

Interview with Robert Moses  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
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Joe Sinsheimer:

As long as we are talking about Burke Marshall and John Doar, it was one of the questions I wanted to talk to you about. Beginning with this avalanche of Kennedy books, there has been so much writing-- some of it I think good-- the picture has become clearer in terms of how people like John Doar and Burke Marshall were feeding information to Bobby Kennedy and the President, and how that system worked.

But what I think what isn't clear was how information was getting from the field to the government, in terms of how the relationship developed between people like yourself and John Doar? Who was in fact communicating with them when you needed to have things communicated? That whole process seems to be ... I don't really understand it. And I think that any attempt to evaluate the government's response has to take, include that whole process in terms of ... . Does that sort of make some sense?

Robert Moses:

A little. Doar was working directly under Marshall. And they had at their disposal, I guess, a small group of various, about six-- I don't know how many-- who spent a lot of time in the field and who would gather information for them. If you took people down to register or something like that, they might be coming if there was some incident or if there was an accumulation of people who didn't get registered and they decided that they wanted to look at the information. I think they would-- typically-- was come in and look at the books and I suppose that they talked to the registrar.

And then they would come and interview us and interview people that we had taken down. And I imagine that a lot of that stuff is on file. Is that the kind of thing that you are talking about?

Sinsheimer:

On file, in terms of the Justice Department having it?

Moses:

Well, in terms of information coming between the civil rights workers and the people in the southern states. The flow of information from us to the Justice Department, if that is what you mean.

Sinsheimer:

Yes.

- Moses: And it seems as I ... there was also of course the FBI, and they were also used. And they would send out-- Mississippi would be primarily up until '64, the resident agents who lived in Mississippi or people from out of Memphis or New Orleans, in their offices there. And the FBI agents were often, I guess, unsatisfactory in terms of their reports. And so they often doubled back with their own people. But they did use the FBI.
- Sinsheimer: What about direct access between ... ?
- Moses: Well we saw-- if you are talking about Mississippi now, which is what I know about first hand-- we saw mostly Doar. Of course he was in the field. So we saw him when he made his rounds.
- Sinsheimer: It is hard, I guess what I am trying to get out is was that a friendly relationship, a working relationship with Doar, and adversarial relationship with Doar? Did that change with time, let's say with failed expectations?
- Moses: I always felt myself that I maintained a working relationship with Doar particularly, he was the person ... . And to a certain extent with Burke (Marshall). You had, I mean on the one hand you had, the official SNCC position vis a vis the Justice Department. SNCC in its publicity arm was in a position of constantly criticizing the Justice Department. And you also had the fact that that criticism was necessary. The way the government works, it moves under the pressure of public outcry, so that went on.
- And then you had varying degrees within the organization in terms of individuals, how they felt about the Justice Department and what it was doing. And I imagine that if you talked to different people, you would get different responses. It wasn't like their was an organizational position. I mean there was this constant barrage of public ... just press releases, just basically.
- The civil rights organizations sort of felt like that whenever anything happened, they had to make a public comment on it. So there was always these press releases which were going out. And SNCC fell into that same mode about operating, of sending out press releases and trying to get some kind of public, I guess, explosion, as well as put some kind of public pressure on the Justice Department. But that happened in Atlanta basically. There was a process always of I'll call in information and talk to the people in Atlanta, and they were doing with it what they wanted to in terms of this or that. Press operation. But that was one thing.



Moses:

I don't know. If they did, because that must have been going on all the time. Because there was always, we were always moving in one county or another, and there was always this new pressure being brought to bear, and they always had these decisions to make about where and how to move in terms of their own legal response. But how they made those, you know, I don't know.

I think that is partly one of the reasons why I didn't myself get worked up about what the Justice Department couldn't do, because it was clear from the beginning that we were operating in a very tight political situation. Just take the way the Civil Rights Bill was passed. It was the churches--what was his name ... I have forgotten, it slipped my mind the name of the guy who was the Executive Director of the National Council of Churches-- Bob Spike. And the key to passing the bill were certain Republican Congressmen from the Midwest. And what they did was they organized busloads of clergymen from the congressmen's district and brought them down to Mississippi and marched on the picket lines about the right to vote. And took them back to their districts and had them speak to their congregations and then organize busloads of parishioners, voters to go to Washington to lobby.

Sinsheimer:

Right.

