




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MEMORANDUM

To: Tim West

Fm: Joe Sinsheimer 

Re: Interview With the Reverend R.L.T. Smith, Sr.

Dt: December 21, 1998

Enclosed is an interview I conducted with the Reverend R.L.T. Smith, Sr., a prominent civil rights leader from Jackson, Mississippi. Reverend Smith ran for the U.S. House of Representatives in 1962 in a campaign managed in part by Robert Moses.

In the interview, Smith discussed: 1) his relationship with Amzie Moore 2) Bob Moses' influence on the movement 3) his decision to run for Congress in 1962 4) campaigning in rural Mississippi and 5) the role of moderate newspaper editors in the state.

Interview with Reverend R.L.T. Smith, Sr.
Jackson, Mississippi
February 12, 1985

Joe Sinsheimer: As I was saying I started about a year ago down there at Duke (University). They have a program called the Oral History program, and it is the idea that you can write history using oral interviews as another source of material, as a very good source of material. And I became interested initially in the '64 Summer Project here, and the more I started studying that, the more I realized that was really the culmination of a series of events that had started way back when. Started, I guess you could say even as early as Reconstruction, but more in the late fifties and with your Congressional campaign, and some of the work that people like Bob Moses were doing down in McComb in '61. So I saw '64 as something that was very interesting but what I want to do in writing the history is back up from that.

So many people write about the summer of '64, and what happened in the three or four years previous to that isn't always said or told well. And I guess that is why I Wanted to talk with you. I don't really have a series of questions, I guess we could really just start with what you were doing in the late fifties, and how you met people like Amzie Moore and Bob Moses and people like that. Hopefully we can just go from there. Does that make some sense?

Rev. Smith: Yeah, that makes sense. And your name again please sir?

Sinsheimer: That is Joe Sinsheimer. (Rev. Smith was taping the conversation as well)

Smith: And are you a native of North Carolina?

Sinsheimer: No, I was born in Baltimore but my parents live up in Cleveland now, they live up in Cleveland, Ohio.

Smith: Oh yes.

Sinsheimer: And I went to school at Duke University in North Carolina.

Smith: Good.

Sinsheimer: So I am twenty-two, twenty-two years old.

Smith: Well, I will tell you the truth about whatever you ask me to the best of my knowledge.

Sinsheimer: I appreciate that.

Smith: Glad to cooperate with you. So begin when you are ready. My name is Robert L. T. Smith. Is yours on (tape recorder)?

Sinsheimer: Mine is on, right.

Smith: Very good, very good.

Sinsheimer: Okay. Have you lived in Jackson all your life?

Smith: No I haven't, but I have lived in this county (Hinds), I have lived in this county all my life. And this is Hinds county, Jackson is one of the county seats of Hinds county as well as the capitol of the state of Mississippi.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Smith: I have lived within thirty odd miles of Jackson you might say all my life, yeah. But I have lived here in the city of Jackson more than sixty years.

Sinsheimer: When did you first become involved with the civil rights movement? Were you ever a member of the NAACP?

Smith: Well yes, that would be a pretty fair estimate of the date where I was active and discussed it with other people who were also active and who were willing to try whatever methods, peaceful methods, that we might come up with to bring about some from a very rotten situation.

Incidentally, please and I know maybe this violates everything. But it is on my conscience. We lost a man who lived here in this city, it was just about ten days ago, Mr. Thomas Hederman. Way back yonder he was Mr. Thomas Hederman, Jr. And for a long, for all of his life he was connected, his family was connected with (Jackson) Clarion Ledger, later on it was the Clarion Ledger Daily News. I knew him as a young man, I am the oldest man to be sure, But I knew him as a young man and on up.

And in the midst of the change that we are now about to discuss, he went as far as he could go and still be able to ... well to get along in the community. He was a leader, leading publisher here in, one of the leading publishers here. And I owe it to a good conscience that I didn't write anything to be read at the _____ funeral. But I want to get that off my chest that southerner bred and born, but he was an honourable man. And he was just about as dissatisfied with the way things were then as some of the activists who were putting their lives on the lines so to speak. And he was an honourable gentleman, well you could put it in one way and say "he fought a good fight."

Sinsheimer: Okay.

Smith: Yeah, he is worthy of the honor of all people. His name is Mr. Thomas Hederman, former editor ...

Sinsheimer: Do you know how to spell that? Do you know how to spell that last name?

Smith: Oh, H-E-D-E-R-M-A-N.

Sinsheimer: Okay.

