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**MEMORANDUM**

To: Tim West

Fm: Joe Sinsheimer *JS*

Re: Interview with June Johnson

Dt: November 29, 1998

Enclosed is an interview I conducted with June Johnson, a leading civil rights activist in Greenwood, Mississippi during the 1960's.

In the interview, Johnson discussed 1) her recruitment into the movement by Robert Moses 2) her beating at the Winona, Mississippi bus stop 3) her family's reaction to her civil rights activity 4) Stokely Carmichael's leadership style 5) the role of Father Nathaniel Machesky in the Greenwood movement 6) Silas McGhee's sit-in attempts in Greenwood 7) the boycott of Slim Henderson's store after he beat a local black woman 8) civil rights activity in Greenwood in the last 1960's and early 1970's.



Interview with June Johnson  
Washington, DC  
May 5, 1987

June Johnson: ...My oldest brother who lives in Greenwood now first started going to the NAACP meetings that they were having there in Greenwood on Avenue I. He became chum, friendly with Sam Block and Willie Peacock. And they would have these little private meetings and we heard the whispering going on in town but it didn't really excite us at that point you know because it was just a whisper.

J. Sinsheimer: What was you brother's name?

Johnson: Theodore. And he and my grandmother, he is my grandmother's heart, he and my grandmother would lie in the room and talk. He would be telling her about what was going on. But once she found out what was going on she sent him down there. And he would come back and tell her what was happening. So it became publicly known that the NAACP was coming to openly invite the community out to membership drives, an active campaign to get people more involved in the NAACP.

And this particular day we happened to be coming from school my sister and I. This was in the later part of '62. My sister and I and about three other girls was walking from school and we saw these men out passing out leaflets, stopping us at the high school and all. From Broad Street to where we lived on North Street they was all down on most of the corners passing out leaflets, you know telling us to come out to mass meetings and why they were in town and what they intended to do and what have you.

So were these little silly girls growing up in the community. We giggled and what have you and really never gave it any serious thought until we came to more openly talk about it. And then some of the local people began to get involved like Freedy Greene's father, Mr. Dewey Greene. I think if I am not mistaken he at that time was the president of the NAACP, but he was it. His name was Mr. Dewey Greene. I don't know if you talked with Greene family while you were there.

Sinsheimer: I haven't.



Johnson:

Now, one of his daughters lives here in Washington and I will give you her phone number while you are here. Sam Block and Willie Peacock were more vulnerable in the community than anybody so people began to take up a friendly friendship with them. George Green and his sister Freddy was in high school and they started getting involved. And they were somewhat like the organizers for the school system. They were on the high school level and a young lady named Patricia Nixon. I don't know what happened to Pat.

So our way of coming home was from North to McLaurin, from McLaurin to Avenue H, which we passed by David Jordan's home, to Broad Street. That was our route to go to school. And we made it a habit of keeping that same route because that would give us the opportunity to go by the "freedom" office and we would get a chance to see the men there. Sam Block, Willie Peacock, Hollis Watkins, and you had a guy by the name of Brown.

Sinsheimer:

Luvaughn Brown?

Johnson:

Yes. And you had later on other people started coming like Charles McLaurin, Jesse Harris, Jimmy Travis, and people started in and out, {Lawrence} Guyot, and what have you. So this particular day I ran into Bob Moses. He was standing at the corner of Avenue H and Broad Street. And it looked like there was a coincidence around that particular time in the morning because I had to be at school by 8:00 o'clock. I would run into him and he would chat me. I was very inquisitive person. I like people. By nature I like people, although there is a time I get frustrated with them.

So I would be asking Bob all these questions and he would carry my books and he would walk me to school. My interest had basically somewhat drifted away from school because I was so curious about what this man was saying to me and what was going on. I was always being pulled on and conquered by the teachers and they were always saying derogatory things about the people and what was going on.

But the attitude at that time was very segregationist. Teachers couldn't even talk



about being first class citizens. They could not literally go to the mass meetings. And they would call us in and ask us what is going on and what have you. And we became very frustrated about that. And it became a situation where we were defending the freedom people as opposed to the respect of there being the person in the authority. Because what they were trying to do, they was trying to suppress our minds in terms of how we thought about what was going on. All kinds of rumors to discredit you know what the overtone was about. They did that, they said they heard of young women going down there and sleeping with the people in SNCC. They heard of people-- babies, young women getting pregnant.

And most of us stopped getting our hair done. We started wearing the Afro. Frank Smith's wife, when she came to Greenwood-- Frank Smith and Martha Prescott. Jean Wheeler was her name at that time, and Martha Prescott were the two people who exposed me or some of us to the natural. So we started wearing our hair natural. And my particular teacher stated to me that she would actually pay for me to get my hair done. And I told her you know that I liked it the way it was. So Mr. Threadgill {the school principal}, he was a Tom from his heart. Whatever the system said, he did it.

So this particular evening my sister, myself, a girl named Willie B. Thomas, and Erance Brook, we stopped by the office on McLaurin Street. And Bob was in there. And you know we was curious and what have you. He was such a mild mannered person. He asked us if I would sit, and did we want to look around and what have you. And so my sister would always pushing me up. She said, "June, you ask him," you know.

Sinsheimer: Is she younger or older than you?

Johnson: She is a year older than I am. She is in Chicago.

Sinsheimer: And what is her name?

Johnson: Dorothy Wedinngton. So I asked Bob what was they there for and why did they come there. And did they think that it was safe for them to come to Greenwood. And what is it that they wanted us to do and what have you. So



he was telling us that they were there to make sure that blacks become first class citizens and they wanted us to get involved, help canvass the community, pass out leaflets, blah, blah, blah.

So Bob had these canvass notebooks prepared. We had agreed that we would come back. He asked us if we would ask our parents to come to a meeting around 7:00 o'clock. He was going to teach us how to do voter registration, campaigning and what have you. So what happened was that my sister agreed. "Oh June, go ahead and take the notebook." So I said okay. So we took the notebook and we all was on our way home and we was trying to figure up some kind of lie how was we going to get out of this and whether or not we was going to come back and what we had to do and how we were going to get our lesson done and what we were going to say in terms of coming back here for 7:00 o'clock.

Well, I think Bob somewhat knew that we were lying and we wouldn't be back. I think he sort of knew that. But I had all the intentions of coming back because I was just going to tell the truth in coming back. And so when we got near home Erance kept {saying} how her mother was going to get her and Willie B. kept talking about her mother getting her. So my sister said, "Well, June you take the notebook." I said, "Well, you go through the front door and I will go through the back." So I took the notebook and I went in the back door. My second oldest sister saw me come in the house with the book and she said-- we called my mother by her name. Her name was Lula Bell and we called her Bell. She said, "I am going to tell Bell that you all have been down to that old Freedom office again."

So sure enough Lula went and told her and she called us out on the front porch and she told us to go in the house and put the book down and do our chores and do our homework. She said i want you all to take those books back down there and I mean don't go back to that place anymore. So Willie B. called, Erance called, and my sister and I we said we are going to have to go. So we went back that night to take the books and Bob was there. We had some little old fictitious story to tell and eventually we just had to tell the truth that our parents



told us not to come back because he knew that.

