



Digital Education Systems
730 17th St. Suite 360
Denver, CO 80202

303-573-1284
fax: 303-573-1285

www.digitaled.com

MEMORANDUM

To: Tim West

Fm: Joe Sinsheimer

Re: Robert Moses Interviews (3)

Dt: September 21, 1998

[The interviews in this package represent about 1/30 of the material I will be sending you. I am going to send the material to you as I find it in my archives and as I organize it. My hope is that if I organize it for you in advance, we can save some time on the back end.]

Included in this package are three interviews I conducted with Robert Moses in the mid-1980s. Moses, was arguably the most important civil rights worker in Mississippi during the 1960s. He was the first outside worker to come to the state—coming to set up a small voter registration project in the town of McComb, located in the southwest corner of the state. By 1962, he had shifted his operation to the Mississippi Delta. By 1963, he was directing the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee's (SNCC) work in the state and was one of the masterminds behind the 1964 Freedom Summer Project. (I have enclosed two pages from Taylor Branch's, Parting the Waters, which detail Moses' initial entry into the state.

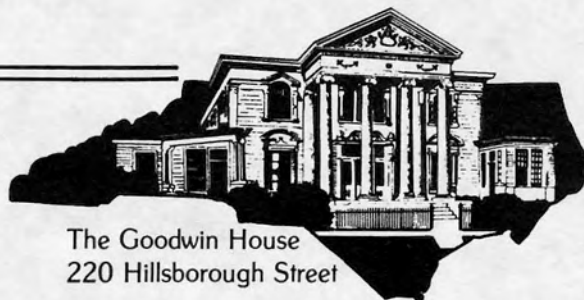
Most of the material I will be sending you over the next few weeks will fit three categories: 1) interviews with a core group of SNCC workers or "field secretaries" working in Mississippi in 1961-65 2) interviews with residents of Greenwood, Mississippi, a major focus of SNCC's organizing efforts during that period and 3) interviews with other civil rights leaders, student volunteers, clergy, journalists, etc. who were working with SNCC at that time.

Please call with questions.

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Interview with Robert Moses
Cambridge, Massachusetts
April 11, 1984

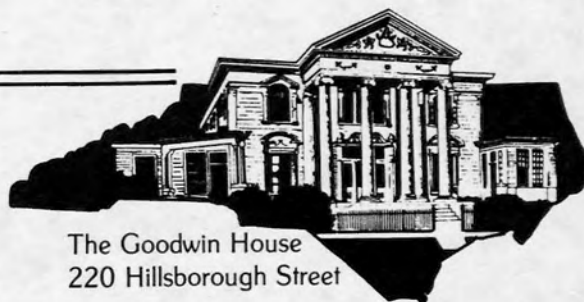
Joe Sinsheimer: I have some questions that I would like to ask I guess just out of my own curiosity. The first is kind of broad, it is about the role of black leadership on the national level. And what this question is driving at is that in reading accounts and interviews of people that SNCC workers had ... there was some amount of jealousy toward the (Martin Luther) King organization back in the sixties. This is implied that ... there was almost a bitterness when-- I guess this would be in places outside of Mississippi-- when King would come to city and give a speech and mobilize people and then leave, and leave the dirty work to other people. And what I have seen in a couple of present day television interviews-- and one was with the leader of CORE-- is the same sort of feeling toward Jesse Jackson, that Jackson is saying I am registering a million and a half people but who is actually doing the work. So my question-- and the third problem is that a friend of mine was doing an analysis of the Warren County controversy in North Carolina a few years ago ... with the PCB's where they had ... are you familiar with that?

Bob Moses: No.

Sinsheimer: In North Carolina they had a bunch of soil, something like forty dump trucks full of soil that was contaminated with PCB's which is the chemical released from electric transmitters on light poles. And the State needed to dump it somewhere and they picked Warren County which is one of the poorest and heavily black areas in the state. And what happened was that there was a local protest movement and people were actually lying down on the highway blocking dump trucks. It got to the point where it made the national news for a couple of days. But what happened was that in the middle of this local protest you had a couple ... Joseph Lowery came and a couple of other SCLC organizers, and they gave very nice speeches and they did mobilize energy while they were there, but they left, and when they left they kind of took away some of the leadership potential from the local people. So the paradox I

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Sinsheimer (cont.): guess is that people like King and Jackson release energy, but they really release it ... do you see what I am driving at?

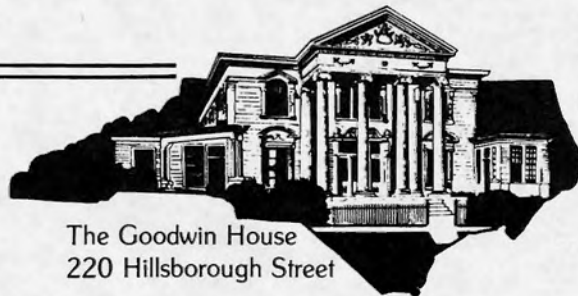
Moses: Well, it is a question, you know, that we thought a lot about in the movement, if not necessarily in the form in which you have put it. In fact I was just discussing it with _____, who is the fellow I was telling you about who is working out under Vincent (Harding). In discussing the two different forms of nonviolence which got played out within the movement, because there was one initial attempt to build nonviolence as a way of life, and the nonviolent community which people called the "beloved community," -- and most notably the Nashville group, coming out of the work Jim Lawson did when he was there-- and then there was the other idea of nonviolence as a tactic, and as a strategy to be used in a political situation. And that came, I think, into the movement and was pressed most by Bayard (Rustin), and was, I think, ... certainly within SNCC, there was a wing of SNCC that adopted that certainly ... Carmichael, the people who came down from Washington at Howard, and were orientated if at all when they were orientated toward nonviolence in that way.

And I am not sure about King in terms of his, what the official doctrine of SCLC was, or what even his personal belief was. But in terms of what the practice was, in practice, I think, the organization opted for the second way, nonviolence as a tactic. And did not really, I don't think, try to teach or organize people around the notion of a beloved community or nonviolence as a way of life. Now these two methods came clearer in my mind that these methods went with two different approaches within the movement. One which was mobilizing people, and the people who did the direct action demonstrations within SNCC, and were geared toward a mobilization effort to get people out to demonstrate... or Birmingham I guess is one of the prime examples of that, you know, where the

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Moses (cont.)

students who demonstrated certainly had no belief in nonviolence as a way of life and if they opted for it at all in that context it was as a strategy and a tactic in this overall political situation.