Smith: These papers right here (pointing at Jackson Clarion Ledger), for a long time he was the editor of one of them. They combined, they were two separate papers for many years but they combined under his leadership, he was one of the leaders in the Hederman family who acquired the Jackson Daily News and then both papers were published as a unit. The Clarion Ledger-Jackson Daily News, if you are here Sunday you will see it yourself.

Sinsheimer: Right. Right.

Smith: But thank you for that.

Sinsheimer: Sure.

Smith: I just wanted, well I owe it to good conscience because the man, he did all he could. Well, there wasn't anything else he could do without canceling out the good that he might do. That is kind of confusing, but ... he wasn't by himself, he had a whole lot of them, but so many people were throwing so many bricks at him that he didn't lift a finger to help bring about the change, but on the other hand a few of us who happened to have known-- I happened to know, its a man he is deathly sick, ill now and he is hardly in shape for you to interview, Mr. Earl W. Banks, if he could talk he would tell you what I am saying. He is not afraid to tell the truth about it. He knows about it. And there were a few more, but not a lot of us who knew that. Well I feel like that whether they are white or black or whatever they were, we look to say that this one was a martyr to the cause, well it is good. But there were others who were almost martyrs to the cause, but they couldn't, not because of cowardice no, we dealt with him. And we didn't consider ourselves no cowards. But we tried to use reasonable judgement. Don't destroy a man, don't _____ destroy a man, and the man is trying to help you.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Smith: Yeah because there is so much for all of us to do and there is room for everybody. And he found it, room where he could help, and he was helpful. Thank so much for ... I hope you will mention that in whatever. His name is Thomas Hederman, Jr.

Sinsheimer: I certainly will. Okay.

Smith: Of course after his father died he didn't use the word junior.

Sinsheimer: Okay. I appreciate that.

Smith: And I appreciate you taking note of that.

Sinsheimer: Okay. Sure will.

Smith: You are the first person that I have mentioned that to since he passed. And I cherish that very much because nobody likes a traitor, nobody likes a double dealer or anything like that.

Sinshimer: Right.

Smith: When an individual, all of us are not in a position to come out openly and cry out loud. We are not, we are not in position to do that. And incidently, well you have not got around to the question but since we are on that, incidently he wasn't the only one, I just happened to mention him because he just passed here a little better than a week ago. That is why I mention him. There were others, other influential whites, of course not only in this state, well ... I guess I knew them in this state, because there were a couple of other states that were helpful of other states, but maybe you would expect them. But everybody would be somewhat surprised, of the Hodding Carters and John Emmerichs, they came out openly with theirs. But they were editors also of newspapers here in this state.

But there were many other whites and blacks who were, they were so placed in the community-- in the county or in this state or district wherever they were, that they would have to kindaof be quiet and be cool and do what they could without a lot of publicity, we had a lot of them. We had a lot of them, I won't try to name all ...

Sinsheimer: So people felt that, so people felt that they could do more good by just doing some quiet things?

Smith: Well, I won't refer ... I refer now to a black preacher. He was an older man, not quite old enough for my father either, but he was considered a district leader in certain areas of the state. A group of conventions and associations and things like that that he was the head of, or had great influence in them. And I have been to some of the churches where he pastored, and some of the associations that he was, he manuevered himself in such a way, he invited me to come. He knew what I was going to say. But he would very conviently be out somewhere while I was talking, and then when he would talk he would do it in a way that looked like, that through all the blame off him (laughter). He supported us financially. He spoke out financially. Well, that was one of the reasons why we were able to meet certain expenses. He wasn't the only one that did that either. He wasn't the only one that did that.

Smith (cont.): But somewhere in the chronicles of this period, those people even if I can't mention them by name, we wouldn't want posterity to feel like that in a great big state-- and this is one of the smallest states to be sure-- but in great big state all you had was a bunch of cut throats. We had cut throats all right, but we had a lot of decent folk. A lot of decent ... we had bullies, but we had a lot of nonviolent people white and black with deep commitment. Now go ahead I am sorry.

Sinsheimer: Okay (laughter).

Smith: I just want to get that off my conscience.

Sinsheimer: Well, I'm pleased to I guess what I first asked you was do you remember the first, your first involvments, do you remember when they took place? Was your father interested?