But he didn't take it either way. It didn't bother him. It didn't bother him because I guess he knew that it was a process of adjustment, getting used to the rejection, getting used to people being reluctant to actually getting involved, getting used to trust, getting used to the reactionary position or attitude that our parents would take toward some strangers that had come to a town, that we didn't know anything about, and they said they had an agenda and what have you.

So we took the books and we sat around and we talked and it went on. And I started going back to school. And I would really meet him just about every morning on this corner because I think the problem was, it wasn't a problem, the fact that he lived near the freedom house, or lived in that vicinity. I was going to school and he was coming that way. He would always walk me to school or walk me half way to school. So my mother worker from five to three in the morning. She would go to work at like 5:00 o'clock and she would get off like at 3:00 a.m. She was cooking at a restaurant, a nightclub, I think it was called the Paradise Inn. I think that was the name, the Paradise Inn.

So that meant she was gone. My Daddy worked at the compress and he normally got off of work between six and seven o'clock. And in the fall he would be late because of the fact that was the cotton picking season. Cotton was being harvested at that particular time. Normally we would go to the field around September and October to pick cotton. My mother worked in a nightclub, my father worked, my grandmother would go as a migrant farmworker down to Florida or to North Carolina. She would go to Florida to pick oranges, to North Carolina to do tobacco and stuff like that.

So my grandmother would be away, my mother was going to work at 5:00 and my father would already be at work or would have to work a longer shift at night. And that left us at home by ourselves. So what happened, my sisters were left, the older one was left responsible for us. So I guess I was the headache. I would always slip away and go down there to see what was going on.



So when I got home, when my mother got home at night I would really get punished. I knew I was going to be punished but it was a curiosity. It was a situation that I wanted to know what was happening and what was these people doing here.

And to be honest with you I never really had any interests. I really thought I was going to end up in an orphanage home. Because I heard that so much from this teacher. I heard it from the community. We didn't have anything to be into. We really, really didn't. Picking cotton and chopping cotton was a way of life. That is what it was. Because you know I was like thirteen turning fourteen years of age. I wasn't dating. I could only go the playground or go to my Daddy's mother house, or go an visit some of my relatives. But I am talking about in terms of girls club or boys club or going off to summer camp, you never heard of it. I mean I didn't here of it.

So my real exposure came in 1963 when Bob and them went to their first, well went to one of their spring conferences in Atlanta at Gammon Seminary. And I had never been out of Mississippi in my life. That was in 1963. I beged, I cried, I thought about running off, I did everything because I wanted to go. So I put Bob up to go and ask my mother. And he went, he and Annelle Ponder agreed that they would be responsible for me. So there you had myself, Freedy Greene, Charlotte Mae King, I think there were several other people from Greenwood that went to this conference.

And we didn't know a lot of the stuff that was going on, the dialogue. We would sit and listen to people talk and what have you. So we came back home we had to, at one of the mass meetings we had to get up and talk about our experiences. And Lawrence Guyot kind of pushed us on up front to talk about what we had experienced and what we saw and what we heard and how did we feel about it. Other than saying the Easter speech that was our first public appearance of getting up trying to talk.

Sinsheimer: All of the kids had to talk in church on Easter?

Johnson: Basically, most parents, it was mandatory that most kids give a talk on Easter.



Sinsheimer: Where did you all go to church?

Johnson: I went to Stranger's Home Missionary Baptist Church. That was what my family was a member of. That church never opened their doors to civil rights, never. Not even to this today.

Sinsheimer: Was it in Greenwood?

Johnson: It is still in Greenwood. Two blocks from where my family lives now. And they are still members of that particular church. And school was out so there was a workshop coming up in Charleston, South Carolina. It was a nonviolent workshop talking about techniques in terms of how you protect yourself, defend yourself from any physical damage or harm. So I wanted to go to that. And I went to that. And I went with a different grouping. I went with Fannie Lou Hamer, Euvester Simpson, Rosemary Freeman, a young named Brown, and several other people I can't recall right now.

We went and we stayed there and on our way back we stopped in Columbus, Mississippi. We was riding Trailways bus station, Trailways bus, and we had a lay over in the Trailway bus terminal. And we had tried to sit at the lunch counter and there was some confusion but it was not a major confusion because we were there for a long time and we were discussing how were we going to deal with the situation. Annelle Ponder was with us also. So it was about time for the bus to come and we all decided that we would sit in the front of the bus as opposed to sitting in the back and to see what the reaction was. We also discussed if one was in trouble, we all was in trouble. It was about the collective effort of sticking together and for safety purposes.

And Mrs. Hamer was somewhat drafted or chosen as the leader or spokesperson for each of us and we respected that. And she and I had gotten in front of the line to get on the bus but the white bus driver came and took a little white girl from the back of that line and pulled her in front of us. Literally pushed us to the ground and told us niggers to get back and put this little white girl and put her on the bus and then took all of the people around us and made sure they got on the bus.



So it was a coincidence that we still was able to get on the bus and we got half to the front. And we told the bus driver that he was violating our civil rights and our constitutional right and we were going to file a complaint with the Trailway bus company about how we had been treated and we wanted his name, his badge and blah, blah, blah. Enroute to Winona which was our next stop.

Sinsheimer: So you were sitting in the middle of the bus at this point?

Johnson: Yea, middle ways of the bus.

Sinsheimer: And did he object to that?

Johnson: He had some objections but you know we had taken an attitude you know we wasn't going to get up. We just stayed there. We sang and we talked and what have you. Enroute to Winona, at every little stop between Columbus, Mississippi and Winona this man stopped and made a telephone call. And we had basically concluded that we were going to run into some problems once we got to Winona because Mrs. Hamer was up from around Killmichael, Mississippi.

When we got to the bus station there at Winona we knew we had been set because there was highway patrol and police officers and white folks standing around. So we went in to the lunch counter. We asked to be served. The white woman was rude and nasty and she told us that they didn't serve niggers and that we would have to get up and move and go on the other side. And we sat there and the next thing we knew there were police officers and highway patrol men sitting around us just snatching us, just throwing us out and telling us not to come back in.

And this is a phase of this story I tell all of the time that I never forgotten. There was a big fat white guy that was standing with a pair of dungarees on and a white t-shirt. When we all were thrown out of the bus terminal we stood out and we talked, and we talked about what was our next move. What do we do? Do we walk away? Do we go back? Or do we go to jail? We walked over, myself, and Euvester.... Most of just walked over and took down the highway patrol tag number.



This white guy went back inside and said something. I don't know what he said but whatever he said triggered all of those law enforcement officers and they came out immediately and attacked us and arrested us and took us off to jail. Mrs. Hamer had gone to sit because she was having problems with her legs. And when she was us being arrested we started calling her and there was another girl left on bus and a friend of ours I grew up with from .... Bernard-- I can't think of his name. But he and Luvaughn {Brown}, Bernard Washington were still on the bus. Mrs. Hamer got off of the bus and she said what do you all want me to do? And by that time one of the police officers shouted get that black son-of-a-bitch and place her under arrest too.

