutions and the power of the individual. This country has become more and more conformist. The political gadflies, the true believers are becoming truer and truer in numbers. There is a paper that you ought to read that is written by William Cody from the University of Maryland. He does an analysis of MFDP as a third party in American history. And he comes out being very, very kind to us. There is another thing you ought to look at it. Have you read the comparison of the '64 challenge and the '68 challenge. There is a girl named Margaret-- she was a secretary to Hodding Carter. She wrote a doctoral thesis, you just must read that. You can find the reference numbers to it in Carson's SNCC: In Struggle.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Guyot: Good. Go back and read it. I think it is called the comparison of two challenges. Excellent paper. It talks about what we were doing, what the loyalists were doing. How we fought and won the '64 thing by ourselves and then we have to unify with them by '68. Again, it shows the power of the individual. Harry Bowie and I went around in '68 and we organized the nominating committees. So when we sat down with Hodding Carter and Aaron Henry-- I mean Hodding Carter and Charles Evers in Fayette they said who do you all got. They knew they had us creamed right. Said we got blank and blank and blank and blank. We elected fifty percent of that delegation. In pure power politics we should have been a part of their delegation. But that wasn't the way it worked out.

How long did you talk to Harry Bowie because Harry Bowie is key to a lot of this.

Sinsheimer: Well, I didn't talk to him much about this period after '64 because I was talking with him in the context of talking to Joe Martin. And at time I was more interested, at the time I was researching McComb so I was more into Joe's story.

Guyot: Well, you see Harry is key because he can talk about Delta Ministry which he was a part of. He can talk about economic development

after Delta Foundation. He can also talk about the changes that have gone on in the Democratic Party there. He is.... {Break}

{Discussion resumes with issue of poverty programs vis a vis the movement} ...{A lot of people} were then offered jobs, paid for what they had been doing already. So it split the movement right down the middle. The offer was brought to us at Waveland. Some SNCC folks said I will go with it, others said I won't. Hey, it succeeded in doing exactly what it was intended to do. Giving white folks a play in the decision, dismantling the movement as much as possible and if not dismantling it, disrupting it and coopting it. It succeeded.

Sinsheimer: Let me go back to a couple of things. One is to go back to the first MFDP state convention where you were elected chairman and you talked about the support of the four women leaders. I had not know that Rauh was lobbying for Aaron Henry that early.

Guyot: Oh yes.

Sinsheimer: Who was supporting Aaron at that time?

Guyot: I don't remember. But the thing I remember most about it was I won and I would not have won without their support. Because they were able to carry some other folks from other parts of the state along with them.

Sinsheimer: {Break} Do you remember the conflict or controversy over R.L.T. Smith not being elected a delegate. I guess that would have actually happened at the county level.

Guyot: In Hinds county. No I don't remember that controversy because he was listed as a member of the delegation.

Sinsheimer: As an alternate I think.

Guyot: Yeah.

Sinsheimer: Well, supposedly he was very hurt by that. People have described it differently. I just wondered whether you knew the nuances of it.

Guyot: Listen, listen, listen. We attempted to bring as many people in as possible. There would have no reason whatsoever not to have him

elected if we could. So to me there is no controversy. I remember, the only controversy I remember was some of the people from Vicksburg felt that some of the people, that some other people should have been elected than those who were elected. But this is the first I have heard of R.L.T..

Sinsheimer: What Ed King remembered-- it is ironic, the person who labels it is Lowenstein who uses it as an example of how the NAACP people were being pushed out. But how Ed King remembers it is the people in McComb and the people in Vicksburg had actually gotten to the political sophistication that they realized that if they made a pact to support each other's delegates that they would have a lot more political power because they had to compete with the Jackson delegation. That it was political sophistication. What they did was turn around and support each other's delegates and the combination of McComb and Vicksburg was powerful enough to compete with the Jackson delegation. And they actually got more delegates and then when it came to it there wasn't room for everybody. Lowenstein is not the only one that has mentioned that but I guess that was all at the district convention.

Guyot: That was at the district convention but you have to understand, you have to really understand. We went to a lot of people saying do you want to be a delegate or an alternate. The newspaper woman, Hazel Brannon Smith. She said, "No, because I am going to go up there and make me \$3,000 covering it." We went to the president of Tougaloo College, Beittel at that time. He said no.