Smith: My father? No, he wasn't interested. Incidentally, my father was born just a short period after chattle slavery was supposed to have ended. And as strange as it may seem to you know ... and I have to just talk off the top of my head, I think I am telling it like it is. Slavery hasn't ended yet. We don't have chattle slavery as such and yet a year before last, no last year, because I had the man come and run a weedcutter in my pasture -- and that is as far back as I can trace my ancestors, that general area on both sides, on all sides. There is three sides to it, it has three sides I won't go into that. But that is as far back as I can trace it back.

But anyhow this fellow was working a man, and he cut the bushes and I told him to leave some blackberries. I explained to him, I said now you leave them so that you can get to them but that will be your blackberry patch, nobody else, if you see anybody in there you tell them to get out of there, because that is yours. Okay, when it came time to pick blackberries the man had moved, he had moved. Oh I don't know how many years he had been there, his children were grown, and his children had found a house, field house on the farm out there. The man never owned a home in his life. His Daddy before him never owned a home. In fact they were, they are my distant relatives.

But here is what I am trying to say. This man got out of Parchman (prison), way back so long back yonder, whether he was railroaded there I am not too sure. He was in another county, you know, when they finally sentanced him to Parchman. And it seems like it was a raw deal. And this man got him out on bond, got him out on bond. And of course that is the way the system worked from well from 1890, well before 1890. It was refined in the constitution of

(Smith) p.6

Smith (cont.): 1890, under this justice of the peace system and the constable, deputy sheriff, sheriff naturally who had deputies. And all of the black population was from the deputy sheriff on down. The deputy sheriff, the constable, and the justice of the peace. Blacks didn't have ... well blacks would have to go to county court or circuit court in the case of murder or something like that. But the system that kept us in slavery was that justice of the peace system, put you under bond, and couldn't dispute a white man's word, and just one thing right on after another. Put a big fine on you, you know you didn't have nothing, and then put you, sentence you to a great big sentence beyond the stretch of the imagination for the crime that you had committed. Somebody comes in and gets you out on bond. Okay, you work there maybe five or six years, or maybe ten years, and decide that you aren't going to work here all of your life, just because a man got you out on bond. And you stop to think that you hadn't done nothing back yonder, maybe stole a pig or a bushel of corn or something or other, got caught in a crap game, anything. And naturally you would run off. All right here are these great big notices in what the few papers we had, and notices tacked up in the area where this man had relatives or would be likely to return. "Escaped convict wanted. Reward one hundred dollars." A \$100 reward was a great big one then.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Smith: So that was the system. Now we come back to the man who moved off from the, well he had been there, I don't know how many years he had been there. He had been a long, long time. Well, he spent the better part of his life as a slave, didn't call him a slave, no he had a shantie of his own over there, had a wife and three or four children. But that was a general pattern, that was not the exception, but that was the general pattern. A general pattern.

Sinsheimer: Can you tell me when, did you know Amzie Moore?

Smith: Amzie? Yeah.

Sinsheimer: Can you tell me some things about Amzie.

Smith: Well Amzie Moore impressed me as a man with a deep sense of honor and commitment. And of course he had some business judgement, he had reasonable business judgement. If things, all things had been equal-- he was in the edge of the Delta, that is where I met him in that general area there. All things being equal he would have been one of the big plantation owners around there, because he had good common sense, business sense, good business sense. I believe he had a

- Smith (cont.): little filling station, I am not to sure about that.
But he was tied into some type of small business there at the time that I knew him. And where he was was kind of a rallying point for people in that general area. Mrs. ... that was where I first met her. What's the lady's name? She sang that song at the national convention.
- Sinsheimer: Mrs. Hamer?
- Smith: Mrs. Hamer, that is where I met her. I would have to refresh my memory to see what town it was in though or near.
- Sinsheimer: Cleveland, I think. Amzie lived in Cleveland (Mississippi).
- Smith: Well, it must have been Cleveland then. It must have, I wouldn't say absolutely sure, be absolutely sure of that, but I just don't know which one of the towns it was. But the kind of relationship we had that you were the suffering group in this area, I was with the suffering group with another area, and we'll get together and discuss our problems and see how we can help one another, see what we can get the federal government to do. At that time there was hardly anything that you could look for out of the state government. And you could stop saying that the governors themselves were all that bad-- I am not saying that they were good.
You really would have to have been here and be part of it, be around it, so see what a deep hold that this situation had on the state of Mississippi. It is all but unbelievable. It is all but unbelievable how brutal, how brutal it was. Yet, we survived, we survived. Some of the things you look back and you, and it makes you, you look back and wonder. You look back and wonder. Well, I don't want to get this period mixed up with that period though. Because that is the period that you are interested in.
Well if I would try to describe the social and political, well religious, well all of it, situation between white and black in that period. I don't know. I don't know. It was, well it was as close to slavery as slavery could get. Put it like that, it was as close to slavery, I mean chattel slavery. We had the actual slavery, it comes on down now. And it has affected us, well I didn't want to try and mix it up with what is going on now. Well, if you ask me specific questions about that period, instead of generalizing because I am tempted to tie it in with today's. But you would have to understand that period back there as well as you could before you could really make a comparison.
- Sinsheimer: Right. Right. Do you remember first meeting Bob Moses?
- Smith: Oh yes. Incidentally Bob Moses is a deep thinker, as nice a fellow as I would want to meet. Quiet, always handled himself with dignity. He had a certain degree of self-pride,