We were all brought down to the jail and when we got there somebody had apparently had busted a whiskey still because there was a whiskey still that had been taken from the woods somewhere, shaped like an old wood stove. The jail was-- if you petition this part of this wall that was extent of the jail you know. And we could see some of the inmates and there were about eight or nine police officers. I know there was the chief, the highway patrol, and several people in plain clothes and what have you. They started interrogated us and wanted to know why had we chosen Winona, Mississippi to come and start trouble. They had heard about those troublemakers up in Greenwood but we picked the wrong city to come to try to do anything.

And at that point they had taken-- one of the police officers took his key, which were very heavy keys to the cell and poked Brown, James Brown in the stomach with them, and then turned around and took his foot and hit him in his behind. And Euvester was a highly light-skinned, she is very light-skinned lady. She had just moved from Racine, Wisconsin back to Mississippi. And Euvester has a very high temper. And the guy walked over and pushed her and was kind of feeling on her and she responded. And at that point they all turned their focus and Annelle Ponder and said that they were going to teach me about tampering with state property. That was the allegation that they made against me that I was tampering with state property. I didn't do anything but



just go there and look at the car tag and was writing it down.

So they was questioning about who sent us there and why did they come there. And we had made a very bad mistake. And we had wished that we had never stopped in Winona. So they placed everybody in a cell except myself. And the next thing I know I was being beaten by each one of the police officers. And they placed me in jail and they took Annelle Ponder out. They beat her because they said she didn't know how to say "Yes, sir" to a southern white man. And they put her in jail. After they beat her, they had beaten her so badly that she ahd fallen and Rosemary and I was in a cel togther but they had taken Annelle in another cell. So that left Rosemary and myself and Mrs. Hamer and Euvester.

The next thing we knew they was coming to get Mrs. Hamer. And they had taken her in the lower end of the cell. We could hear her just screaming and hollering. It was like you was distant, miles away, and the echo of her screaming of her hollering was a very, very strange kind of feeling and a kind of voice that you really didn't want to hear. And she was beaten so badly until, it became very, very clear to us that we had, we had a lot of choices to make in terms of survival in this jail. Because what they tried to do, they played a lot of mental games with us. The cells were filthy, we didn't have drinking water, the toilet was filthy. The highway patrol came in and ordered me to pull my clothes off and wash them in the commode in order for me not to have evidence of blah, blah, blah.

So what I did. I tore the dress in half in some kind of way to save some of it. And I had a slip on and I had this big pocketbook and I had stuffed this pocketbook with some of my clothes because I wanted to have some evidence when I got out. And he would come in all the time at night. We didn't have blankets or anything to sleep on. We were just there. And what happened was he was trying to get us to become indoctrinated to the fact that we had attacked each other. And that they had been very good to us and that nothing had really happened to us while we were there. And we were standing out on the street and we were put in a jail and got into a fight. And



that is how they really wanted us to think.

So there was a black guy who I guess was doing time around the jail that would come and was a snitcher. He did a lot of little things. The food was so filthy so we decided not to eat. So he would say to us that if you want to get out of here alive, if you want to do what you is supposed to do you had better do this and blah, blah, blah because this is not the place to resist. So Bernard and this girl that was left on the bus got the word to Greenwood. We knew they did because that was the next stop. We could not make a phone call, we could not make any contact with nobody.

I do remember the night-- we stayed there that Sunday night-- that Monday night they tried us in front of a white mob. They handcuffed all of us, took us out of jail, and walked us across the city of Winona. They were in a process of building a new jail there. And we were all found guilty. I was the youngest person, I was fourteen years old. And they were getting ready to send me off to Oakland Training School, but a more common term is a bad girls' school because they said I was a juvenile and that I was in violation of some state law to be away from my parents.

So there was a real question between them and the law about my age. They wanted me to say that I was twenty-one years of age. And I refused to say it. I was not twenty-one, and I did not say twenty-one. And at some point they wanted me to leave the jail that night but I wouldn't do it because they said they couldn't keep me there, they had no charges, yet in still they did have charges against me because there was a dispute a between what had happened and my being a monor while being in jail.

So my mother did come over. My mother came over-- I remember now-- Ida {Mae Holland] and my sister Dorothy and somebody else came to see us.

Sinsheimer: Guyot?

Johnson: No, we didn't see Guyot until we got out the day Medagr got killed. That is the only time we saw Lawrence Guyot. And Ida came over and got very, very reckless and what have you. And they told her if she wanted she could



get some of the same thing that we had gotten.... So my mother did come and I wouldn't go back with her. I stayed in jail, I told her that I was going to stay there, that was a commitment that we had made together. I refused to leave that jail and I stayed there until Mrs. Hamer and the other people got out of jail. But while being there....

Sinsheimer: What was your mother's reaction to that? I mean did she accept it finally?

Johnson: Sure, she accepted it. I didn't think, I told her I didn't think that anything worse could have happened or would happen than had already happened. My eyes were closed literally. My head was busted wide open. My face was bruised very badly. And my body had scars all over. I had been humiliated to death because they tore all of my clothes off right there in front of all these white men you know. So what else could happen other than me getting killed? And they did take us out of the jail one night and put a gun on each of us to say that they did not beat us. And we were so silly, we were so silly and so unfearful that these people would shoot us it was unbelievable. We all denied, we refused to sign the statements.

That is when we heard that Lawrence Guyot-- finally they broke through, it is my understanding, I think Robert Kennedy was the Attorney General at that time, finally they broke through. It was my understanding that there was a lot-- I did not learn this until the early part of '80 that these people had literally planned to kill us. And there were so many internal struggles going on between SNCC decisions, SCLC decision, and what have you. And Guyot was the one that broke loose and protested and said, "If these women can go to jail to our freedom than we can violate whatever it is. We have to go up there and see about them."

So at that point we were told that Guyot was missing but we did not know he was right there in the jail. But the Klansmen had taken him in the hills of Carroll County and beat him literally near to death. Until the day we saw him he was badly bruised, beat up, and what have you. And at that time the sheriff, the police, and several other people came to our cells and said we could



go. We was leery about leaving but this was in the broad open day. We were leery about leaving, and we we were so fearful about it because we didn't know whether they was trying to set us up to kill us or somebody-- because we had been told that we were going to beat again. And what happened, somebody from John Doar's office, the Justice Department... the FBI came back and told us that we didn't have to be afraid that they were there to protect us and we could leave.

When we got out there was Bernard Lee, the Reverend Beranrd Lee. Have you talked with Bernard Lee? He works down at the district building. The Reverend Beranrd Lee who was working with SCLC at that time. Andy Young, Hollis Watkins, and my mother and a couple of other cars came and got us. But on our way they told us that Medagr had been killed that night, or early that morning. And they took us to the SNCC office. And when we got there we was met with FBI, Justice Department, TV cameras, people in the community folks, and what have you.