But you see you have to understand-- anything you say to me that Allard Lowenstein said is immediately suspect. Here is a guy-- I remember him coming to talk to myself and Jesse Harris at the Freedom House. The only thing he wants to talk about is NAACP. What did we think about..... And we were honest with him. But you see Allard Lowenstein not only red-baited SNCC he participated in a meeting that is described from the notes with the National Council of Church's....

Sinsheimer: Forman's book?

Guyot: Exactly. Here is a guy who a lot of members

of the Congress really think he is a hero. The only thing I saw him do well was his work with the Eugene McCarthy campaign. I think he was a crud period. He had intense energy and talent but his whole business in South Africa, his book Brutal Mandate, have you read that. Well, you need to look at the whole, his involvement in YSA, no NSA, way before they were hooked up with the CIA. Now the guy was very talented, very energetic but most suspect. {Break}

Sinsheimer: That is what I am trying to get at ... behind his smokescreen. I mean these are the things that he is trying to promote and push where as for example in that case I mean Ed has a very clear recollection of what happened for example.

Guyot: I love Ed to death. But you have to look at some realities. Ed now works for the University of Ole Miss. Ed was in the position to assist in naming some people who should be awarded by the University of Ole Miss. Who does he name? Raspberry. R.L.T. Smith. {Richard} Wright. They were honored by Mississippi. Let me tell you something. Ed was my chaplain in school when I was at Tougaloo. He and I fight a lot of fights together. But Ed has his own interpretation of a lot of facts at which he and I are in variance. Specifically Pat Darien, Hodding Carter and others charged Ken Deane with being a spy. I defended him. The doctor from Vicksburg defended him also because he was telling us what he was doing before he was doing it. I mean I love Ed but I have problems with not him, but I have problems with his interpretations of a lot of facts, especially as it relates to Lowenstein. He loved Lowenstein. I don't mean in that sense, I had better retract that. I mean politically.

Sinsheimer: Okay. In Zinn's book there is the description of you walking down the aisle {of the church during} the Hattiesburg Freedom Day. Just wanted to get at, to use that as a way to get at the question of ... I don't know how to phrase this. Well, how do people who are involved in that sort of organizing-- have you thought about the question of ways to survive, to keep the burnout lower. Obviously the love and respect of the people you are

working with goes a great deal in terms of keeping up that sort of thing. But have you thought through other ways that people who were involved in that sort of day to day organizing where burnout becomes a problem after a certain point. I mean personally how did you survive? I mean you clearly survived longer than a lot of people> Have you thought through some of the reasons why you might have done that?

Guyot:

A couple of reasons. One I got and continue to get my energy from people. I like people. People stimulate. Ideas, different ways people react to the same thing. That fascinates me, it energizes me. But when I reach my level of physical dissipation I simply close out. I simply gear myself only for relaxation for a certain time. Or I read a book. Or I go talk to someone who I know disagrees with me. Or I go talk to someone who has been on my list to meet for a long time. Or I go fishing. I learned a long time ago that you just have to let it coast, coast a while until you get ready to move.

Because I advocate to everyone never move until you are thoroughly prepared both physically and intellectually, before you have thought out what you want, what is possible at the beginning, who do you have to deal with to get it and how do you include people rather than exclude it. I try to teach people that. I learned over and over again. When you know who is in the meeting and you know what the meeting is about you can.... Because there will be too much new stuff. The question is who is making the decisions.

I have trained myself to go into the room for the first meeting and know who the power players are and I listen to what they say. And if what they are saying is consistent with what I want then I join them. I have trained. It is just-- what amazes me is how many different little things that deal with communication move in a decision. I am not interested in who is involved in the decision, if I can be involved in who is going to frame the question....

Sinsheimer: Let me put it in a different context.

Guyot : Okay.

Sinsheimer: Your activity in '64, '65, '66, '67 compared

to Willie {Peacock} and Sam {Block} And to other people. I mean they just couldn't survive in a way.

Guyot:

Well, you see it has to do with something else. I knew what the political realities were. I knew that, I believed in and continued to believe in people. I come from a family of strong people who made things happen. So I knew that things could be done. And I also knew that we were fighting to get black people into the political arena. And I knew what the limitations of the political arena were. So we had a different way of analyzing what was success and failure.