Smith (cont.); a certain degree of independence. I was around him a lot, round him a whole lot. And I don't remember a single time that he ever varied from attitude of independence. He never varied from that. It seems that he had assigned to himself the task of helping wherever he could. And that he would not be a burden on any of the people that he would come into contact with. Another words he would never let you buy a him a dinner (laughter). No, no. When you would see him eat he would buy something, he would never buy the expensive foods, he never wore the expensive clothes. He was always clean and always well dressed for the occasion. But he was never a flashy dude, dressed up and I am doing fine, no, that wasn't it.

But he was a studious kind of fellah, he was able to rationalize, able to make split decisions-- I mean decisions on a split second so to speak. He was a man of that caliber. And we went through some pretty rough places. We had the Klan mobs trailing us and somehow or another ... I don't think that Bob had a gun, I never asked him. I never asked him. In fact he never asked me, but I am almost sure he knew what the score was. Somehow or another it looked like the mobs didn't frighten him, others would get excited and He didn't express it as such, but his action was, "that we have a job to do, and we can get as far on it as we can while we are here. And somebody else if they shoot us down" He didn't say that, but that was his attitude, that was his attitude. Of course, that happened to have been mine at that time.

And we were in so many dangerous situations that I reckon if we had better judgement, if I had had better judgement I wouldn't have thought about trying it, wouldn't have thought about trying it. But that is just the way it was.

Sinsheimer: How did the idea come up for you to run for Congress?

Smith: What?

Sinsheimer: How did the idea come up that you should run for Congress.

Smith: Well, now it wasn't all together my idea. I had had the idea. I worked, started working at the post office when I was twenty or twenty-one. No I was twenty-one after I started because it was over in the Spring. But they called me when I was twenty. And then I was working-- I won't go through all of that but I couldn't leave. I wouldn't leave, glad I didn't leave until the crisis had passed -- it involved another family. And it was a white family incidentally. They had treated me as nice, I wouldn't want nobody to treat me any nicer than they treated me. And they had a

Smith (cont.): crisis in the family. It was a terminal thing and I couldn't walk off from them, you know.

But anyway at the post office, I don't know what year this was, I don't know what year this was, but it must have been long about the time that-- in fact Hoover was President. The Congressman from this district was a man named Dan McGehee and he came from down in, I don't know whether it was Walthall county, wherever Meadville is (Franklin county), Wilkinson? Anyway he was in this congressional district.

Sinsheimer: Do you know how to spell that name?

Smith: Pardon.

Sinsheimer: Do you know how to spell his name.

Smith: McGehee. M-C-G-E-H-E-E. He was congressman for several years. And he would come down to the post office pretty regular. Yeah, that was during Hoover's term of office, we had a postmaster named E.C. Cloon, C-L-O-O-N. And Mr. Cloon he had told us, in fact the post office was resegregated, it never had been segregated to my understanding. It never had been segregated from the beginning. But Mr. E.C. Cloon was appointed postmaster, the post office itself was segregated. The swing room, that is where you come in and rest, or eat your lunch, or whatever it is, waiting to go back on the clock you go to the swing room. So that was segregated, whites on one end, and "colored" was the way they had the other one.

And I don't know, most of the carriers at that time were black, they called them colored. So this Congressman McGehee would come by pretty regular. And on two or three occasions he came by, we blacks had not gone out on our routes, we were there. And he would come in there and come down through the workroom there shaking hands with all workers, all the white folk who were working, just laborers in there. He was shaking hands with them. And we had three or four white carriers, he went around shaking hands with them. And he didn't shake hands with a single colored carrier or other worker in there. And I wondered about that until when he came back through there several months later, or the next year whenever it was, and he did the same thing. And I said, "Boy if I could ever run for the Congress, yeah (laughter). And could win it, that I would certainly do something about this kind of situation." He is here representing the federal government and to rationalize it on out further I said, "Well, if we could just vote and to vote for a decent white candidate. Who would at least respect us all as federal workers." So I thought about that back then.