And along with that goes the notion of the involvement of the media. That is you have a demonstration and also part of the ingredients of the demonstration is the media, local media or if you can national media. And it is involved in just getting the news or the story out, and it enters into the whole strategy. So along with that comes this idea of leadership, because with the media you are forced to a spokesman. The media has, you know, just so much time, has to zero in on some image. So to do that you have to develop some spokesman.

So all of these things, I think, are part of a kind of circle of events which you can trace through the movement. Jessie, is just the latest example of that. You have the media, and a mobilization effort, and leadership. But leadership geared toward media. Not even necessarily organizational leadership, because for the media you don't need even an organization, all you need is a charismatic personality and some look. So, ... and that certainly was, I think, what King's organization geared to, that is they geared to establishing King as a national figure, and that meant using the media, and it meant, it shaped the kind of projects they were interested in. It went along with nonviolence as a strategy, as a tactic, and using it in mobilization efforts.

Now the other way, interestingly enough, I think got played out within the movement in the community organizing that turned out to be an integral part of voter registration in the deep rural, deep South. And to some extent although it never really got a chance to flower in urban areas in the Deep South. But in those areas it got involved in organizing people as opposed to mobilizing people.

Sinsheimer:

What is the distinction you are trying to draw there?

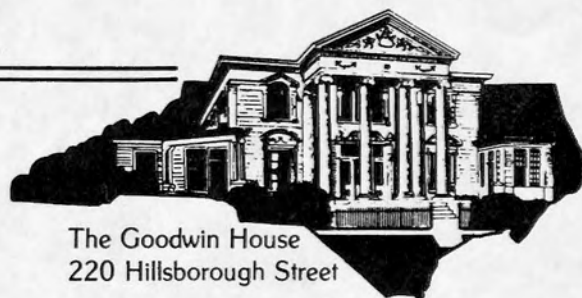
Moses:

Mobilizing and organizing? Well, I guess the way I think of it the organizing effort, you are trying to get people to pull themselves together and to provide their own leadership. The mobilizing effort, you pull people together, you don't really care whether they pull themselves together so much or not. You don't care so much how their coming together happens but whether they come together. And then you

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Moses (Cont.)

don't really care so much about whether leadership develops, and in some cases you might not want it to develop. That is you might want to leave a vacuum so that when you are ready you can come back in and mobilize the people again without having to deal with you know, their own organization or local leaders.

But anyway in this kind of effort, this kind of effort turned out to be something that worked real well with the voting in the rural South. And of course this idea about organizing the local leadership was an idea that Ella Baker had talked about for awhile both when she was with SCLC and in the founding of SNCC. It was one of the points, I think, around which SNCC differed initially from SCLC.

Sinsheimer:

Now is that where you got your first taste of that?

Moses:

You mean from Ella? Yeah, I think so. Well, yes and no. I did have a notion of it even before I met Ella because in the spring of '60 I went down to visit my uncle who was teaching at Hampton Institute, Bill Moses. And while I was there I went down to participate in demonstrations if I could, and they did have some. Wyatt Walker came down to speak.

Sinsheimer:

Who ... ?

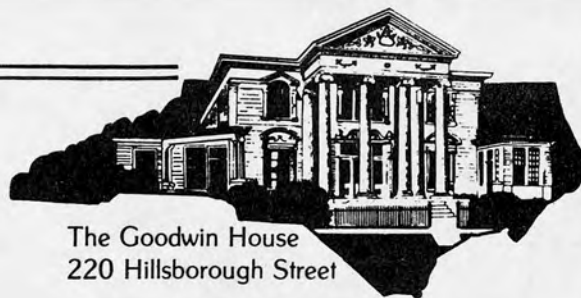
Moses:

Wyatt Walker became the Executive Director of SCLC after Ella. And he came down, and he was making at that point, the point about following your leader, that we should all have one leader. I guess it was in preparation for his going into SCLC, I think he was already lined up. And I remember talking to him afterwards about this concept which just somehow struck me as wrong. And I was talking to him about the need for a lot of leaders, for people all over to take issue. That was in the spring, and then that summer when I was down in Atlanta and talking with Ella, it was a theme that she struck. And one of her things was that it often turns out that if you line up behind a leader, and the leader turns out as she said to "have feet of clay," then you are stuck.

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Moses (Cont.)

So she had tried to push SCLC in that direction. Grassroots, more grassroots kind of work.

And then Amzie, of course, was a great local leader, Amzie Moore of Cleveland (Mississippi). When I went to work in Mississippi ... and he was himself a great local leader .

Sinsheimer:

How did you, I mean, what between Atlanta and you going to Mississippi, I mean you just kind of went? What actually happened?

Moses:

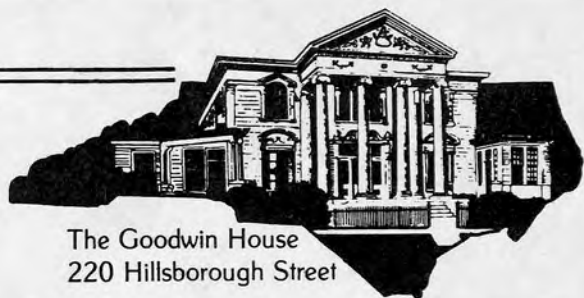
What actually happened was that Jane Stenbridge, who was the Executive Director of SNCC, asked me to make a trip through Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana to look for students to come to a SNCC conference in the fall. There hadn't been any direct action, that they knew of, and they hadn't therefore any contacts in those states. Ella, then, drew up a list of people for me to go see. So then I took a tour and that is where I met Amzie and agreed to come back and work. -But getting back to this concept of ... so on the one hand you have this organizing in an effort to build local leadership in order that the organizing can keep going, that is that the organizer doesn't become the leader in the local situation but actually tries to build some leadership, or to let the leadership emerge. Which goes along more with the notion of nonviolence as a way of life. Where in that notion is basically the notion of trying to help people to their own empowerment, self-empowerment.

Because basically within the notion of nonviolence as a way of life is this notion that each person has something of God in them, tracing it back now to its religious foundation. In that, therefore each person is able to find within him or her the where-with-all to be nonviolent. That is that you have a resource, inner resource, that you can cultivate and develop and therefore you have a real practical foundation for personal nonviolence, it is not just something that is theoretical.

But to do that you have to develop this notion and you have to have a practice. And I think what was missing in this country, was that there wasn't a vehicle, there wasn't a spiritual discipline that people knew about that they could practice.