Moses:

All targeted to specific Republican Congressional districts, that is how they swung the vote. Now, I mean anybody looking back would say that the Republicans should have voted en masse for that voting bill, because it certainly has opened up the whole South to them. But the people who were then in power were content to rule with the Dixiecrats. So they didn't have access to the Executive Branch of the government as they do now, but they were content, you know, to rule the Senate and the House with the Dixiecrats. I mean all of that was clear, I mean you were always operating within that highly charged political field. So I am not sure though what the gist of your question was? What it is that you are really getting at?

Sinsheimer:

I guess part of it might go back ... part of it might go back to, it was at one of the training sessions when Doar came that whole ...

Moses:

Oh, confrontation with Doar? Jack Eunice and them? Is that on record somewhere?

Sinsheimer:

Yeah, ... I think it is Sally Belfrage's book.

Moses:

Oh yeah.

Sinsheimer: At some point and I might have even asked you this, you said something to the effect that ... .

Moses: Well I stopped it.

Sinsheimer: You stopped it, okay.

Moses: We didn't bring Doar, we invited Doar to the session. But we didn't invite him there, you know, to take a barrage of criticism. I mean we know that kind of criticism existed within SNCC. I urged the volunteers not to think of the Justice Department as their enemy. Which they weren't.

Sinsheimer: Because they still were ...

Moses: They had a major enemy to think about. It was enough to think about that. Rather than trying to think about the Justice Department. I mean, the problem, the thing to think about which is-- I don't know if it got across-- was to think about what kind of working relationship, you know, would you establish with the Justice Department, or should you establish, while you were down there to use them for whatever help ... . Because the Justice Department was very helpful in that kind of situation in just helping establish your credibility in the black community as someone who has some kind of ... help to offer. People viewed it as help if they would get in trouble and someone from the Justice Department comes down from Washington and interviews them. I mean they viewed that as a plus, they know that white people know that that person came down, and they know that it might serve as some kind of psychological deterrent. And it also in their minds makes what you are doing not fly-by-night. You know, it makes it something that has some kind of backing to it. The fact that a response is forthcoming. So all of that is much more important for the volunteers in their Mississippi operation, than the political, well the emotional response to the political analysis. I mean the political analysis might be true, but then there is also given then whatever it is, what is your response going to be, that is the practical response in terms of how in terms of how you are going to move and try to get the job that you are trying to do done. And a lot of times people have a lot, I think, of emotional needs to respond, which may be counter-productive when you are working.

Sinsheimer: I have the sense that ... that question is also ... the question then that, I think, historians would

Sinsheimer (cont.):

ask about the Kennedy government, in terms of if you evaluate the Kennedy government in light of the Reagan government, you do see a "knight in shining armor." I mean if you evaluate it in terms of what the Constitution says, or the American ideals, or you know, that other definition then you get another sort of picture.

I mean-- everything is relevant-- I was working for the Democratic Party down in North Carolina and there were a lot of attempts going on at voter intimidation. And one of the things that was contemplated, in fact I think [Governor] Hunt wanted it, was to call in the Justice Department and try to get some marshalls in some areas where they expected trouble. And the conclusion after some investigation was that it would be counter-productive. That you sort of have to realize who you would be getting. And this is twenty years afterward.

Moses:

Right.

Sinsheimer:

And maybe what I really was trying to do was to sort of throw that historical question back up in terms of how do we evaluate the government's responses in terms of ...

Moses:

The other thing about these kinds of relationships is that the way this government works there is the official side of everything, and then there are all these unofficial links and relationships which have formed. And people who are in power like that are always in a position to help move different things around. Now why-- a very concrete example of this in terms of Mississippi had to do with the literacy project.

Do you remember that? Did you know about that?

Sinsheimer:

Adult literacy?

Moses:

Yeah.

Sinsheimer:

No I am not really familiar with that.

Moses:

Well, sometime in 1962 I think it was, I looked up a former teacher of mine, John Blythe, who taught logic, philosophy at Hamilton College. And he had left Hamilton after he had done some work on putting, programming his logic textbook. He had written while I was a freshman, while I was in school there. I guess the first time it



Moses (cont):

began to be used was when I was a freshman. It was a standard introductory logic text. It was coming off the press, he was mimeographing it.

After I graduated, some time after that, he left. He had gotten \_\_\_\_\_ some other machine to do, to help the students do their logic. You know that kind of thing. He got an offer to go with Diabold to do programming.