But anyhow it was years later, that must have been in '31 or '32 somewhere along in there, because Hoover came into office long about that time. But this was in '59 or '60, '61, whenever it was. I had retired from the post office. And I said there ain't nothing to hold me back now, and, of course,

Smith (cont.) as long as they would let me get hold of some little material things, well you know, I could make it. And didn't have to go to nobody to furnish me or nothing like that. And I said well if I don't try, who would try?

So in taking it in those terms, and then there was a group, that son-- that was my son a while ago-- and a man who died a few years ago named Joseph Broadwater, Albert Powell died around Christmas, all these were veterans of that war at that time. And Cornelius Turner, another veteran and oh what is his name, this is a white lawyer, what is his name? He left here ... well I jussy can't call the name. But anyhow he was a lawyer, he left here, he finished Harvard Law School and he was on campus around Harvard, in and out there for several years after we had this campaign down here. Well, they got together and I have left out somebody I can't think who it is. Well, its funny I can't even call the man's name. Can't call his name. He married a girl here in Jackson and her Daddy worked in the post office with me. Waddel was the Daddy's, Mr. Waddel was her Daddy's, this man's wife's father. Well, it may come to me.

But anyway they had been discussing it, and discussing it, and discussing it. And they got together to look for a candidate. And the first one they approached-- they told me that I was the first one they approached. I told them, "Well, yeah. I have been thinking of that." I didn't want to announce without some sponsors or something like that. So that is the way that we got kicked off. We got kicked off there. Of course I did have-- I got some other encouragment, got other encouragements from people out of the state, organizations out of this state.

Sinsheimer: Now how did Moses get hooked up with that then?

Smith: I have often, I wouldn't ask him, I wouldn't embarass him. All I know is that it seems to me that Moses had been working with Amzie and them up there, it seems to me now. And we had a meeting at Kruger ... , we had a meeting up there somewhere.

Sinshiemer: Mrs. Kruger?

Smith: They had that resettlement project out there at Mileston, not to far from Kruger. And some of those people had awakened politically and we thought economically, being around that settlement there. But Moses just happened up (laughter). He just happened up. And he just stayed right here with us. Right with us. We had a -- the manger of that campaign was Dr. E.D. Britton, he is still living, Dr. E. D. Britton.

Sinsheimer: Britton?

Smith: B-R-I-T-T-O-N.

Sinsheimer: And he was the campaign manager?

Smith: He was the campaign manager. But in fact Mr. V.R. Collier, Mr. Collier was the actual campaign manager. And then when Mr. Bob Moses came in-- Mr. Collier had the insurance agency there, and later he was manager of the Savings and Loan Association-- so he couldn't go out like Moses. So in fact he wound up that Mr. Moses put in more time than any of the others. He didn't say anything about any title, and I didn't say anything about any title, but he was the most active of all, as far as, because he wasn't pinned down. Both of those men had jobs here that they had to be there everyday to take care of them. Bob was free.

And he didn't slow down, he didn't slacken back on in, whenever you wanted to go, Bob was ready. Wherever you wanted to go Bob was ready. So it ... Bob was educated and he had been to some of the better schools and whenever he had a chance to whites, educated or miseducated blacks, he wasn't somebody they were going to look down and talk down to. No, that helped a lot. That helped a lot.

Sinsheimer: So when you were running, were you campaigning regularly?

Smith: Oh yeah. Every day.

Sinsheimer: Every day.

Smith: Every day! And it is silly, when I look back at it now I say well I just wonder made me do that. But I campaigned all around the area right where I was reared, that was, it is a road down there now, Paul Gallows, Paul Gallow's road. And that is what some little man had some cheese back up in that way. He kept some ropes around there to hang folk. I was born and reared about three miles from there. And the folk were so frightened, nobody ever told us, the children around then in that neighborhood, they never told us what Paul's Gallows meant. They didn't tell us, they were afraid to tell us. Afraid to whisper it.

A grown man before I found out that is where right after slavery they would not only lynch blacks there, but they would lynch right thinking whites there. I found out later that they lynched whites there, it wasn't many but it might have been longer.