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Moses (cont.):

In India you had this long tradition of practicing spiritual discipline and examples of people. So I think that was something that was there that Gandhi probably, you know, used, certainly helped to make that real.

So that in terms of the movement goes along with the organizing effort, where you are also trying to help people to empower themselves, and goes along with building leadership. So you have that tension throughout the movement between the two efforts, even though we didn't have a spiritual discipline on which we were building the organizing effort. If we had, we might have survived, we might not have burned out in the different ways that we did. And we might have been able to meet the different crises that emerged in the sixties.

But we didn't. And the country didn't. I mean there was nowhere in the country at that point except, you know, very isolated cases ... but it wasn't part of the culture of the country at all and it is just now beginning to take a toehold in the country, you know, this interest in meditation and practicing some kind of spiritual discipline.

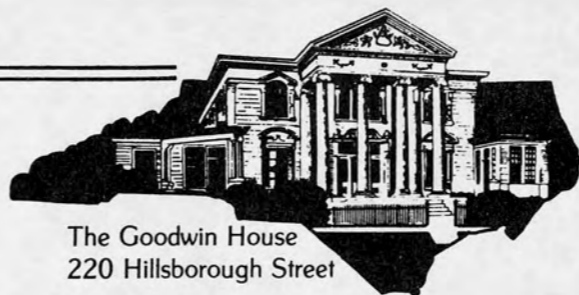
So it is easy to see why we weren't able to have that, and therefore why this idea of nonviolence as a beloved community, as a way of life, you know was ... the rhetoric was in certain of the SNCC people why [but] it couldn't take hold in the organization.

So I think that tension has always been there, and we thought a lot about it, although we didn't know about this spiritual discipline, we knew something was missing, we always knew that something was missing, although myself personally I could adopt nonviolence, I couldn't propagate it. I couldn't talk to local people about it. It was just something that I felt and something that I could hold myself accountable for. Not something that I felt that I had the grounds for really approaching the people we were working with to try to change their attitudes about it. And I think the reason was because of this lack of a real spiritual grounding.

But even so we thought about that problem a lot, what was lacking. I don't know if you remember but the Jackson movement after the Freedom Rides (and the Freedom Rides were really carried into Mississippi by that Nashville group) and when they got in there after the Freedom Rides they [the Nashville group] wanted to start a nonviolent movement in Jackson but they were not able to. And I think what basically was missing

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Moses (cont.): was this spiritual discipline to ground their beliefs. I mean the beliefs were there and in place, but there was nothing grounding them.

So, when this thing, you know, if the question is coming up about Jackson, because Jackson really is in the other tradition. That is of mobilizing media, leadership and I mean he is doing, he is a genius at exploiting the media.

Sinsheimer: To be fair, the other word we use is ego, which is the criticism that people use.

Moses: But that is bound to be tied up with that position. And I suppose you certainly have to have a strong ego to do that in the first place. Your ego has got to be intact (laughter). You can't have a weak ego, strong in the sense that you have to have yourself together in order to do that.

And then people are bound to take that and make it a question of he is just trying to project himself. I mean that is bound to happen in that situation and other local leaders are bound to feel threatened. You know we saw that time and time again in the movement. On the other hand you have to be very much intact as a local leader not to be threatened by that, and to understand how you can use that to your own advantage to what it is you want to build in your local community. But that tension, that was there, it is true that was there throughout the movement, and it is true about the resentment of King, and people feeling threatened by King.

Sinsheimer: But I guess ... when Jackson first announced, I guess the smallest of his goals, so he said, was that he wanted to get people to register so that black people would start winning local elections.

Moses: Right.

Sinsheimer: And, I mean the focus right now of his candidacy is not that.

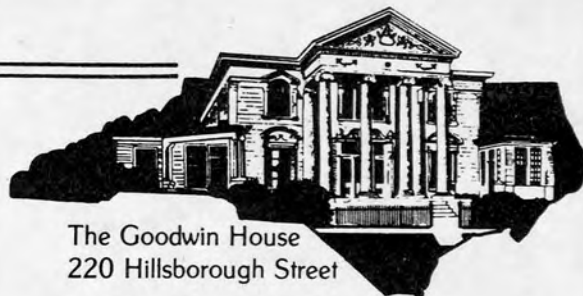
Moses: No, because it has moved beyond that, and all of a sudden he really is a candidate.

Sinsheimer: Right.

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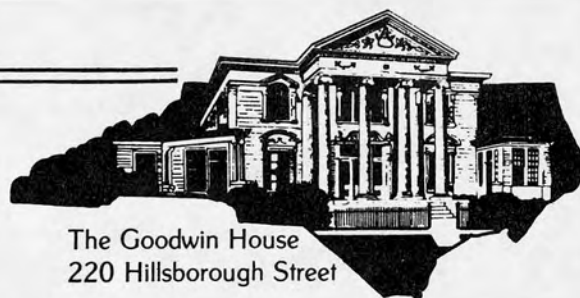
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- Moses: Which really plays a lot of light about running for president, that is how much it is a media event. And if you can somehow capture the media, then you can become a bona fide candidate. And you don't have to have an organization.
- Sinsheimer: I find it fascinating that the press never knew what to do about Mondale, they found him almost boring, but now they like the union story, the little fifty-two year old steelworker who supports Mondale, and that is how they are getting their story. If Mondale wins they can put all these touching little stories on, instead of having a dynamic Jackson, and they don't have Gary Hart and his ..., I mean its amazing, now they like him again because they can run all these stories ...
- Moses: About little people.
- Sinsheimer: About little people, exactly.
- Moses: Which is good in a way.
- Sinsheimer: Yeah, but thirty second spots on CBS.
- Moses: They found a way to project.
- Sinsheimer: Yeah. What about ... what about sheer organizational rivalry? Mississippi seemed to be one place where that was put aside for a while.
- Moses: Yeah, well one thing I found was the overwhelming desire of all the people we were working with to have all the organizations working together. I guess they felt overwhelmed by what they were facing in Mississippi, and you kept hearing again and again we want to see NAACP, SNCC, CORE, we want to see them all working together. And then it just happened to be fortunate that you had people in command posts in different organizations in Mississippi who were the kind of people who would work together. You had Medgar Evans as the field secretary for NAACP people in the state, you had Aaron Henry as the Chairperson for NAACP, and then you had (David) Dennis as the field secretary for CORE, and then myself, so it was easy for us to put together this concept of you know, an umbrella organization to cover the voting (registration) in the state.
- And that served as a unifying factor, because you could go then anywhere in the state and do voter registration and not have to run into any kind of flak that you were in