So he was there and I had gotten interested in literacy, and the notion that we could also teach literact while we were in the South. So I looked him up and asked him if he was interested in developing programming, programs to teach adults. And I showed him, I mentioned to him that among the problems that we had-- I had gotten hold of some materials and we had started trying to teach some people in Greenville. And they were teaching the word "can." And the picture had a picture of a garbage can. So the person wasn't able from the picture to get the word "can," because his first association was garbage. With that kind of thing you are dealing with an adult that has a very rich vocabulary, right. And the problem then is teaching how to go about using that vocabulary in teaching.

So he was interested and I took him to meet Burke Marshall at the Justice Department to talk with Marshall about it. Marshall suggested, I think, that we go see Courier at the Taconic Foundation.

Sinsheimer:

Right.

Moses:

But ... the project got off the ground, and I am sure that it was the influence, a lot of the say the assurance of Marshall, people like that in the Justice Department to a person like Courier, right, to Blythe; because he eventually ended up taking half of his salary, half of his time on this project. If we had thought more maybe we would have pushed to have all and maybe we would have had some results from it.

Because of that, I think those connections, it went through. Courier put an initial \$60,000 or \$80,000 into it. It went, the money went to Tougaloo College and they set up the project there and we took SNCC staff people and put them under Blythe's direction. And he taught them how to do program writing and we got an artist. And they worked-- the idea was to teach our people how to do the writing and then work directly with the people that we wanted to, the target population.

Moses(cont.): So what I am saying is that I think that things like that go on all the time. And they may go on for the good or for the bad, I mean I don't know. But it is that kind of unofficial working relationship which you can develop with people who are in touch with a lot of different power centers. And so therefore they have the ear or the trust if they are the right people of other people who can facilitate pulling together something which requires the different interactions-- in this case Tougaloo had to be involved, although Bidel was willing really to act on our, my ...

Sinsheimer: Who was Bidel ?

Moses: He was president of Tougaloo at that time. So that is one thing to illustrate what I was talking about. The other thing which is that it didn't come off. Which illustrates something else about this country, which, how difficult it really is to really get money, a program for poor people. It began to be good, Blythe was really an excellent teacher and knew what he was doing and was able to train the staff ... turn out materials. At the United Nations other people started getting interested in what he was doing, the possibility of something overseas, that kind of thing. And then Diabold got interested in the materials, and they wanted to claim the materials ... and it all ended up in court. It might have worked had we been able to persuade Blythe to leave Diabold and work for Courier at the Taconic Foundation. But it seems to me a lot of stuff gets railroaded in this country because of people ... a certain element of just greed.

Sinsheimer: Maybe I will come back to that one, think about some more about that. Something I definitely wanted to ask you was about, if I can phrase it in a question. The thing that I thought was most interesting last time I talked to you, was that we talked about this notion of mobilizing and organizing. And we talked about the idea of the media influencing that direction, and the things you were saying, while media attention is important there comes a point when you change your organizing to the point where every thing you are doing is for the media. It seems like now we have reached a point in terms of our presidential elections, I mean every event is for the media.

Moses: Right.

Sinsheimer: So I guess the question is how do you trade off whether it is working in Mississippi in '64, or trying to get some sort of organization for nuclear arms [reduction], or protest South Africa; how do you trade off the need for media to raise consciousness with the

Sinsheimer (cont.):

notion that at some point that whole thing can just take over and all you are becoming is an organization or a movement that is involved in symbolic action.

Moses:

I don't think, I wonder the country may have gone through a turning point. It may be that the country has been so inundated now with media, that people have to get information, they can't get information except over the media. And then they have to get it in very short doses, you know, their attention span has been educated and determined by the media. So all the TV is watched for some very short period of time. I don't know, it may be that that is, you know, a basic fact about this country, the way it has developed.

The only other thing is to organize organizers, to really set about to organize organizers. How you would do that? You don't have funds for doing that so you need people, people who would somehow, SNCC people, people who are ready to commit themselves for nothing. But you would need them in large numbers. Excuse me. (Break)

You know I meet with a group, it's adults and they are all volunteering their time and contributing their money to have the place to meet and see that everything moves (yoga group). And there is no media effort involved. I mean they occasionally have speakers come through and so forth and there is some advertisement connected with that, but no TV. But some posters and maybe some letters and stuff, invitations. So that kind of thing can go on, people have to have some real commitment, and there has to be something real that they are getting from it.