But I don't know how many different blacks that they have lynched there. If you could ever get in the neighborhood of Utica, get them in the hands of the lynch crowd. But I hate to mention that lynch crowd. Well, let me put it this way. Not put it this way, but let me tell it like it is. My granddaddy never learned to read and write. And he was born right there in the little old town of Utica, it is a little bity town. I was there yesterday, no yesterday was ...

Sinsheimer: No which county is that in?

Smith: Utica, I was there Sunday. That is my home, I told you that is where is where. Well this granddaddy was born right there in the little town of Utica. And he changed his name

Smith (cont.): later on. I don't blame him. I never called the name under which he was born. And the house which he was raised-- he was raised with his sisters. And during the Civil War, he didn't participate in the Civil War. I don't know whetehr his Daddy, how many brothers or what not, got killed in the Confederate Army. I don't know about that.

But he was thirty years old when the Emancipation Proclamation took effect. And when he left he changed his name to Smith. He never called that name. Well he did call that name because he had some nephews, they were black. And he called Will, Will was the old slave master's name, that was the only time he would ever call the name when he would acquire about Will. Will lived around in the area where we lived. And he was about the age of my Daddy and that is the only time that he would ever call that name.

I don't know, but his sifers would never teach him to read and write. His own sisters, born and reared right there in the house with him, they were white. The men folk, many of whom were gone, killed in the Confederate Army or something like that, something happened to them.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Smith: Now this grandfather as close as, he didn't call it Paul Gallows road because the men that he talked about they would lynch blacks anywhere. And there were two of them that were his cousins. I reckon since I said that maybe I won't call the other names then. But he called three of them. And one of that three there, one of them was the forebearer of some might prominent folk here in this city. Mighty prominent folk. But he called them, all three of them. Said, you know, they hung so and so on this street. (Break)

In fact I carried from time to time some of my own sons and some of my grandsons down there. But the last one of those trees were gone. Back at the time he -- we didn't live but sixteen miles from that, but we would go and come in a hack, that was a kind of buggy thing. And sixteen miles is a long way, you know, when you are riding a horse. And he didn't make the horse trot, he just let it walk (laughter).

Sinsheimer: Right.

Smith: What they called the good roads, that is when you widen them out and gravel the road. Well, we didn't have any good roads at that time, no graveled roads. So old Indian trails, or old settler trails, with the trees lapping over. Had a lot of those, and there was alot of those big old trees from his house up in Learned to our house down

Smith (cont.): in Utica. And every great big old tree, he could tell you who He said old John Ben Williams, old Ben Richard, old Ben _____, now two of them were his cousins. Then they hung so and so on this tree. That was ... my grandfather was Commodore Smith, that was his name. The thing was badly mixed up then, and is badly mixed up now. I mean on that line.

This old man, my granddaddy, he lived to get a 104 years old (laughter).

Sinsheimer: Yeah. Well, tell me what you, do you remember what you did after the campaign?

Smith: Well the campaign really was part of the voting rights struggle, that was what the campaign was all about. These men who I told you about decided that we needed to run a candidate. And most thoughtful people knew that the kind of voting rights laws that we had here, and not only in Mississippi, but in most of these Southern states, there was no way in the world for blacks to ever have any kind of political strength. They would just be tolerated in some situations, but that would be rare. So we figured if we could get the Voting Rights Bill, we ought to be able to help correct some of these things ourselves. And that is what, that is what the campaign was all about. I wasn't foolish enough to believe that I could win, could win the seat, no.

But when I told you awhile ago I went around canvassing in these areas. And thank God that-- I didn't canvass in an area on neither white or black, I didn't canvass on a racial basis at all. But I canvassed on an economic basis, an economic basis and on the political basis except that, assuming that we have accepted the Constitution of the United States as our basic law and we were willing to live under it and abide by it. So I just, well I could greet blacks in churches of course, rarely would I just go to an individual's house unless I had a special occasion to go there... .