I mean the fact that Eleanor Holmes Norton while still at Yale came down to Greenwood. Marion Wright Eddleman came to Greenwood. This was I thought important, but hey, they are simply two people. But the whole question is how do we spin that off in really getting somebody else identified and invigorated and mobilized. Some people thought that we should have registered more voters, we should have built more houses, and this stuff should be visibly measurable. I never assumed that.

And this whole thing about I am not a part of the system. I ask people right quick. I said what you are doing is too valuable to waste time on it. Do you wear clothes? Do you pay taxes? Do you eat food? And once they answer those three questions I said let's not talk about being part of the system. Let's talk about how you utilize this one.

That was one of the things that allowed me to take more of it. I had it rough but there is nothing that I would undo. I paid for it physically. I had hypertension a lot. I was always overweight and I had a kidney transplant. I have an implant on this eye, looking forward to one on this eye. A reaction to the medicine I take for the kidneys. But hey I have lived well. I have recruited a lot of good white people. I have been associated with everybody in this country that is worth a damn politically. Some of whom I disagree with. Most of whom I love. But I have never ever, ever hesitated in taking on anybody or anything. And I am very proud of the way I live.

Sinsheimer:

How do you in terms of the Movement how do you deal with question of people measuring

the success? I mean obviously there is a whole spectrum of the way people were looking at Atlantic City.

Guyot: Right.

Sinsheimer: From one spectrum to the other. I mean as chairman how did you try to address the question. How did you try to draw people back in who in a sense saw that as a failure?

Guyot: By simply saying two things. One, we went to fight on an issue. We did not let people change us on the issue as we saw it. Best characterized by Fannie Lou Hamer, "We didn't come up here for no two seats."

Sinsheimer: Right.

Guyot: . Okay. That is a success. Number two, look at what they had to array against us. Here we are a damn near impoverished party, barely with enough money to get up there to make the trip. What is the threat. The threat is that ordinary people would be determining their only lives and the politics of this state and eventually of this country. What is so wrong with that. And again look at what they had to align against it. Everything in the federal government from the White House on down. His {Johnson's} call of a press conference to undercut Fannie Lou Hamer, the FBI, all of the civil rights agencies being pressured individually. Every member of the credentials committee. What more can you do.

Again, consistent with the principal that the fight was to get in. That was what done to make us stay out which simply enhances in the words and actions of the enemy of how important what we are doing is. I won with a lot of people. See you have to look at who was on the executive committee. Peggi Connor, Victoria Gray, Eunita Blackwell, later Susie Ruffin. We did have some men, I have just forgotten most of their names. {Break}

Sinsheimer: I just have a couple of more questions. Two conversations I wanted to see if you remember. One was about whether or not to call a general strike in the Delta. Or how serious that conversation was or whether it took place.

Guyot: It took place around the Freedom Union that

was organized by the Delta Ministry. As I remember I supported it, but I don't remember too much more about it than that.

Sinsheimer: Did you remember the SNCC, did you go to the SNCC Conference shortly after, or at the time of Kennedy's assassination.

Guyot: Food and Jobs, jobs and Yeah, jobs and food. Yeah, that is when the AFL-CIO tried to buy us out. Bayard Rustin talked about the need to work with the labor unions. It was a small meeting. And the guy who was later to watch us, every step at the '68 convention, was there right here in Washington at Howard University saying "Look we will put up \$30,000. We will set up an advisory board and we will pretty much deal with our problems." We said no, go buy somebody else off. I never will forget that conference. Norman Thomas said at the conference, "We can't win by singing, but we can't win without singing." What do you want to know about it?

Sinsheimer: Well, a couple of things. One was about Rustin's involvement.

Guyot: Oh, Rustin was clearly, was clearly, let's go with the labor unions. Let's come become stablized.

Sinsheimer: I have the transcript of his speech. I will send it to you. I have Thomas' speech too.

Guyot: Please do. I would love it.

Sinsheimer: {Howard Zinn} had all of the old reel to reel tapes that he gave me. This next question would be about the discussions that went on what was SNCC's reaction going to be formally or informally to the assassination.

Guyot: Of?

Sinsheimer: Of Kennedy.

Guyot: It is amazing I remember I was in Hattiesburg on the day he was assassinated and Ms. Dee's who worked with me and was a member of the church, walked up and said, "What are we going to do now." Which was an indication of how much people identified with that guy in a positive sense. But I don't remember that discussion in SNCC.