We had not had any medical treatment the whole while we was in jail. I was flown one place. I went to Connecticut and I ended up at William Coffin's house, Bill Coffin. Do you know who I am talking about?

Sinsheimer: The chaplain at Yale?

Johnson: I stayed with him for awhile and then Marion Wright Eddleman, she and Bob Moses had made these arrangements, I stayed at his place and I ended up going to summer camp in New Haven, some part of Connecticut. And I spent most of my summer there and while being there the FBI came up to pick me up. But I had been instructed not to leave with nobody. So that is where I spent most of my summer. I went back to Mississippi and that is when the March on Washington came and I just repacked my bags and got in the car with Willie Peacock, Charles McLaurin, Hollis Watkins and we came back to Washington to the March on Washington and we hooked up with Bob and all of them.

And then when I went back home-- that was my experience for that particular year and I ended up going back to school. And in November ....

Sinsheimer: Let me ask you some questions? What was the



reaction when you went back to school from let's say your classmates. Well, those of us who were involved you know they would talk to me about it but many of the people they wasn't involved. It was not a thing that I talked to everybody about. Those people who was actually involved, families and stuff like that.

But the real reaction came when President Kennedy got killed in November. When the federal marshals came on my job-- I mean at the school. And I was in my eighth grade math teacher's class. And this was about 1:15 and I was paged over the PA system to come to the office. There you had about two federal marshals and one of the local police officers and they were all in the office of the principal. So he said to me, "Johnson"-- he called me by my last name-- he said, "I didn't know that we had a student in our school that was this deeply involved in that mess that was is going on down there. You are a disgrace to this school."

Sinsheimer: What was the principal's name?

Johnson: Alex Threadgill.

Sinsheimer: Oh it was Threadgill.

Johnson: And I was being subpoenaed to court. Our trial was coming up that November up in Oxford, Mississippi.

Sinsheimer: For the Winona incident.

Johnson: And I felt badly because I couldn't defend myself because I didn't know what the repercussions would be. And I took the subpoena and I went back to my class. I was nothing but a kid. What I did is I went home and somebody was always coming to my house talking to me about what had happened and what have you.

We went to court in November. Oxford was a very unique situation. You know James Meredith had just gone, integrated Ole Miss, I think it was in '62. And we were slapped in the face with the real overtone of racism, the real overtone of racism from many of the students there at Ole Miss and most of the town because the Justice Department had an office there. And we could not live



in Oxford, Mississippi in a hotel. Now here is the Justice Department office, we were in federal court, and here is a group of people that had filed-- the Justice Department had sued some other people that had violated our rights. They served us in their office. They would literally go out and get us hot dogs and hamburgers.

Sinsheimer: Where did you all stay when you were up there?

Johnson: We had to stay up in Holly Springs, Mississippi. But the interesting thing before that was a black cafe, the only little black cafe in that town wouldn't serve us.

Sinsheimer: In Oxford.

Johnson: In Oxford, Mississippi would not serve us. And they {the Justice Department} would go and get the food or go over to the Holiday Inn and get it and bring it back. And we would have to travel over I would say 45 miles one way to sleep.

Sinsheimer: To Holly Spring?

Johnson: Right. Now they pretended like that was best for us but we didn't live in a hotel. We lived in different people's homes there in Holly Springs, Mississippi. The trial was .....

Sinsheimer: This was after Kennedy had been shot?

Johnson: The day that Kennedy got shot I was subpoenaed to court, on that day. That was the day that we had gotten the announcement and the marshals came out to court and subpoenaed me to court. A lot of red necks, rebel flags in the courtroom, snickering, giggling, niggers, apes. You would hear comments and things like that. And it is my understanding, I can't recall this. But it is my understanding that there were several blacks, but they were more Uncle Tom blacks, that was supposed to serve on that jury and they found out the type of case it was. And we had to go before an all-white jury and we lost the case. We lost the case. Nobody was ever convicted.

The state of Mississippi never paid us



for you know the traumatic experience that we have had and we still live through. Guyot has health problems from it. I suffered very badly. I ended up wearing glasses. You know if I look at my eye it is just about closed over here. The headaches and pains and scars that I will be carrying for the rest of our lives. We nevr in no form or fashion-- we just had our day in court. They said we attacked each other. Nothing ever happened. From that day on....

Sinsheimer: Who represented you? Was it Doar himself?

Johnson: Well, the Justice Department, a group of attorneys who was working with him. The particular guy that I can recall was a guy named John Rosenberg who was with the Justice Department at that particular time. We lost the case. Nothing never happened. The inmate that attacked Mrs. Hamer, they came and testified. It was a very sad moment because he didn't want to do but he had to do it. That was his first chance or opportunity to really apologize to Mrs. Hamer. It was very emotional because he did it, he was an inmate there and he was forced to do something against his will but his life as opposed to Mrs. Hamer's life.

I went back to school. In the summertime I just kept getting involved, kept getting involved into different activities of the movement. And was constantly in and out of jail. And eventually after I got beat in jail, that was when my mother made up her mind. She said if I could fight for her freedom she could fight for her own. She left a public job and never went back. When she died she was working for one of the local Headstart programs and she became very active in SNCC.

Sinsheimer: So your mother really never did anything until after you all were.....

Johnson: She never did anything. She never went to a mass meeting. She became the head cook of SNCC. After I had gone yo jail and she saw the condition I was in a condition she left her job and never came back. She never went back. And there was twelve of us and we didn't suffer for anything. My father kept his public job. He got fired of of one job but he kept the job he was on until he



retired a few years ago.

Sinsheimer: Your mother was working at the restaurant? And she quit that job when she got more involved in the movement? Gotta ya.

Johnson: And she left and she became very actively involved in SNCC and she ended up being a cook for SNCC because the national headquarters set up there on N Street the summer of '64. That is when most of your students became involved. Greenwood was the center focus, or focus point of everything. And I think Greenwood was somewhat targeted after 1955 or 1954, the killing of the Emmett Till case. I think that is what really focused a lot of point because that was a major national, international case and he got killed in Leflore County.

And our town was the home of the White Citizens' Council because of the agricultural make-up of the Mississippi Delta. And the city was ran by the White Citizens' Council, the state was ran by the White Citizen's Council. Black people were more prone to the like of a lot of things because one experience I do recall. My second oldest sister was in the band at school and they occasionally had fundraising activities. They would sell brooms or candy to go on school trips. And she and a group of ladies, girls, wore some short pants downtown. This was the double standard of how the system was designed. She wore short shorts, she and several other girls. My poor mother had to go down and get my sister from the police department as opposed to white girls wearing short pants.

And my brother who is the military now in Petersburg had gone to a local grocery store right there on the corner from where my family lived. And this happened on the Fourth of July before the civil rights movement came to our hometown. And we don't know what happened in the store but the white guy chased him from the store to our front gate, yard. And he asked him if that was all he wanted and my brother said yeah. And this white boy became upset because he said yes and wanted to take him away from my family and literally beat him.