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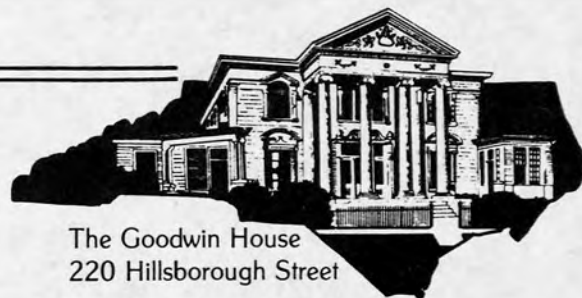
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- Moses (cont.): somebody's territory, you know, or you were trying to usurp local leadership, or anything like that. So that was just part good luck, and good people in the right positions. And then of course that broke after MFDP because then the politics got people on different sides, Democratic Party politics. And after that they were very anxious to make a separation of leadership in the state.
- Sinsheimer: This was after Atlantic City?
- Moses: Yeah.
- Sinsheimer: Just the separation around the reaction ... ?
- Moses: People who they could count on, the Democratic Party needed people that they could count on to support them in the state. So they moved to support a fund, different people, different projects. So you got the whole CDPS and the whole poverty program opening up so that became a vehicle for funding. I am not sure that we answered your first question, whether we got the essence of it?
- Sinsheimer: How much did you struggle with the question personally?
- Moses: Of?
- Sinsheimer: Of being a leader.
- Moses: Well, you know, over a period of years the whole question began to penetrate into my thinking, it is not something I went down there with preconceived ideas. Over a period of years, I began to work out this distinction in my mind between leaders and organizers, and organizing people and mobilizing them, and what my own role should be. I guess the crux came around the question of whether I should permit myself to become a national symbol within SNCC. Again the other way this problem comes up is fundraising. And this came up around the question of fundraising, again because fundraising is based on what people know, an image, so you are relying again on media, so therefore you need a national personality.
- So this question came up within SNCC after 1964 of trying to develop this within the organization. So it was something that I was against. I didn't want to be such a person, but I didn't also want the organization to

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Moses (cont.)

move in that direction, because then your organizing begins then to get tied into your fundraising. You begin then also to organize around media events, things which will attract the media. Your organization then begins to be pulled and swayed by the whole fundraising mechanism.

So that was a big ... of course SNCC got it, I mean that was Stokley. Stokley became a national media image person. And then for awhile was able to help raise money but as soon as the media turned against him then that blew that. You are still a media person but you have that negative image. Which is really part of the problem, it is a deep problem that I have with that whole syndrome of media and leadership. Because with Jessie (Jackson) it came up around this quote about the Jewish, you know characterizing Jewish people. So there you are the media has made you and now can break you.

Sinsheimer:

Well, Gary Hart now to the same extent too. I mean the media created him and now they are carrying him back down.

Moses:

So it has taken a long while, but even in coming back this problem presented itself again. And it has been clear now to me, very clear now, given my own lifestyle and what it is I want to do that I should not become a media person, because the line is a thin line and once you cross it is hard to, you can't turn back. Once you become a media person it is like the media always has access to you.

Sinsheimer:

(Robert) Coles was telling me a story about the day Erik Ericson made the cover of Time, he said: "This is the begining of the end, people know about me now."

Moses:

Right.

Sinsheimer:

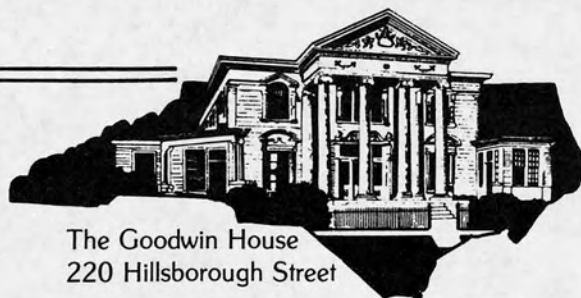
There probably is something to that. I guess also that Alice Walker is being driven crazy, she is suddenly in the media. That is a nice story to write ...

Moses:

Well, I had learned enough though from the movement to understand the little moves not to make that happen. I mean you can say, okay I will do one TV program and don't think much about that. I mean I really am just systemmatically not done any media events. And it works, if you are not a media person, the media can not

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Moses (cont.): use you.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Moses: They just can't throw your name in, because no one knows it. So your name doesn't get thrown into the hunt.

Sinsheimer: Do you ever have feelings of frustration about that?

Moses: About?

Sinsheimer: Isolated is a strong word but ...

Moses: Well, let's put it this way. As I grow deeper into myself, into my real self, a deeper understanding of who I am and what is important to me, my frustration recedes to zero. Really understanding what ever pull you feel to do that is wrong. It is coming from a part of you that is not real.

Sinsheimer: Well, I wasn't necessarily saying that ... desire for celebrity or anything, but more I mean ... genuine political feelings. I mean issues or causes. Is that what you were talking about?

Moses: But that doesn't, you are not prevented from participating. That doesn't stop you, you just participate, participation is just not at a global level that's all. If you do not have a problem with that, the problem I guess occurs if you are used to participating at a global level you somehow miss it.

Sinsheimer: (Pause) I am trying to think about the first question. Maybe we can come back to it. If we could back up to your early days in Mississippi. I would like to get a clear perception of how that grew from McComb in the first couple of years. So you went to McComb because of ... ?

Moses: Amzie.

Sinsheimer: Amzie (Moore).

Moses: Yeah. What happened was that Ed King, not the Ed King from Mississippi, the minister, this was a young black student from Kentucky I think, who had become

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Moses (cont):

Executive Secretary of SNCC after Jane stepped down. Jane stepped down in the fall of '60 because of political problems, disagreement about the conference. And Ed put a blurb in Jet about the voter registration project that Amzie was planning and then C.C. Bryant in McComb read it and wrote to Amzie and asked to have some of the people sent down to him. So then Amzie sent me down there. And that is how we started in McComb and that was in the summer of 1961.

And that kind of ended there when we had the demonstrations and the students walked out of the high school, and a lot of us were jailed.

Sinsheimer:

Over Herbert Lee?