Sinsheimer: The third question is if you will remember Moses' speech at that convention was a walkthrough of Theodore White's article. White had just red baited SNCC and Moses' speech dealt with the issue of how open SNCC should be. A pretty strong statement about there is so much work to do that any organization should be allowed in.

Guyot: What speech was this?

Sinsheimer: This was his address at that convention?

Guyot: Jobs and Freedom?

Sinsheimer: Right.

Guyot: Okay.

Sinsheimer: I just wondered if there were conversations after that because that raises the whole question, it makes Moses' position clear in terms of the National Lawyers Guild.

Guyot: Let me tell you something. Myself and Moses, Dave Dennis, met in Jackson with Ben Smith, Arthur Kinoy, and Kunstler and we laid it out very clearly. We are not interested in a left-right thing. We are interested in one thing. We make the decisions and you all do what is necessary to make them happen. Or to protect us in what we do. That was it. I am very proud of the fact that SNCC, COFO-- we were red baited for it-- but internally we were united on it. Hey, as long as they are doing what we want that is their business. Member of the Congress now from Detroit defended Pete Stoner. Hell, I was defended in Hattiesburg by John Conyers. At that time he was newly elected Congressman and a member of the Guild. That was somebody else's problem. I am very proud of SNCC for that.

Sinsheimer: Were there any pressures within the organization for that. Any people saying, "Well, we are going to get red baited for that."

Guyot: Not in SNCC.

Sinsheimer: So all of the pressures were outside of SNCC?

Guyot: In fact I was under a lot of pressure with

some people saying Guyot you are just not left enough. I would say...

Sinsheimer: Within SNCC?

Guyot: Within SNCC. Let's put it this way. There was nothing that happened in SNCC in Mississippi that I didn't approve of. I was closer to the people than Moses and Dennis. While they were the leaders. Moses has said publicly that unless I agreed to it it didn't happen. Because I learned one thing. You have to fight on decisions before the fact. After the fact, after they are arrived at, it is implementation. You can either sit it out or what have you. I am not the kind to sit it out. So that is where I made my fight and made it often and won a lot of them.

And one example was in the Freedom election John Lewis, who is now in the Congress, and Fannie Lou Hamer wanted to go door-to-door in Jackson and I stopped them. And see the interesting thing is I often wonder what would have happened if I had supported it and it would have happened.

Sinsheimer: Why did you stop them?

Guyot: Because what I was concerned about was it was one thing to set up that kind of situation. the Freedom election, publicize it and encourage everyone to participate. It was another thing of putting them in the physical danger of door-to-door approaching which had never been done before, and the total unpredictability of it. I mean if you go to one door it might be come on and have some ice water, you go to another and somebody might get shot. And that was what I was concerned about. We were on a ~~pragmatic~~ *pragmatic* thrust so why bring in a variable that was totally unpredictable. I taught myself... go ahead.

Sinsheimer: Well, other people had canvassed door-to-door, but you were saying you didn't want those to do it.

Guyot: No, no, white people had not ~~been~~ canvassed door-to-door.

Sinsheimer: Oh, you are talking about white people.

Guyot: That is ^x exactly right. That's right.

Sinsheimer: Okay. They wanted to canvass in Jackson?

Guyot: That is right. And my position was no and I got the support of other things. Another thing, you have led me into breagging and I appreciate it. When we went, when SNCC went to meet with the Attorney General and Arthur Schlesinger and John Doar at the Department of Justice I was selected to go with them to make sure they didn't sell out. And who was the SNCC delegation. Jim Forman and Bob Moses.

I say that only to say that despite the fact that some people, Casey Hayden, god bless her, always used to tell me you answer all of the questions right but you don't come to the final conclusion. I said, "Honey, let me tell you just one thing. We just look at this differently." She would say, "Well, do you think labor people should be organized?" I said absolutely. "Do you think they should own the factories?" I said, "Yes, if they can afford it."

My position always was once you accept the fact that the fight is to get people in to what is an imperfect system, because basically that is what they want, that is what is really possible, then you don't have to worry about whether we are going to have socialism in five years or not.

When I went to Rutgers Law School people were astounded, here I was a former client of Harry Green who taught there and Arthur Kinoy and I was the one arguing that corporations exist to make money. That is the function of the institution. Now if you can by social pressure force it to contribute some money to some homeless folks or send some blacks to college that is fine. But I am not going to invest in something that is not going to make money and I am not going to encourage anybody else too. I made a point of saying I am the most radical, poorest capitalist there is. But I think there is enough flexibility in capitalism for us to do what we want to do. If we don't utilize that.