My grandmother went to his rescue and we ran and got our mother. And his father came, and because the community became very



concerned about what was going on. And my mother had told us, "You all stay on the porch." And definitely told my father to stay on the porch because it was more prone for him to get hurt than my mother because he was a black man. He had my brother by the arm and my brother was holding to the fence trying for him not to take him way. And at that point my grandmother got up off of the frontporch with a knife in her hand and they was going at it from one point to other. And she ran out there and snatched my brother and pushed him and got between my brother and the white guy to figure out what was the problem. And he was talking about he didn't respect him as a white man and he said yes to him and blah, blah, blah.

I don't know what my mother told him but I know he left there with tears in his eyes. And his father came down-- she made sure that he understood that he was not going to beat my brother. And his father came down and made an apology based on his son was shell shocked as a result of the army or a horse or something had kicked him. And that particular incideent-- and we were orientated and educated, we never set our feet back in that store anymore. That was an experience that took place in the local community and eventually that store went out of business. We just couldn't go in that store.

And then other things were happening in the community. There was a constant makeup whereas the railroad divided the two communities In some form or fashion there were railroads that made sure you understood where the black community was and I understood where the white community was. And we always had white men coming from the white community into the black neighborhood chasing black women. My uncle told me the story how he was chased out of Mississippi because they would literally come into the black community on Friday and Saturday night and aks black men where could they find black women.

And my uncle-- he is dead now but he left Chicago-- they had taken these white men and beat them very badly because they were not going to tolerate it. And when the police came looking for them-- who is dead-- told us that she and several of the other women in the neighborhood slipped him on a



train. And it was not one of these commercial trains, you know a freight train, in one of the car boxes. And helped him, gave him some money and fixed him a little apron of food and told him not to come back within a certain time because the whites and police and sheriff and thing was looking for him.

And I remember the story, two black women who was found right there from her house on the railroad track where they had been beaten so badly by white men because these women were supposed to have been crossing {the color line} {Break}.

I say Bob {Moses} is my mentor. I haven't done a lot of things Bob wanted me to do. Bob wanted me to go law school. Still wants me to go work on a Ph d. He wants me to take my history and develop it into something. I have a little ten year old kid. Right now I am working to save up money for a retirement for his education. I became very close to Bob. I got a chance to travel and get a lot of exposure after the '63 period. I went to Oxford, Ohio. My mother went to Oxford, Ohio to that particular conference.

Sinsheimer: To the training sessions?

Johnson: Yeah, in reference to the summer of '64.

Sinsheimer: What do you remember about those?

Johnson: Oh, I remember there was a lot of confusion. I remember a lot of confusion. I remember there were some serious divisions in terms of people, ideology, what that summer would be about and how we would have an impact on the Summer Project in Mississippi. I do recall that Sam Block and Willie Peacock were very disturbed. I think that was a real decision, turning point in their life and somewhat really shifting them out of the decision-making process. And that is my interpretation of it. And I could be wrong.

Sinsheimer: ... I think they would both agree with that I think in terms of their involvement. In December I had a birthday so I was turning fifteen but I understood some things. I understood that there was some dialogue between them and Bob and there were some frustrations in terms of his decision he had



made. They were very much opposed to the white students coming down at that particular time. Not so much at that time, not so much at the white students but the black students coming and taking control of the different projects in Mississippi.

Johnson: Particularly the group from Howard. Stokley and Cleve Sellers....

Johnson: Let me give you another guy's name who is at the District Building you need to talk to. Courtland Cox was one of those students too. He was from Howard and he was with Stokley Carmichael. He is with economic development, he is one of the deputy mayors for economic development. And before you leave I will give you his phone number.

Sinsheimer: Let me play that question out because in one sense, aside from that question that we just talked about. Well, from what Sam was telling me from his level he just didn't have anything left at that point. So in a sense you see a leadership void in Greenwood, I mean Peacock and Sam were destroyed at that point on one level which allows this next generation of leaders to come in. I have just thought a lot about what would have happened if they had been, what would have happened if Sam and Willie had still had a lot left that summer.

Johnson: Well, inspite of that internal struggle, I don't think that tampered their visibility and their respect, and the high energy that that community had placed in them. That community--because in spite of the decision that was made in Oxford, Ohio, Sam Block and Willie Peacock were viewed as the community leaders in that town. Sam Block, Willie Peacock, and Stokley Carmichael.

Sinsheimer: How do you think Stokley moved in so quickly? How did he get so respect?

Johnson: Well, because he was vocal. He was vocal, there was a new tone. Stokley came off with the attitude of being very militant and very radical and we didn't object to that because that had its place in the community. There were some folks that really wanted that.

Sinsheimer: But a year earlier that wouldn't have fit



really?

Johnson: No, at the organizational stage no it was not good kind of strategy to bring into a community that was basically, dead, fearful, and scared. And I think that Sam Block and Willie Peacock's tactics and strategy in terms of how they got into that town was the best way. They paid a lot of unknown dues that many of us did know anything about in terms of being beat, in terms of being chased, harassed and shot at by the FBI. And I think that was the focus point of the community when people really respected them and accepted for their guts. And Sam Block and Willie Peacock had guts! They had guts.

I guess the most hurting thing that happened that bothered me was to see Peacock go through his whole psychological thing. Left the movement-- I mean he didn't leave the movement, he left Greenwood and went to California, he and Sam both. My mother found Willie Peacock in our bathtub near dead. One day he just went in and ran the bathtub full of water and we later learned that he had been drinking because of his frustration. It became a very comabttive....

Sinsheimer: About that summer?

Johnson: No, that was like '65. And eventually he and Sam went to California. A lot of people began to happen. The Catholic people got involved. They wanted to gain the fame of leadership.

Sinsheimer: When you say the Catholic people?

Johnson: Father Nathaniel and they called us communists. We was labeled as communists, we was being misled by these outsiders who were coming into a leadership projection and it shouldn't be that way, it should be the local people who were doing that. And they were some people that were very rejected because the overtones that these people put their lives on the line. You knew the problem was here, you never educated this community about the problem, why is it that you want to take the forefront. The Catholic did not get respect in that town until around '67 and '68 when Martin Luther King got killed. There a big, big split between local black leadership, ministers and the Catholics there. And the Catholic was more of a sounding board for many of the blacks



because that is where we went for our social activities-- skating, little schools and stuff like that.

Sinsheimer: The St. Francis Center there?

Johnson: They began to poison, I think they began to poison the minds of the community because of a certain elitist status that was hooked into the Catholic in the community.

Sinsheimer: That the Catholic was more middle class?

Johnson: No, no not the Catholic being more middle class. There was a middle class segment of black people that was hooked into the Catholic process.

Sinsheimer: Right. They had been the ones that had first sent their kids to the school.

Johnson: We were Brownies and girl scouts and what have. But getting back to '65, '64, the whole question about the three civil rights workers that was discussed at the conference and blah, blah, blah. And I was not at a position to take sides at that point because I didn't have a lot of detail and understanding. And like I say my experience will be based on direct experiences and what I have learned after, growing up and what have you. And people just going in their own different phase of the country.