And it happened during the sixties. And I am not sure why, you know, it is kind of unique in this country's history it seems. And you saw for a short time, you know, the trend where people going to school, what they wanted was to better themselves. But it maybe in the theological seminaries that these, well Vincent Harding was making a point that in the theological seminaries it is the only place in American education where people are openly committing themselves to serving other people. But it is also true that if you look what happens to the bulk of the graduates they are also living very comfortable lives.

So I am not sure if there is any place in this society right now. There are still people from that generation who are trying to live in a counter-cultural situation. And they are potential



Moses (cont.): potential organizers, but all their organizing, of course, is local. That is part of the way that they have been able to survive is to focus on their local issue. Now maybe something will come out of that. Maybe if they are successful in putting roots down that last over one generation and able to pass this on to the next generation and their children, there is tradition. Then maybe over a long period of time it may be possible to build anew something which is not local, not based on media.

There is a group that came through a year-- last spring I think-- there is a girl who had been in the summer project who is heading up a school for organizers in Chicago.

Sinsheimer: Do you know her name?

Moses: Yeah I can get it, I have it written down. The person who would know it, was in touch with her, was Wally Roberts. Do you know Wally?

Sinsheimer: He was ...

Moses: He was one of the volunteers.

Sinsheimer: In the Freedom Schools. And he was with Massachusetts Citizen's Advocate or something?

Moses: Yeah, they folded, they had cutbacks. So he is not with them. He was living up here in Mass. but he has moved to Vermont now. I think he is with Goddard College in the public relations ... I think I have a number for him so I can ...

Now I remember thining related to the question that she was raising ... it felt like there was a lot of organizing going on around the project that people did not know about. Precisely because it wasn't focused on the media, and the media had not gotten into it yet. And they felt that it was time-- which is your question-- to focus national attention by the media and to try to help that to develop a national organization, because the organizing was localized in different regions of the country. For example, they weren't organizing the South. So I was against it. I talked with them and felt, explained what I thought would happen. Particularly once you do that then you go South, it would just be a repetition of again white people moving into the South because they had not taken the time to develop the black organizers that they needed. \_\_\_\_\_ like they had developing in the North where it was easier. And you had people, again a greater middle class to choose

Moses(cont): from, people who had been through some kind of, experiences which made them ready for this. Now I don't know what came of that, whether they decided not to do it or not. But any case, those would be the people that you might look at.

The tendency always is to try to go national too quick. I mean SNCC, it was part of SNCC's mistake. Ms. Baker raised that question back in the sixties, whether SNCC should just keep a regional focus. And it might have helped. But every group, there is a kind of exhilaration about moving around the country. I think even with Jesse's (Jackson) campaign. You can see it there too. Because it is interesting, he had PUSH in the same way that we had COFO as a vehicle set in place through which he could launch a national campaign. And we had COFO as a vehicle through which we could launch a state organization, MFDP. And he organized, launched this national rainbow coalition as a political force through the operation of PUSH. And of course he was forced ... and welcomed the media, embraced the media. We did not have that problem in the state. But again I think that media, of course, overtook whatever organization was there, just knocked it over.

So it involves more patience than people, people in this country are very short in patience.

Sinsheimer: Do you think people have become desensitized about things? About civil rights?

Moses: Well, the whole country got annoyed by-- desensitized ... it is a nice word.

Sinsheimer: Okay (laughter).

Moses: I think it gives, it is as though credit was there. It is a fault, it's really a flaw, a tragic flaw in this country, because of the position it has been into because of the technology. So it is in position where it really requires a very mature leadership. And that requires in this case, a very mature citizenry. Else where is this mature leadership going to come from. I mean it just isn't there. I mean people are just ... just immature. So in the case of the civil rights movement, I mean you have long series of immature responses after another.

Stokeley and, Stokley is a young student, right. Just out of college and he has just went through this whole series of harrowing experiences and the response was "Black Power." And the country knee-jerks in response. The same thing goes for the rebellions. This pent-up frustration just, you know ... But there is no possibility of any mature response to these expressions of frustration, as it expressed itself in these rebellions, what people

Moses (cont): call riots. And so people don't, they responded by arming themselves on the one hand, and retreating to the suburbs. And just saying, well we have done enough for them. And it is just an immature response. Everyone is satisfied, they are satisfied now because on the surface everything is moving along, you know, the riots have stopped, the suburbs are comfortable, people are living the life that they dreamed of. But I mean it is another time bomb. It is just ticking away.