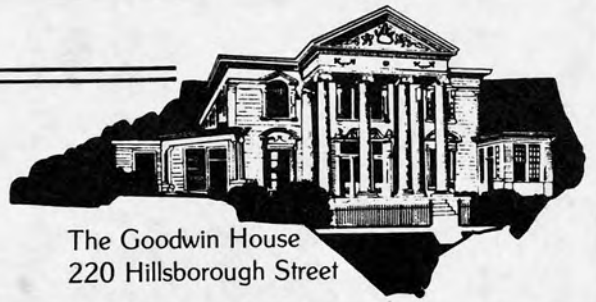
Moses:

No, the demonstrations were over sit-ins. Marion Barry came down and he was part of what was called the direct action movement of SNCC. And then he trained Hollis Watkins and Curtis Hayes who had been working with me on voter registration and were frustrated and were local people from the area, young people, to do some direct action. And then they started some sit-ins. Then they involved one of the high school students in the sit-in and she was expelled from school and then the students marched out protesting that. And then a lot of them got arrested and then we were in jail for about a month. And then afterwards the students, we got places for them in a Methodist church related school in Jackson. I am trying to think of the name, I have forgotten the name. But anyway, so I kind of followed the students to Jackson when we got out of jail to try to keep an eye on them, on what they were doing, because it wasn't as if it was a really good school.

And then in the meantime, the people who had been in the Freedom Rides and had been trying to organize in Jackson, some of them were still there. And having failed at the direct action they were turning to some type of political action. And then they had gotten this idea of running these candidates for office, Rev. Smith and I think it was _____, what was his name up in the Delta. So then they asked me I would be the campaign manager for Smith and that got me into that program, and traveling in the congressional district

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Moses (cont.): of which McComb was a part, doing voter registration at this level of encouraging people to register so that they could vote for Smith.

Sinsheimer: Do you think that made a difference?

Moses: It was an important move in the overall history of what happened in Mississippi, because it got us into the notion of 1) turning people's attention toward the Democratic Party and the actual process of getting people to run for office, and I guess raised in the back of people's minds about what is the Democratic Party, and how that is actually going to look when people do get to vote. And so it kind of laid the groundwork for the convention challenge in that sense.

And it also got people into this kind of power politics, the idea of moving as if you were a bona fide candidate, just move as if there were no barriers. And this led into some consciousness about using this as a technique for consciousness-raising.

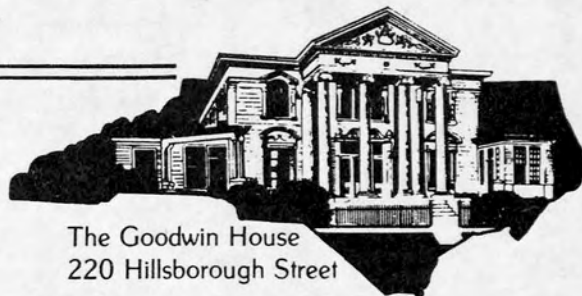
And then basically also organizing. That is where people began to think about what they were doing as also using political activity and the right to vote and the campaign as a tool for organizing, setting up people across the state, contacting people. And that won over a lot of direct action people who had tended to look at the voter registration as a cop out to the Kennedy's and the federal government. They began to see it as a tool they could actually use to get out and organize people without spending half of their time in jail. Because the federal government did provide some protection in terms of organizing, that is Mississippi couldn't just pick you up and put you in jail if you were organizing around the right to vote.

So after that the discussion came about working in the Delta. Amzie felt ready to begin work in the Delta, which he hadn't felt ready to do when I first went down. And so then we recruited about twelve people, and spread out into the counties.

Sinsheimer: Did you recruit from Jackson?

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Moses:

People were around Jackson, but they weren't, their homes weren't in Jackson but somewhere ... at Toogaloo like McArthur Cotton and Dorie Ladner, and some were from Jackson, James Jones, Jesse Hollis and Watkins were from the McComb area, Emmabelle was from the McComb area, she had been expelled from school, and was up in Jackson with the students up there. She went to Greenville. _____ was with the NAACP in Jackson.

And then Frank Smith came over, he was from Georgia. He came over to work. Sam Block we picked up, and was from the Cleveland area. And after we had started he heard about it and came up. Willie Peacock and Amzie and I. Amzie knew his family [Willie's] up in Charleston, so we went up there and talked to them.

So it was like one by one, picking up people. And so that took us into the summer of '62. I mean we spent the Spring organizing, getting people spread out and beginning to work. And by that time we had this -- after we had started, I guess after that came the building of this COFO idea. I think we were already in place and working before we had any kind of systematic funding, which lasted a short while .
(end of tape)

Sinsheimer:

There was I think in 1962 a problem with in one of the communities with surplus food getting cut off in response to voter registration activity?

Moses:

That winter, '62-63, I think was when we got into the food problems and trying to get food down from Chicago. And clothing. It was a hard winter if I remember. It wasn't the '61-62 winter because we weren't up there, we were getting up there towards the Spring.

Sinsheimer:

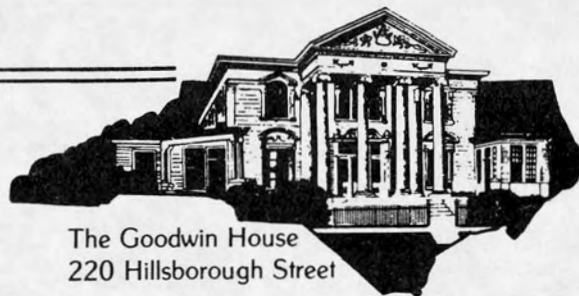
So you are talking about the summer of '62?

Moses:

The summer of 1962 then, we were there and pretty well spread out and established. And we began running these workshops in Greenwood. We had this little office there, and we would bring people in from the different counties, and run workshops with them and then get them back.