When I came back to Mississippi most of the Howard University crowd stayed at my family's home. My family's home was the focus point of the movement. It is very interesting, my family never was threatened. Never, never that I can recall that we ever got a threatening phone call, or nobody ever threw a bomb. One time the white woman in the community, my father was in the store and he over heard the white lady in the store discussing that my family had taken Stokley Carmichael and what you and that they were having a meeting at the Elks Club. And my Daddy had never gone to a mass meeting in his life. He was around all of this stuff but he didn't go. And he came and told me and said go to the Elks Club and tell people down there that they talking about throwing a bomb in the house. At that point Jim Forman, Stokley, and all of them spent the night at my mother's house because you know our house was-- most of



the people stayed there.

Sinsheimer: So in other words after your mother joined the movement your father didn't really?

Johnson: My Daddy was very supportive. He didn't march, he didn't demonstrate, he was always, he always had a place for people to live in.

Sinsheimer: So he wanted to keep working and just...?

Johnson: He was the support base of the family, he was the support base of the family but he was in learning institution at the same time. He learned a lot. My mother was the head of our house. My mother made the decisions in our house. And once my mother made that decision you know that was a learning process for her. My mother had never traveled. She had twelve kids, died at forty-seven years of age. She had never traveled, she had never really got a chance to go away. She had worked all of her life and I used to pain so bad to see my mother on Sunday morning make rolls for white women and wash women's drawers before she made our breakfast.

And I rebelled against it. Out of all my sisters and brothers I resented it. And I resented that I had to go and babysit for us to survive. I resented it because there was so much filth that happened to young black girls like the story Ida {Mae Holland} tells how she was raped and all of the things that happened to her. I had an incident where I was keeping this little white girl and I asked her not to go in the medical, in the medicine chest. She went in there and she broke something and she cut her hand and she told her mother that I literally cut her. And I told my grandmother and my Mama that I didn't do it and I refused to be punished for it, it was not just not syndrome because I am the darkest one of my sisters. And it was a problem not only with my being a black person and trying to go against the odds of racism and segregation among white but I had a very difficult time in my own peer set being as dark as I was.

I am fighting at this point at my age now for acceptance. Even here on my job. You wouldn't believe some of the things that have happened to me here because I am an outsider, because of who I am, and because of where I came from. I am to publicly make an appearance in the Washington Post to gain my identity, my



respect in this town. I had to do that. And I had to do it for a lot of reasons because I saw that-- you know Washington is , to me, a sick make-up of South Africa. And I say that honestly when I say that to you. And there are a lot of opportunities and benefits here in this town. But I am talking about the mentality of the people here. The plantation mentality is no different from the one that I came from. So that was a struggle within itself.

I remember there was a white girl, she and I were the same age. She wanted me to say "Yes, Ma'am" to her. And at that point my mother told me you have to go to college. You have to do something different. You have to do something that you can feel comfortable and independent. I remember when I would go to the cotton fields. My grandmother made us go. And we would tell her that these white men would be fresh with us and putting their hands on us. They didn't want to hear that. Our role was to go and make a dollar. And I rebelled against it.

I remember working in the cotton fields in Belzoni where Herbert Lee {actually Johnson is referring to NAACP worker Gus Coats who was killed in Belzoni in the middle 1950's} got killed. We had worked so hard that day. We had to be in the field at 6:00 a.m.. We had worked so hard that day. This man did not pay us because he said that he had not gotten enough money from the bank. Eleway \_\_\_\_\_ if he is not dead, he lives in Greenwood. He is a sanctified minister. He took us , he was driving, to Solomon Henderson who was really the head person of the transportation.

We had worked from 6:00 a.m. to 6:30 that afternoon. And I mean it was hot. It was so hot that the soil was hard. It was difficult for us to get water. Can you imagine us working from that point until 6:30 and not get paid for what we had done that day. And this white boy was so insensitive to our label and to us as human beings, he wanted us to clear out that particular crop for him in order to meet whatever financial obligation he had to meet at the bank.

And Eleway said "No, I am not working these people any longer this hard." You know sweat-- we would have to go and lie in bushes, we have to, we couldn't waste water. When you had two and three hundred people that you had to take care of, you couldn't waste water. And



this man literally took a hoe and was going to whup Eleway. I always tell everybody that I really respected Eleway. He was going to take this hoe and whup us in the cotton field right there in Belzoni, Mississippi where a black guy was shot down because he came and tried to register to vote. And he was going to beat us because we refused to finish that spot of the crop for him that particular day.

We had not gotten paid. Solomon was going to bring the people and people refused to go back and work for him because people just said if you treat us that way, there is no telling what he could do. And if you allow him to keep on treating that many people that way. We was doing like migrant farm work, day work. And he was going to literally beat us, I mean literally beat us to make us work. We had worked. We had really worked.

And I promised God if I ever got chance to get out of the cotton field I would never go back because that was not easy work. I never will forget how we would come home with blisters, literally blisters, and our hands being young women and how we would have to pick cotton. My grandmother is near eighty-seven years of age now and I used to see my grandmother pick cotton, 600 pounds a day.... And that was our way of living. Picking cotton, maid work or babysitting or soemthing like that. That was our way of living.

And '64 went through its cycle. The Freedom Schools was the focus point of the community. The Freedom Day, there was a Freedom Day around the state. It was to mobilize that attention of the state legislators, your local politicians, and national because there were some Congressmen's sons and daughters and professors' families down there. And Leflore County had a lot of focus point because Dick Gregory lived there. Jim Forman, Jim Farmer, he lived there for awhile. Reverend Tucker, they had tried several demonstrations, he had tried to lead those demonstrations and had been bitten by the local dogs. Chief Lary was the police chief at that time. Charlie Sampson and Buff Hammond were the commissioners.

Things rocked on, things rocked on and the McGhee's became more of a focus in terms of their local involvment. Mrs. McGhee it is my understanding had been committed to the state mental institution as a result of not selling



her land to one of the most, well the prominent lawyer in my home town now, John Frazier. But he served in the Senate for the state. And he also was the prosecuting attorney in the Emmett Till case.

Sinsheimer: So it was John Frazier who wanted to buy her land?

Johnson: Yes.

Sinsheimer: Silas {Laura McGhee's son} didn't tell me that. I guess because he is still there.

Johnson: That is no problem. They have had public fights over that. And what happened is they became involved. Her husband had died and they got involved and she was trying to solicit help to gain sole ownership of her property. They would struggle to just hold on to what they had. And Silas and Jake became involved in the movement. And they were the two people, two young local folks who that I saw that had more guts than I had ever met in my life. They integrated the Leflore Theater or just anything that needed to be integrated or tested at that time. And they were attacked by Klansmen in the broad open daylight. Taken out of a truck, or put into a truck and taken in the middle of nowhere and beat with iron pipes and what have you until they ended up in jail.

Sinsheimer: Had you ever heard people talk about sitting-in before then? Had that ever been discussed.

Johnson: It had never been discussed to my knowledge, not in Greenwood. Now I had heard about sit-ins down in Jackson, Mississippi and in Nashville but not in Greenwood.