And it involves now more than just the United States, it involves the rest of the world.

Sinsheimer: You use the word "mature." I guess another reason why Mississippi is so interesting is that you see not only a level of maturity in terms of the leadership, but also creativity and ... in terms of finding creative ways not only to organize but to dramatize the problems that existed. Right now I am thinking of the Freedom Schools-- a creative, in fact ingenious response to ... . And I am sure that there are some people doing some creative things on a local level and maybe it is going back to some things that you were saying earlier. Is it possible to keep the creativity which seems like you can only have control of that if you have, I mean, only be creative if you have control of something. When you let it start to grow you lose the control and it starts to become less dramatic in terms of its creative potential.

Moses: Are you bringing this back to the media question?

Sinsheimer: Well, more to the scale question, can you ... ?

Moses: Well, I mean, the two are related in the sense that organic, if you are having an organic process of growth, you maybe able to deal with scale, because you are not going to grow too quickly. And you may be able to build into the growth ways of protecting your creativity, protecting the sense of community. People working in groups that don't overwhelm them. You get some sort of harmony. There is a sense in which SNCC was building that way. And of course the Summer Project interrupted that.

Sinsheimer: Smashed that process.

Moses: It was a media event. And we were not able to restore the balance. That is restore, go back to -- it wasn't



Moses (cont.): easy, people were not willing to just say okay we had that, we did it, we went through it, we got certain benefits from it, and we don't have to do it again, and we can now go back under and pick up where we left off, and keep working.

Sinsheimer: When you use the word people there you mean ... ?

Moses: I am talking about SNCC people, organizers. Now Forman wanted, he was pushing the organization to have a South-wide Freedom Summer. To do the same thing, but do it bigger, do it in more states. Other people who didn't want to do the Freedom Summer wanted to do something that would have a kind of national impact in the political sphere, I think that was what motivated Stokley, people like that to do the Black Panther Party. I think that is what came out of the way in which SNCC moved, the feel for a national impact again. Taking the kind of charisma that had developed around the Summer Project and making it a kind of permanent part of SNCC on a national stage. And so that eventually led to the Black Power.

Sinsheimer: Well, did it have to ?

Moses: Well, I am just saying that this is, it is like, it is a magnet. Once you introduce that into the situation you forget when you do that it isn't easy for people to return to what they were before. That they now-- because that is being successful in one sense-- they now look at that, that is in terms of when they set their goals. This is what happens, I think, in the organization when \_\_\_\_\_ is introduced, I think that is what happened in SNCC.

Stokeley became a media, a national media figure, and the organizers stopped organizing because it was more glamorous to do what Stokley was doing. And it is difficult then unless there is a certain kind of feeling, pattern established by habit and, you know, people talked it through so that.... You see we never had that problem in Mississippi, the leadership was always doing what everyone else was doing. So no one could say well I want to do what the leadership is doing, I don't want to do this other ... . Anyway, I think that is part of what happened, that the move, which was the Summer Project, certainly short-circuited the organic process which was going on in Mississippi of building the workers, the SNCC workers, the staff people. See it is another question of whether we could have sustained that, that organic process.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Moses: But there is no doubt-- and we couldn't return to it, the SNCC, the crucial members in the SNCC Mississippi staff, they did not survive intact from the Summer Project. And it is one of the great tragedies of the Summer Project. And then (Lawrence) Guyot and the MFDP, it was hard for him to go back, to see that the way for the FDP was to go back, to do the same kind of thing that had been done in Mississippi before except now do it on a political level, that is do this basic grass roots organizing of the MFDP. Well, it was more glamorous to raise the Congressional challenge, get your lawyers together, get the FDP people together and take them to Washington and challenge the Congressional delegation. And what they insisted on was another Summer Project with the volunteers, bring people down for the FDP. There was no way to argue about all that. Because what they would say is well we did it so....

Sinsheimer: Right.

Moses: It was like the attention of the focus now was the MFDP challenge, right so, follow that up with a Congressional challenge. The same type of media action. Looking back clearly there poised to do-- if the consciousness was there-- really grass roots organizing of the FDP, putting up people for local offices, but there wouldn't have been any media attention

Sinsheimer: Right. What would have been the ... okay I need to think how to say this .... You say if the consciousness was there, what was the psychology of what happened in Atlantic City? I mean in terms of perceiving of what you had done, I mean was it perceived as a step forward or perceived as ...