Well, in the case of the whites, I went to their house. I went to their house. And I was surprised, you know, how I was received in many of the places. I was surprised how I was received. And maybe the greatest surprise was, I don't know what the greatest surprise. I know-- I went back to one house the second time. And this house was ten miles back this way from where I was born and reared. One man and his wife, who were in their seventies I believe then. I believe they were in their seventies. And of course they hadn't had social security then. I believe we had social security then, I know we did. But then there were so many other things that we did not have that would benefit white as well as black. And in fact each time they asked me to come in and sit down. And well, I dealt strictly on the campaign, on the issues

Smith (cont.): would come before, should come before the Congress. And the second time that I went there the man told me that he had talked to, he told me the folk that he had talked with, and he said now my wife and I -- he called her name-- we are going to vote for you. And they say that they are going to vote for you."Well I thank you very much for that. I will never make you ashamed," or something to that effect. Well I went in several areas, but in Copiah county-- this is still in Hinds county where I am talking about that-- in Copiah county, I was surprised when I went there and (canvassed) that whole community, east of Crystal Springs going back towards Georgetown, and I talked with different ones, and there was a man that told me that they wanted to talk with me And I went there and they promised to vote for me and I -- well I won't call his name, his son is still connected there-- but I know those folks voted for me. But I didn't get a vote, a white vote in Copiah county. I know they voted for me. And I know that, well I couldn't tell who was who there, but I didn't get but a handful, didn't count but 1400 votes in the whole district. In the whole district.

And what I am trying to say, I don't know how many of those votes, if they had threw out 1400 (votes) it wouldn't made no difference no way as far as any of the others were concerned. But it is a good thing that they stole those votes, (because) that showed how rotten the system was. In testifying before the House Judiciary Committee, you got some shrewd lawyers in there, representatives from various districts, and some of them are not lawyers, very shrewd people. And I could pretty well tell from their line of questioning, after it was all over, I could see where maybe they found weak spots. And that was one of the weakest of spots. But I mean I think I was about fifty-nine, sixty (years old) at my next birthday at that time. And didn't have much education, but I could read and write, and I had been working for the post office department there about thirty-three or thirty-four years, and, you know, even as rough as the thing was I left there with a good record and a good And here is a man that seems to know what is going on and seems to have some of the answers here, and didn't get but 1400 votes in the whole district? I will tell you. It was that kind of thing that didn't do no harm to the Voting Rights Bill. So I devoted all my time there, I had my little business operation to take care of, but my sons were grown then. At least one of them that understood business (laughter). That one there (referring to the son who had stopped by the office earlier) he hardly gets a chance to eat. But anyway that is what I have been trying to do. After we got that passed ...

Sinsheimer: When did you go up to Washington do you remember? You went up to Washington to testify?

Smith: Yeah, that was during the campaign.

Sinsheimer: During the campaign?

Smith: The Attorney General well, you know, he was encouraging it. The Attorney General through his influence, that is the President's influence, they would get me, I don't know how many times I went. But I testified, I don't know how many times I testified. And instead of, you don't grow through a whole lot, they ask you certain questions to prove certain points. And when they get that-- you don't realize what it is but after it is all over you reflect back on it, you can see that was to sort of bridge a gap somewhere there. They have got testimony from somebody that made a statement that wasn't true.

Like years ago you had, I say years ago, maybe the year you were born or right before there, back in there you had people who would speak openly and say, "Our niggers are satisfied. Niggers are satisfied. And these troublemakers just come right here and stir them up. These niggers don't want nothing else. Give him that, he wouldn't know what to do with it. That ain't what he want. He wants him a bottle of homebrew." (laughter) You know, well a lot of folk they believe that. They believe that. And it is a very few, very few ...
_____, it is a pity but it is relevant; of these white people that had wealth, who had actual wealth, and go hire them a chauffeur, a house boy, or somebody like that. They would examine him very closely to see what his philosophy of life-- they may hire him and keep him there two or three weeks, a month, to see how he reacts and what, what does he manifest interest in. Well, now if he was a fellow that could discuss today what you were reading in the newspaper, they didn't need him.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Smith: Because they figured that would be trouble down the road. But if he was a fellow that was always late, and you got to wake him up, and then when he go carry you wherever you want, you leave him in the car and you come back and he is asleep. That is what he wants. Yes sir, that is what he wants. Got to watch and keep him from getting drunk driving-- that is exactly what he wants. And somebody who comes from Smithsonian or Harvard or anywhere, and try to talk something like this with him, he (says), "Well I don't have anything to do with that. I am doing all right." That is what they want him to say. Well, he just said it. And the strange white folk come after you and question you, you don't what they are trying to do, they are trying to trick you. You just tell them that you are doing all right. You don't want nobody beating me. As strange as it may seem, that is it. What are you majoring in?

Sinsheimer: History.