Sinsheimer: Had you ever thought about it?

Johnson: No, no I had never thought.... I will tell you what happened is that one night I was with my mother working. She would take each one of us to help her at this nightclub. I had gotten tired in the kitchen and went out front and sat at the bar and she was the first person who brought it to my attention. You know it was unconscious. I went in and sat in at the bar, and the white guy, Frank Zeto, if he is still living he is still there, said something to my mother and my mother came out and said,



"Baby, you can sit out here. We are not allowed to do this. You will get me in trouble." So I had to come back inside of the kitchen and sit there and eat my hamburger.

And that was the extent of that. But really publicly talking about sitting-in or anything, no. We always wondered why we couldn't go in these restaurants or why we couldn't get ice-- we had to stick our head through a window to get ice cream and things like that.

So Silas and them became a real focus point of the community. The Freedom Day and then the "One Man, One Vote Issue," and then Fannie Lou Hamer. Mrs. Hamer became very prominent in the community because she would come over from Rulesville, Mississippi and hook up with us in our mass meetings. And I took a real deep love for Mrs. Hamer because she was a spiritual person. She knew the Bible very well. In spite of people saying she was illiterate, couldn't read or write, she knew the Bible, very, very well. And she was always involved in our community or we would go to Ruleville or go into some black county and do something because it was close.

Mrs. Hamer got a lot of national attention because she did a lot of the speaking. She was one of the local Delta spokesmen, she was the Delta spokesmen other than Aaron Henry. But people didn't focus in a lot on Aaron Henry you know because I think Aaron Henry had done so much you know before the movement got there but it was not widely known being the NAACP president in Clarksdale and having the little lunchcounter and what have you.

So Mrs. Hamer kind of moved SNCC, Mrs. Hamer was somewhat the advisor. Ella Baker came into Mississippi and they was more the advisor of moving that generation of the Howard University crowd, the white students that came from California and New York and Washington and what have you. So there was a question about the growth and the development and the priority of what the real summer programs and project would be about.

There was a question about registration. There was a question around voting. There was a question around running candidates. And there was a question about how would you link the four organizations together into a coalition per say. So COFO came about. And eventually I don't know if they ran that particular summer, or they ran the following



summer. Fannie Lou Hamer-- that is right '64 was the challenging summer. That is when Fannie Lou Hamer, Annie Devine and Victoria Gray ran for office against Senator Eastland and Stennis if I am not mistaken. Ran for something but they ended up organizing the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. That was originated out of that summer.

And my mother went to the convention. I didn't go, I was off at camp somewhere.

Sinsheimer: She went all the way to Atlantic City.

Johnson: Yeah, she is in Eyes on the Prize, she is in that film. That is when they challenged the regular Democratic Party. And I think you know that story, the result of that. And coming back in '65 the national office was still there {in Greenwood}. And I didn't see Sam and Willy playing a real visible role at that particular time. I didn't understand what had happened, the decision that had been made. But they as far as the local people were concerned, they were the leaders of that community. We were not in on that level of the decision-making process that they were in on. And then the leaks began to happen to sabotage them and their credibility, you know that they had pulled away from SNCC, they were on their own and they were in the process of starting their own thing like the Greenwood Voters League or the Greenwood Movement or something like that. And they started sabotaging their name, that they were stealing money and all this kind of stuff.

Sinsheimer: Who was sabotaging them?

Johnson: This didn't come from people inside the movement? Somebody started it and it is my understanding that it was the whole Catholic syndrome that they had started it. I think this was the focus point of trying to push them away because it became an issue of black people becoming more visible about who was controlling their money, their community economic wise. Because we had major boycotts on every local grocery store in town because there was a police officer by the name of Slim Henderson had attacked a black pregnant woman on that Freedom Day and branded her with an electric cattle prod.

Sinsheimer: So that was in the summer of '64. So that was



what triggered the grocery stores?

Johnson: Right behind that. We boycotted his store from '64, until we put him out of business.

Sinsheimer: I thought that happened in '63 but you think that was the summer of '64?

Johnson: It was '64 when we had our major Freedom Day and in front of the Leflore County Courthouse. And the county had gotten a black bus, had gotten a bus and painted it black....

Sinsheimer: Black Annie?

Johnson: Right. And the city jails were filled, the county jails were filled. The county farm at that time was still in existence. All of the jails at that time were filled up. And this young girl-- she lives in Greenwood the girl that they drug down the street., Dorothy Weathers was the ounge woman who was pregnant and we started focusing all of the local merchants there and made a boycott. Just started around the city. And some people closed up, this particular woman's store \_\_\_\_\_. And it was just the situation where people started singing freedom songs and it became a fire. And it was a day to day activity that a group of people here and a group of there, and a group of people there, blah, blah, blah. And the movement rocked on, rocked on, rocked on. And then local people began to venture into the leadership roles.

Sinsheimer: Who were those people in your minds?

Johnson: Well, there was Silas, Jake, myself, Willie McGhee, Alberta Barnett. We really stayed until I moved from there. Alberta is still there. Silas and Jake, William McGhee is still there. And then you had Mrs. Mary Diggs down at Sidon, Mississippi who ran for public office. I think she ran for board of education, board of supervisors at that time. And then you had Mrs. Blackwell. Mr. Sanders was still living, Dave Sanders was still living. Reverend McSwine, and then you had J.B. Collin who ran for public office, and then he ran for board of supervisors. And then it ended up that was how the whole question around legal services came into the community.

Martin Luther King got killed in 1968 and



that triggered off another overtone of boycott. And that is how the whole question around the Greenwood Movement got started. That is when the Catholic and the Methodist Church began to emerge and get involved and to take on, well to say that they were leaders of the community. And there was a lot of overtones behind that because we had an injunction put against us. Silas and Jake because they was picketing the downtown stores on a daily basis. And the boycott was very effective in '68.

And the merchants began to cry out and they ended up suing us. And we ended up going to court. Judge \_\_\_\_\_ who is the chancellor now out of my district, from Cleveland, Clarksdale and Greenwood, was the judge that did the ruling. Because when he ran for judge before I left he became to my house and asked me for my support. And that was one of the things that came up about him, about his involvement, and his position on the Mount Bayou case where the white woman fell-- well she got a ticket by a black police officer. She went and literally fell on a piece of concrete and she closed the town up because a judgement was rendered in her favor. And she won basically all of the money in this little black town.

Now this was in the latter part of 70's and early '80's. And he ran for county judge again out of that particular district. And he was ruling judge at that particular judge that ruled the injunction against the boycott. So Silas and Jake I think violated that and ended up in jail and was threatening a lot of prison time.

So it rocked on but before that Silas got shot in the head. And it has always been-- the white community only bring out when a white candidate is running and that is not the popular candidate that they want to run-- the word was that Roy Logan and Curtis Underwood is the ones that live in Greenwood now that shot Silas and Jake. Curtis Underwood was one of the main focus of the police department that was always because he came up in the SNCC office to attack Charles McLaurin. He was always the bully. He was one of the main representatives of the White Citizens' Council.