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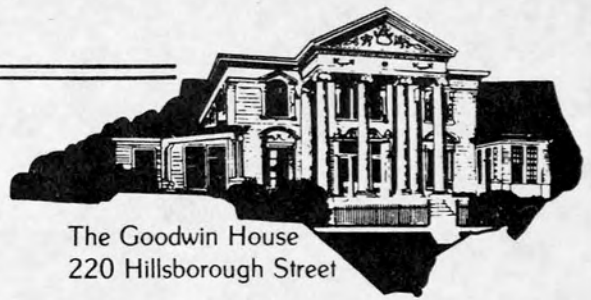
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- Sinsheimer: Were you harassed at all at this or was this pretty much ... ?
- Moses: The usual. We weren't demonstrating so I don't recall many actual arrests, people in jail.
- Sinsheimer: But people were definitely aware of what you were doing?
- Moses: Oh yeah. We weren't ... a few people were going to register but not a whole lot. We got more people to go up [to register] when we began the food drive and tied in going to register with getting food or clothing or something like that. I guess in '61 -- when did Meredith go into Ole Miss?
- Sinsheimer: 1961 maybe?
- Moses: No 1962 I guess. 1961 we were in McComb. I think it was in '62. Or maybe it was the winter of 1961-1962. Well it was a kind of holding period. We had established this beachhead in these counties in the Delta and we were just trying to hold on, you know, basically. We weren't, I mean it wasn't a question of getting people registered or even getting large numbers down at that point because the fear was so intense. It was just finding one or two here or there who might be willing and then trying to support that afterwards. And then holding these community meetings and trying also to get the staff into SNCC. That was a big problem, not problem, but program to get the people who were mostly from Mississippi to get to know and feel a part of SNCC. And then as we got into these communities we began to pick up other organizers, local people who began to work with us.
- Sinsheimer: People who had done nothing before?
- Moses: Young people, and some older people too yeah. June Johnston's mother in Greenwood. I remember when we picked her up -- I mean she was active in support and everything, but she wasn't organizing in Greenwood. But by the spring-- see then, then in that winter that we had the shoot out. The ambush thing outside of Greenwood. Then after that we had the big campaign trying to focus on Greenwood, and then as a part of that we were arrested. There was a court case. And then

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Moses (cont.):

they had a trial in Greenville. I guess the trial in Greenville -- as a result of that people that we had going down to register and all that, focusing activity on Greenwood, the Justice Department I think brought a suit on Greenwood. And so as a part of that we took a bus load of people over to the courthouse in Greenville.

And Jim Johnston's mother was there. It really... something clicked in her mind. I mean just getting up to move. It's something that clicked in my mind about organizing, that is that one of the tricks it seems in getting local people to begin to think of themselves as organizers and leaders is to take them out of their environment. So just the fact about getting over to Greenville and talking to people there. I mean she talked to more people there about going down to register than she did in all her life in Greenwood.

Sinsheimer:

Is there a fear element involved in that ?

Moses:

It is part fear, I guess, and it is part just habit. You know, the habitual ways of relating to people you know. And it is not easy to change that and suddenly become someone who is talking to them about, you know, coming down and the way it is, and so forth. And Greenwood being a small town, you know, in the black community you pretty well know everybody. And fear, for a young person maybe that is not such a problem, but for a person who is established and has a family and so forth, it is hard to get them to get out on the street.

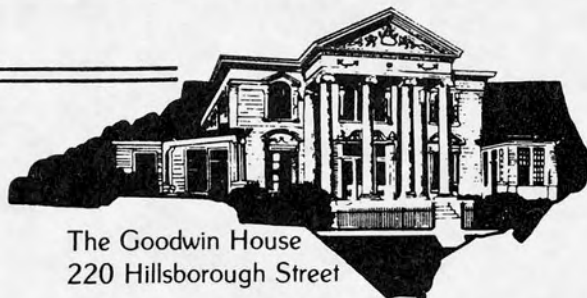
So it was interesting, she had no problem getting out there in Greenville and talking to people, and it excited her. She became much more active after that. So that was one thing that we began to incorporate as a tool in the organizing. You know, whenever you can get your people together and take them some place else to work, so that the people who you are working with in one place can become the organizers, help become the organizers in It is something that I thought that we missed out on because we were short-circuited.

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Moses (cont.):

With the FDP, ideally what would have happened would have been that you would have built that up enough in Mississippi until the FDP people themselves were ready to move out, say to Alabama and help organize a political party there as opposed to SNCC workers going and doing the organizing. And that is what happened when Stokley and some SNCC workers left. And it was partly out of frustration, and partly out of their own desire to create their own kind of political party that they wanted to see happen.

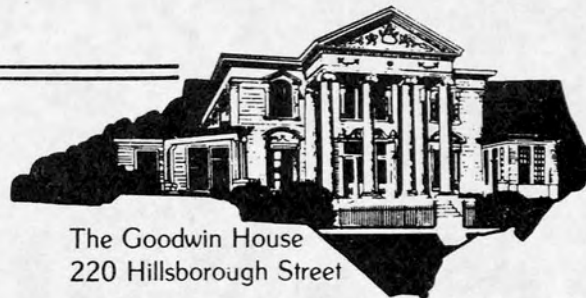
But that I think gets back to the difference between mobilizing and organizing. Because it is-- I think it is an even higher step in organizing if you go in and you are working with a community and you get the organizing to the point where not just you can leave and they are still working, and have leadership, but to the point where they are ready to go out and take on organizing another place themselves. Because then when you get that type of mechanism, it mushrooms in an exponential situation as opposed to just inching along.

But the movement never-- it got into that a little by 1965 with the FDP, those people were ready to go out with other grass roots people in different parts of the country-- it was just a lack of grass roots organizing. If we had had then what we had going on in the late seventies, it would have been possible to make real connections. But the corresponding activity in the white community had not started.

And that I think could have cut through a lot of the problems with Black Power, if there had been at that time corresponding activity in the white community so that the white people were working. And didn't have to feel that they had to work in black communities. Then you might have been able to get to the community people at the level of the community as opposed to the level of the organizers, together. Because the people were much more open to working with their counterparts in the white community than say organizers.

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Sinsheimer: Now in 1964 with the White Folks Project with some of the volunteers, they were in Biloxi and It didn't work very well.

Moses: Yeah.

Sinsheimer: Things were polarized too much?

Moses: Well they couldn't make any in-roads into the white community. I think that all those projects-- because as soon as you can't do that, then you are turning on yourselves, because it is your community. You are just doomed, your frustrated because it is not like you have just have some real program for yourselves. I mean people are not disciplined enough to say well we are just going to train ourselves for several years. That is what we are about.

So that happened repeatedly over the next few years. Did you meet, or read about Mendy Samstein, or hear the name? So Mendy tried going up into the labor communities, to try to do some organizing. Again it was bone dry, there was nothing there that he felt he could work with. There was no consciousness there.

So people just kept trying to turn back. And we were asking people to do it because it was the way out as far as I could see of what was clearly heading down the pike-- this crash within the movement which took place in the late sixties.

Sinsheimer: How early was that evident?