Moses: Perceived from my point of view? from their point of view?

Sinsheimer: Well in terms of if you are going to evaluate the potential of continuing that. I mean would it have been possible, did people feel defeated, did people feel ...

Moses: No, the delegation didn't feel defeated. They felt, I mean how could they. They didn't get the seats but they the white delegation. They were courted by King, invited to the receptions. Steptoe and other people got formal invitations to go to Johnson's Inaugural Ball. So their psychology was not one of defeatism, and certainly going on to challenge the Congressional delegation, you know, that was not ....

But it is just that it was difficult once that kind of action has been produced to turn people's attention back to their, to the real basic jobs. But you were in real

Moses(cont.): position now to do it because you had the whole delegation, plus all the people that they knew, to pull together, to teach them how to lead and organize and go out. It was done a couple of places. In Holmes County the organization to this day ... some individuals did it. But the leadership was , had had their heads turned, Guyot, by the very project that had brought it into being.

And that maybe that it is kind of dialectic, it may be inevitable unless there is a real consciousness. I mean you could say well I told you so, if you do that then you will get this. So the Summer Project in that sense is always two-edged, every way you turn it cuts both ways.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Moses: Which is why every, I don't think people understand that about it, people who even feel they know about it, who are interested in it, they see it as something good, but they don't see it as cutting both ways all the time.

Sinsheimer: Well, there was talk about, I think there was a Freedom School Project the next year. Am I right on that?

Moses: Yeah, I think MFDP ran some Freedom Schools, but again they brought down, they had a Summer Project, not on the same scale.

Sinsheimer: Right. What was the feeling, was there feeling about that?

Moses: Well the problem there was the opposition within SNCC to that kind of project, you see that is part of the reason why people were moving out to Alabama because they couldn't deal with the volunteers. And so ... Guyot said we have to go with the volunteers, and I was not able to at that point to try to persuade him otherwise. A lot because of the whole notion of, this basic interaction between the people, energy is in there, grabbing the reigns themselves, carrying the ball themselves. It was more important for what ever course of action was taken for it to be based on the integrity of the people who were doing it rather than for the right course of action to be taken based on my or some one else's saying it is the right thing to do.

Sinsheimer: What did you personally do right after Atlantic City, in those few months?



Moses: Right after Atlantic City, well let me say this. By the spring -- when did Selma, when did the Selma march take place?

Sinsheimer: Spring of '65?

Moses: Spring of 1965.

Sinsheimer: March sounds right.

Moses: Anyway Donna and I had moved into Birmingham, driving into Birmingham the day of the march. So whatever else we did between the Convention ... (inaudible). I thought that we would try some city organizing so we were in Birmingham.

But I am trying to think, I mean I probably, most of the time was spent at meetings.

Sinsheimer: Was that in Atlanta or in Mississippi?

Moses: Well, there was a meeting at Gammon in Atlanta.

Sinsheimer: Where?

Moses: Gammon. I think that during that period, Gammon Theological Seminary. I think that was the meeting ... '64, '65 ... I think that meeting at Gammon, that was the meeting in which I discontinued the use of "Moses." I am not sure, I think it was during that period.

Sinsheimer: You did some rural organizing in Alabama as well?

Moses: No, I never really settled down in Alabama. By the time we got there, Tom came through, Hayden, and invited me to speak at the SDS march against the war. And after that I got involved with this union organizer from \_\_\_\_\_ who wanted to organize some kind of, what do you call it, group to meet outside of the country to speak out against the war, the United States involvement. They eventually had a meeting, where did they call it though? In Europe, in Sweden, I remember that meeting ... it is kind of like war trials. So I did that with him, trying to trying to get a feel for what was possible in this country in terms of organizing against the war.

And then Staughton (Lynd) came to me with the idea of working with him on this summer effort against the war. And he was saying that Johnson was going to go back during the summer and the students were not in school, and there was a lull in activity and so forth. We did the Congress of Unrepresented People, that was in that summer. And then after that I went to Africa, a reunion, that was in the fall of '65. And we toured Africa and came back in the winter. And then a group of us put together this black consciousness paper.