After '68 the Greenwood-- Mississippi Valley State broke out. A young Trinidad was in school with my sister. Wilhelm Joseph, very



bright, very articulate. Ended up being elected the SGA president. In '68 I finished high school and I went into college September of '68. Valley State broke out in '68 until around '72 when we graduated. So the focus point was still on trying to break the slave syndrom mentality because the students at Mississippi Valley-- Block got put out by the way. Ida got put put out. They registered at Mississippi Valley. They was told that they couldn't bring any leaflets on campus. They could not demonstrate. They could not protest. They could not public speak over there about what was going on. And that is where Jimmy Travis went when he got shot and they had to end up taking him from there to some other place.

Because the guy who was president-- I don't know how you could describe him but he was more than a live Uncle Tom. And if you get a chance to read some of the lawsuits about Mississippi Valley State you should really read his testimony. J. H. White. It is my understanding he wote a letter to the Board of Trustees when they fired him-- John Britton who is a law professor up at the University of Connecticut-- always tell us that, he said, "I never felt so sorry for a man who had been a servant to the white institution and to the white system the way he had served." He built the school, you have to give him credit. He built it from a Vocational College to Mississippi Valley State University but when he was not able to control or abolish the student movement in 1968, once this young man brought the students to life about what was happening to them and the issues around the college campus, those students went to prison and he was just, his time was over.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Johnson: And it is my understanding that he begged them in a letter, whatever happened to them, if he died or whatever happen, he wanted the, I think Mr. Guy Billup, who was like the godfather of our town, Guy Billup who was a millionaire and blah, blah, blah. He asked them to build him a house, he wanted the biggest antebellum home that had ever been built in Mississippi. And if you see that house, they did it just that way. But it is my understanding that there is a letter on file that he wrote to them and they say it is the most sickening thing you have ever read.



Sinsheimer: He asked the trustees to build him a house on campus?

Johnson: He sure did. He died and they buried him there on campus. And I was actively involved in student issues on Mary Holmes Junior College campus at Westpoint, Mississippi. That is where Ralph Featherstone was, John Buffington, these are carry overs and people who come out of SNCC. Ike Coleman. But there was a question of summer enrichment programs, and getting college students attune to what the different administrations were doing to them.

And I was involved up until I graduated out of college in '72. I got a job in Legal Services and until '72 until 1982 I was fighting inside Legal Services-- well I was utilizing the resources of Legal Services to fight the system by suing basically all of the major cases that was brought about, to get into the banks, to get blacks into the police department.

I had graduated out of graduate school in '74 and went to the police department to get an application to apply for a juvenile counselor's job. They refused to give me the application for the job. I sued the city. It was discovered that over 200-300 blacks in the community that was a member of the class had been discriminated against and the city had to pay out a \$130,000.

We tied up-- I was in another major lawsuit in Greenwood called Johnson vs. The City of Greenwood where we found out that the city of Greenwood was not equally distributing the revenue sharing dollars. That the white community was getting the better grade of pavement and asphalt. We didn't have stop signs, we didn't have recreational facilities, we didn't have nothing. And we got a judgement against the city of Greenwood. We tied up the money to operate the city for two and a half years before the city decided that they would agree to equally distribute the money. And the city wanted to buy a computer system and we said no, we want equal services. So we tied up all the money, like \$3 million for two years until we were able to come up with some resolutions for handling that.

I did a major case against the county, Johnson vs. Leflore County where there were no blacks working in the courthouse other than inmates, or you know errand boys or what have



you. We ended up getting blacks in the banks, we ended up getting blacks into the city hall, we ended up getting blacks working for county government. Then we started suing trying to get the laws {changed} in terms of gerrymandering, redistricting.

Now the first case we did was Moore vs. Leflore County in 1974 and that is how the redistricting plan came about. Johnny Walls was the attorney. He is a good person to talk to if you get back down. He is Greenville, Mississippi. And John \_\_\_\_\_ who was an expert at redistricting. And you have heard about Frank Parker, I am quite sure you will get a chance to talk with Frank.

And James Moore brought that case against Leflore County. And that was focus point of changing the voting process from an at-large voting process to a district process. And that case is still somewhat pending because it has never been mandated like it should have. And the Justice went down a few years ago in '84 when Jesse Jackson and {William Bradford} Reynolds went to Greenwood and found out that there were still some questions of disproportion in terms of the make-up. And at one point you only had one black supervisor.

And I am quite sure you have heard of the big dispute that is going on. Alex is a sell-out. I mean he is so, because he had, he and the board had drawn a plan where it would only protect his interest and to make sure that no other black could be elected to the board. And Willie Perkins and Solomon Osborne fought to overthrow that. And there is a big thing there where Alex had to run in a special election a year and half ago but he has to come back coming up in November if I am not mistaken to run again. And people are focusing a lot of their attention on him because they think he has gotten suckered into the system now, he is the chairman of the board of supervisors, he has caused Moore a lot of problems, he is the one that made the recommendation that Moore be suspended from his position on the board because of not being bonded. Some crazy stuff. It is a big dispute right now.

James Moore brought the case against the city of Greenwood in order for the council and mayoral system to be changed to the ward system. And that is David Jordan got in on it. He takes the credit for it but Moore led the fight. That is how they ended up on the city



council. So there is a lot of work to be done. No, the racism has not changed that much in Greenwood. I worked around it, I worked in it. I won my case but the city tried to make sure that I was not granted punitive damages. Everybody else they said it was fine for them to get money by the case because they said I had exposed the city too much and brought too many outsiders in there. And they didn't see that it was necessary.

So what happened, the money that I did get, I ended up buying a house in the white community. I had a couple of little old threats about that and what have you but it was nothing major. And my son and I lived over there for two years. I didn't sell the house. The house means a lot to me. It is still there. And when I left Mississippi, I left there to come here.

I have done a lot of things. I enjoyed working in political campaigns. I enjoyed organizing, I enjoy putting them together. I helped a lot of black and white officials become elected in the state of Mississippi. I was just lucky. I had a lot of pressure put on me and a lot of people that I put bread on their table turned against me. I went to bed a lot of nights with fear. I don't mean in the '60's, I mean in the '70's and in the early '80's, you know that somebody would bomb the house.

I remember one day in '81 I had a Doberman that Reverend Johnson had given my little boy for a Christmas present. And I loved that dog so much. We named him Ali. And by my moving next door to the white lady. She was opposed to that but I needed a dog for my protection. And one day I came out they had killed him right there in my driveway. That was a sign to let me know what would be the next move.

I did not allow that me to intimidate me. I was always fighting with the police department. I was on my way to China in '78, a police officer drove up beside me and threatened to kill me. And I reported it to the mayor and the white city council about what had happened {break} and there was an executive order issued against this particular guy and was that he was not to speak to me ever any more unless it was on official or police business.

And let's see what else I can think of. I got my B.S., I got my Masters, I did a lot of traveling, I worked on a lot of defense



committees with Ben Chavis and Eddie Carthan  
and a lot of other folks {break}.