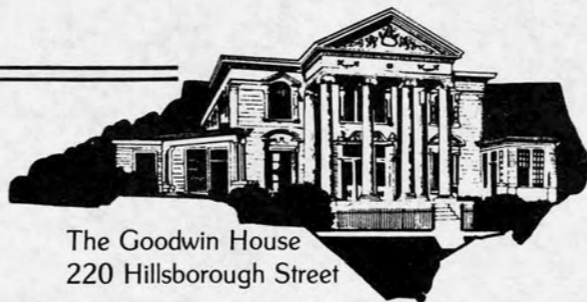
Moses: What we were doing was right after the Summer Project.

Sinsheimer: How early was that recognized?

Moses: Right after the Summer Project. That was very clear. Now what was clear was the reaction of the black SNCC workers to the Project, then the problem was what is the way out of this? And one way out was to try to establish a beachhead in the white community. So that the white workers could work in white communities. So you wouldn't have everyone piled up on top of each other in the black communities. So then you could bring grass roots people together from the two communities.

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Moses (cont.):

Because there was no question in our minds that the people themselves would relate. Say that people who we had organized in the MFDP would welcome, you know, a meeting which they were relating with their counterparts from the white community, working people and such.

And so we began to try to seek that out and people went different places. And over the next couple of years it became clear that they could not survive, the support, emotional support, wasn't there. And so the burnout was ...

Sinsheimer:

Support lacking from the white community?

Moses:

From the white communities. No support at all. I mean people would last a month, two months and then they would be back. And you didn't have then in the white communities this alternative movement, you know, little pockets in the white community which might actually support a person who was going out daily to work with the larger community.

But people were aware of that problem, and trying to figure out a way around it.

Sinsheimer:

How important was the actual compromise (at the 1964 Democratic Convention) in the reaction to the Summer Project?

Moses:

You mean the MFDP at the Convention?

Sinsheimer:

Yes.

Moses:

That had nothing to do with this.

Sinsheimer:

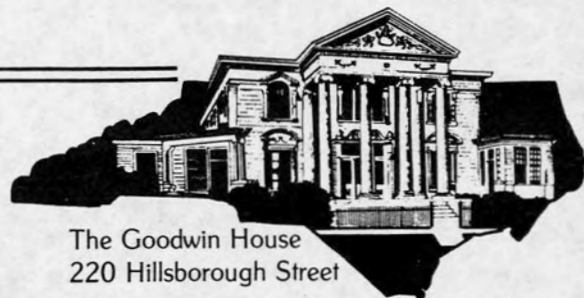
It would have happened anyway?

Moses:

Yeah. No, here you are dealing with something that goes deep into -- we were talking about this out in Colorado in connection with Gandhi, and the Indians' feelings of nationalism, and the degradation that, the powerlessness, that the Indians felt at the hands of British colonialism. So the need in India to, for people to reaffirm their

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Moses (cont.) own worth, which leads to not wanting to have foreigners or people running the movement or something. And I guess you could probably trace these same kind of attitudes to a lot of nationalist movements.

Sinsheimer: Have you seen the movie, Gandhi?

Moses: Yeah. Right.

Sinsheimer: There is that scene where the young Catholic priest says what can I do to help and he (Gandhi) says you can leave.

Moses: Right.

Sinsheimer: It's pretty much the scene. And that happened in full scale in the South too?

Moses: Yes. Because I think that people tend to not understand the deeper ramifications of what was happening then, and they tend to think of it just as racial. Because that is, you know, the boundary, the cultural background.

Sinsheimer: Isn't that then, one of the biggest problems of the future of the black movement?

Moses: How to deal with that, in this country. Of this country.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Moses: It's a major problem, of how this country Of course otherwise what will happen is that we will have Reagans. The other side will exploit this.

Sinsheimer: If you go all the way back ...

Moses: I mean Nixon ran on the white fear of the blacks in the inner city.

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Sinsheimer: If you go all the way back to the populist movement that is the problem too.

Moses: Right. That has been ...

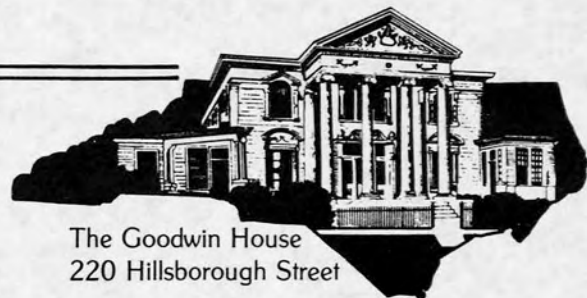
Sinsheimer: But you are already beginning to see it with (Jesse) Jackson. "He only got four percent of the white vote," louder and louder they (the news media) say it every state. Your beginning to see it in these interviews-- I saw an interview where someone was saying that it is hard to see past him being a black activist. And here he is getting all these votes, more than, twice or three times as many as people thought he would. And yet, still he is getting the black vote.

Moses: Well, there is one question which is what is the stage which the country is at? Right. I mean, clearly the country is not at a stage where it can support a black person for President. It is at a stage where it has cities that can support a black person for mayor, if the city is not somehow fifty percent black.

So that isn't the question. What is more the question in Jesse's campaign is the recognition-- you see if you think back to '64 and the MFDP and the challenge to the Democratic Party, that challenge opened up to the Democratic Party the question of are you going to have black people, in significant number, in these party conventions. And Jesse now is opening up, continuing in that tradition -- are black people going to be given, or are they going to take a significant role in actually shaping policy at these conventions. That is what he opens up, What is stopping that, if anything stops that from happening it would be the local black leaders in these cities, in Atlanta or Philadelphia or wherever, where they are anxious to hold on to their own particular power and play this off with whoever might gain the nomination. Because if they had all gotten together and agreed that we will reserve the black vote, it is like the Governor of a given state running as a favorite son. And he is going to go in their with all these votes. Now you are doing this on a national level, and everyone could agree, we will reserve the black vote to our own candidate.

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Moses (cont.):

And we will use this as a bargaining chip at the Convention for a policy-making role. Now the consciousness in the black community is not raised enough to, for everyone to go that route. And it is inevitable that you are going to get people that have their own political agenda.

Sinsheimer:

Julian Bond was at Duke (University) about ten days ago, giving a lecture. What it was, what it turned out to be was a full critique of the Reagan administration. It was pretty good, it was really good actually. When questions and answers started what would be the first question you would expect? Who are you supporting? And he said Mondale and about four people applauded in a room that was about seventy percent black. But I guess I was surprised.