I think we made a mistake and I am going to do something about it in this city to recapture the whole flag. See the civil rights movement had the flag as emblem and certainly in the '63 march. And that got way around the Viet Nam question but it has to be recaptured. See I think there are a lot of

natural drives in this country that have to be utilized. As far as I am concerned the whole politicization of the white evangelists is a natural reaction to what the black church had done. I don't have any problem of that. I understand what that is about. And it is also very, very clear to me that without the black church there would have been no civil rights movement.

But there is the whole question of patriotism and who defines and its symbolic value. Because with the economic moves that are going around television now-- and also another thing. Another truism. Without television you couldn't have gotten national legislation. You couldn't have gotten national involvement. But now with the economic moves that is going to impact on that there is going to be more and more need to get people energized around other nonnegotiables like patriotism like health, like the role of the individual in policy formulation and inculcation. How do we deal with limited resources creatively.

You see it goes to another question. And that is people constantly raise the question why are student campuses so removed. Well, you have to understand. There weren't a whole hell of a lot of people organizing student campuses when the civil rights movement was in its hey day. SNCC was the best at it. But until you have that kind of organization that is well trained, that is mobile, that can really cut across a lot of barriers right quickly and transcend them, it is not going to happen. But I think now you are getting into a situation where the need for creation of something like SNCC. It certainly won't be as ... but the need for it.

So therefore my sense of politics and American history says there is no such thing as a vacuum. Because when you start talking about the labor unions as we know them are almost disfunctional. So they have to change how they recruit people, what they recruit them around, and how to deal with an economy that says pretty much-- a friend of mine is writing a book. I met him through the Ripon Society and the... Episcopal Society For Cultural and Racial Unity during the challenge. He told me you know what I am doing is writing a book about the families who use to hire out of social obligation 1500

or 2000 people in these small towns. What they were doing now is taking their money and investing it in Taiwan and what have you. And what is happening to those towns is that they are becoming welfare sites.

Well, that is not new. It is becoming quite national. But the whole question is how do you deal with it. Hey, I think we will find that the election of Democrats is not necessarily the answer. Incidentally the next president of the United States is going to be a guy named Robert Dole. Hart will not get the nomination. Dole will win the presidency.

Sinsheimer: He is scary.

Guyot: Who is scary?

Sinsheimer: Dole.

Guyot: I don't think so. I like him. I am going to support him. I am going to support Jesse Jackson first. If Jesse does not get the nomination I will then support Robert Dole.

Sinsheimer: You are not the first person to tell me that?

Guyot: Is that right?

Sinsheimer: A lot of people like him.

Guyot: I mastered the Voting Right Act. {Break} When I left Rutgers Law School I went to work for the Lawyers Committee of Civil Rights and Law. Monitored the Voting Rights Act.

_____ and I led the fight for extension before anybody else in this country did. We met with Joe Rauh. Joe Rauh, during the McGovern candidacy, McGovern wrote a paper saying he was going to go to the Southern Governor's conference and he was going to offer them abolition of the Voting Rights Act if they would support him. I saw the file. Joe Rauh to his credit said you had better not do this.

What I am saying is that became such a key issue, extension or non exstention.

_____ who is now in South Carolina and I led that fight. We got money and pulled together a conference in Mississippi. And the two Senators that did it were Kennedy and Dole. I like his wit, I like his courage. I think the Democratic Party can't deal with Jesse Jackson. They want black folks with no

demands. And Jesse is goinbg to be a force to be reckoned with. I am going to support him to the hilt.

Let me go back to Bayard Rustin, I want to tell you one other thing about him. In 1966, we had a meeting of the black elected officials at the Admiral Benbow {hotel} in Jackson. The Lt. Governor of Mississippi was there. James Farmer was there, some people from the Justice Department, Aaron Henry. We were all meeting. I get Bayard Rustin out of the room and I want you to talk to Martin and tell him you want his help in '68 because we are going back to the Democratic Convention. He looked me square in the eye and said look Guyot, "By '68 Martin will either be totally destroyed or dead." Any other questions?

Sinsheimer: I will let you go. I appreciate it.