Sinsheimer: Does that exist somewhere? That exist somewhere?

Moses: Yeah, should be in one of the SNCC files, or somewhere.

Sinsheimer: It would have been '66?

Moses: Yeah, spring of '66.

Sinsheimer: Who else was involved with that?

Moses: Oh, Janet Jemat , Don Richards, Doug T. Harris, I think that was it. We put together a conference in New Orleans. And that was before, that conference took place just before the SNCC meeting where Stokley was elected. And then after that, after the conference I went back to Mississippi and was up at Amzie's (Moore) for a while.

And we had planned a month long retreat in Alabama for a small group of us who wanted to talk through some problems and issues, directions.

Sinsheimer: Was Stokley included in that?

Moses: No. Stokley was now, by that time he had had the march through Mississippi and Stokley had announced Black Power and was chairman of SNCC. These were people who had been in SNCC, but who were not in entirely with the move that was being made. So we did that and left after that. It was when I was in Alabama that I got the notice to report for the draft. And it was during that time that my marriage dissolved.

So basically after '64 I didn't do any more direct organizing. There were a lot of meetings with the organizers around all of the problems and whatever that came out of the summer. Meetings in Mississippi, a bunch of SNCC meetings ....

Sinsheimer: Do you think that that kind of ... internal scrutiny is ... always productive?

Moses: Well, SNCC was at a crossroads. Part of, I mean part of what had happened in that period was that the rhetoric and the effort which we had insisted on in trying to work with local people, that they had the right to get in there, to participate, to get involved with the decisions shaping what happened. And trying to construct the meetings so that they could do that at the workshops and so forth. All of that caught up with SNCC. In other words people began to question what happened within the organization. And once that was raised it had to be honored, there was no way of avoiding once consciousness was there. Becasue for example I was made field director in Mississippi, SNCC field director of Mississippi by

Moses (cont.): fiat, I mean it just came out of the blue from Atlanta. So once that was raised then it had to be gone through. I mean what I was saying was that I was appointed, and the appointment was from outside. There weren't these elections.

You had the situation in SNCC where you still had, the organization of SNCC was as a coordinating committee students who were elected from colleges who were members of the coordinating committee and they had really, nominally, you know they were like the board, the highest authority. And they elected the President and the officers. The staff didn't vote in SNCC. We might have voted when Stokely took office, that had changed by then, probably.

For example when John Lewis was running and so forth, I mean we were not allowed to vote. So there were all these kind of contradictions, that had to be gotten out. I mean the people were insisting, I mean you know about the meetings where everyone was asked to write down stuff and not sign their names to it. This was the meeting that took place at Wave-land in Mississippi. And people wanted to try to insure that influential people in the organization didn't just carry everyone. So that had to be gone through. It couldn't, I mean the process was short-circuited because of impatience. (Break)

Anyway that process had to go through, and there were a lot of other things going on at the same time. Because of -- I mean the whole reaction against the volunteers, the question of whether SNCC really was to be an inter-racial and what did that mean, that all came out for the first time in a really concrete way, faced with numbers of people who wanted to be part of it.

And then you had this whole question about the organization being national and having media focus, and developing a national media issue which was tied to the whole problem of fundraising. So that was also something that was on people's minds. Because the question about programming, how big an organization should it be -- Forman wanting, articulating an organization of a mass student movement. Something maybe like where people are members of SNCC, students on a mass basis.



Sinsheimer: He had written some things about that sort of an idea even before the summer.

Moses: It was an old idea that he had had, he had worked it out, before SNCC. But now, you know he saw the chance of it becoming real. And I was articulating an idea of an organization of organizers basically. And so all of those things were going on. (Break) So anyway-- it just took, it took a time to get all that had happened digested. I think that the time was well spent, I think people didn't take enough time.

I mean there were people who were arguing you know that we have to get out there and organize and everything. But another thing, people were really now looking at a life long commitment, that is now were they really commit themselves for the foreseeable future to this kind of work. So they had some basic questions that needed to be addressed.

And certainly if you think about those few years in light of the years that have gone by since then, if we had been able to take another year and had been able to salvage the rudiments of an organization, who would have said that that was too much time.

Of course no one was willing to, people were not logically able to come out and just take that time six months or a year and just sit down and work something out. There was always, I have to get back. And there was no one who would be willing to fund that either, say okay, it is important to do that.

End of Interview.