Moses:

You were surprised with Julian or with the response?

Sinsheimer:

Both. And that it (the response) was that heavy. There really was kind of a silence. And surprised that he did not explain it. That is what I guess I was surprised at. He explained it by saying that I am for Mr. Mondale because I want to win. And he never said anything. He never felt compelled. Which was interesting. Maybe that is just his own ...

Moses:

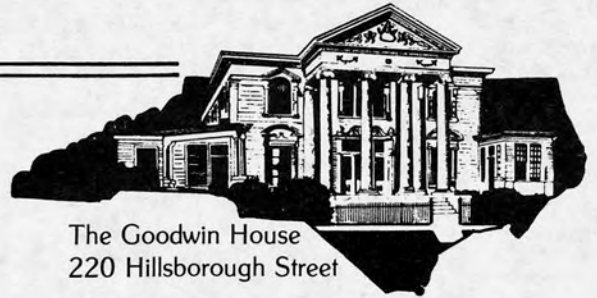
People didn't push him?

Sinsheimer:

Well, I guess the first thing was that someone asked him about second primaries. And he eluded that kind of too. He said that philosophically that are not evil because what they do is help the party find the candidate who has the best chance of winning in November. He was saying that they help the party find middling candidates that can win. But of course he said they can be racist. And then he said that, and the next person popped up, and said that he had been a victim of second primaries. I am pretty sure he was a black Durham lawyer (Mickey Michaux), unless I have it wrong, who had run for Congress, and lost out in the primary-- won the first primary and lost in the runoff. And he said, "I am a victim of this."

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Sinsheimer (cont.): And put the question like that to him (Julian), Okay here is an example of what he just was talking about. And he skirted it, because he just complimented the man. He said something like, "Well I can understand them not wanting to vote for a progressive, intelligent black man like yourself." And everyone kind of laughed, but he skirted it, and the whole thing was kind of surprising to me.

Moses: Well, I don't know what Julian-- my feeling is that the people who are supporting Mondale are not doing it because they want to win, but because they want to have power. They know that Mondale is going to win, they are counting on him to win the Convention, right. Then they want to have some power, some influence. Or maybe they have already made some-- Mondale has been forced to make some agreements with them in order to get them to support him initially.

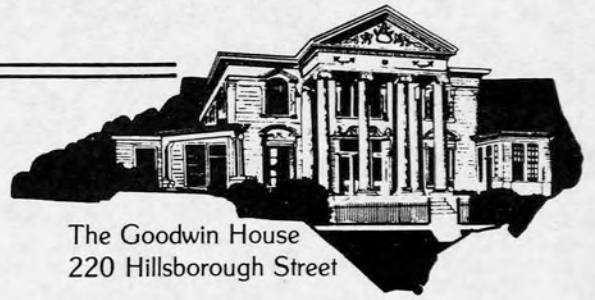
Sinsheimer: I kind of brought that up because in the histories of black political consciousness-- I mean, there-- you know, Julian Bond seems to be one part of that. He is fairly sophisticated about ... he has been through a lot of things.

Moses: Well I was thinking not about Julian Bond and people who are the leaders but I was thinking of the mass of people. Because the next step is throw those people out. That is if as people you decided that this is the route right, for us to go, to really exploit our voting potential. We have so few weapons to use, so the vote now, we are using this as a tool to see how much we can pry out of this country, you know, for the benefit of black people.

Now if as a people we decided that every four years, right, at this convention, there is a real opportunity to get down some commitments to black people if we can unify ourselves and send in a block of delegates and a presidential candidate who is not necessarily running for office, but

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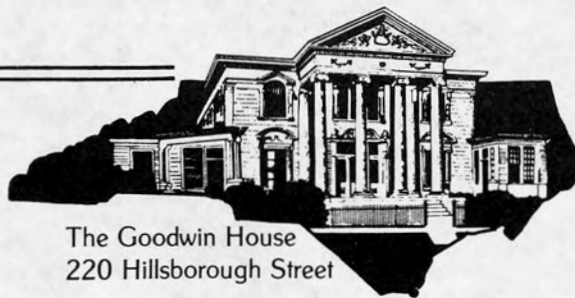
(Moses) p.24

- Moses (cont.): is representing us. I mean, in effect functioning as our presidential stand-in. But I am saying that the consciousness is not, I don't think, high enough to do that. Because clearly this is not something that is going to stop in '84, it should, there is no reason why it can't become some kind of tactic.
- Sinsheimer: I forget who the man who is president of CORE now?
- Moses: CORE is kind of out of it. I know who you are talking about, I have forgotten his name.
- Sinsheimer: Well, anyway, he was saying...
- Moses: He doesn't represent, CORE doesn't represent anything. I can't think of his name, but he is suspect because of Innis?
- Sinsheimer: Hmmm.
- Moses: But the whole role he played in Africa. I don't know if you followed that. Angola. He was supporting the group that was fighting back by South Africa. And he got all involved in that. He has done a lot of shaky things and I am not sure
- So anyway, this is a big question. And of course there is a question of whether-- the thing that I... again that I appreciate the exploitation of the media, and everything, but there is a big difference between moving like this and organizing. We would be in a much stronger position if this was an organizational effort. You know, if there was real organizing that was being done. And that people were there, that were going to be able to speak for themselves, as opposed to having someone speak for them.
- I mean it is one thing the concept of leadership and the concept which Jackson is saying that he is spokesperson for black people, minorities, and the poor. But the organizing notion takes that a step further, that is that they should speak for themselves, and your job is organizing, to provide a platform for them to speak. And that of course is much more powerful, and that what the legacy it seems

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Moses (cont.);

to me of the movement, or at least of one arm of the movement, is. And I don't think that is lost, I don't think that legacy is lost. Jackson is playing on another legacy of the movement, which is in the mobilization of folks. And that-- you see this first legacy is being used much more by the white community in one sense than by Even in this school here, this program that my children are in here, is an open class room program in which the movement idea of participation, of participatory democracy and so forth, is taken into the schools. It is built upon the idea that the parents have the right to get in with the staff and make fundamental decisions about how teachers conduct classrooms and all that. So we built this little program here.

But that basically is a white, something that has taken hold in the white community. The black community has not moved in a similar direction. But you see that happening in a lot of different parts of society.

I am going to have to run, my kids are leaving now. It is time for them to go home.

End of interview.