Smith: Well, if everybody you see wants to advice a young man, I have got so many grandsons and nephews-- and they are in school, some of them coming out of school, the universities now, two of them this year. We start off from the premise and I mean this sincerely, I don't think that the color of a man's skin has anything to do with his capabilities as a man. I got them on both sides, as well as on the _____ (Indian) side, and I don't see no difference in none of them if you educate them-- I am not talking about mis-educated now-- but if you educate them, I don't care what color he is, if he has the native ability, and that is not based on the color of his skin. If he has that he will make it.

But we are suffering right now from miseducation, and that includes me. Some of the teachers that I had coming up, I have had all that many, they couldn't spell Mississippi straight. Some of the teachers I had wouldn't know how to begin a sentence. Wouldn't know how they end a sentence. Some of those who-- I hope they are all out of the classroom now, I hope they are. But many of them who have been in the classroom should still be in school. They should still be in school. It is so dangerous getting off on, away from that period that anything now, a whole lot of conjecture would have to enter into it. If there is too much conjecture, you are subject to too much error.

But I see hanging over from the period that I was a child coming on up, it is hanging over, is that part of slavery that has to do with ... well We had a saying way back yonder when I was a boy, just trying to get in high school. The ambition of the average black back there at that time was just to be either a school teacher or head nigger in charge somewhere. Be it on timber cutting or around the saw mill, around the gin, just make him head nigger in charge, and he would be worse on other blacks than the whites would be. I hate to tell you that I found that to be true. And I hope that it has diminished some. I hope it has diminished some.

Sinsheimer: Let me ask you this, were you involved in Aaron Henry's, when Aaron Henry ran for Governor? Were you involved in that campaign?

Smith: (Inaudible)

Sinsheimer: No, when Aaron Henry ran in '63, Aaron Henry and Ed King?

Smith: I was cognizant of it, I was cognizant of it, I didn't do anything to help it.

Sinsheimer: What about in the summer of '64 when all the white students came down?

Smith: That was big leap forward. That was the big leap forward.

Sinsheimer: Why?

Smith: In dealing with people if you don't win a man's heart you have lost him. If you don't win his heart. And if you can arouse interest in people, interest in them to examine the thing--and see what it is like, see what does this mean for mankind. What does this mean? If you can arouse people to do that-- fact of it is if we hadn't had that we wouldn't have had no civil rights bill. I will put it that way.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Smith: We wouldn't have had no civil rights bill. And incidently (laughter), you know, there ain't nothing but tell it like it like it is-- had we not, I say we, all of us in America centered particularly on the vietims here and in other areas, had we not got a vast majority of white young people interested this civil rights situation we wouldn't have had the civil rights bill, it wouldn't have passed. It is just that simple. It wouldn't have passed.

And it frets me now when somebody comes along with some kind of polarized some kind of way, it ain't good for nobody when we polarize things. It ain't good for nobody. No. What is good for the one is good for the other, and what ever is good for America it helps everybody in America. Why pick out a certain crowd, we are all Americans. It help everybody in America.

Sinsheimer: Sure.

Smith: I say now I have high regard for Duke University, I have regard-- and the minute you think about it-- I have high regard for the University of Mississippi. We had some rough up there, but we had some fine people at the University of Mississippi. I was talking about back there, now we still have them out there.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Smith: We had some rough journalism here in Mississippi, but when I think about Hodding Carter III, well he was an old man, and Mr. Hodding Carter Jr., and Mr. John Oliver Emmerich, and Francis Harmon and others, way back yonder. Editors that, my God, they risked their own lives. Certainly risked their fortune. What about those men? And we have forgotten that we have them on the scene now. So we have a big job on our hands now that we don't polarize ourselves. Nobody knows how to handle that but me and my crowd. Your crowd is part of the whole thing. All these other folk out here they have their problems, the same problems. They have, their obligations are the same obligations. They need to take care of their families, they want to educate their children. They

Smith (cont.): want to support their organizations. And they want to live decently. On the other side of the tracks over there, don't worry about it, don't worry about that, we have rezoned this over here, but on the other side of the track, ah, there ain't nothing to that.

American citizens. Just as many of them came out from there to answer the draft call as they did on the hill over here. Most of them on the hill got back. Nobody knows better than me because I buried a lot of them. Those who lived across the tracks there, a lot of them, well, they brought their bodies back. It vexed me so much, I pastored a church there long before you were born, I still have-- it is in the area of my hometown there. And this old grandfather I told you awhile ago, it was about three miles from his home there. And there is not no big crowd there. And I believe during this last war I buried three, three or four young men. And one I went to the graduation, he was just graduating from high school. Right out of high school, right on in to the army. And less than a year he came back home-- they said that of him, they told us don't open the body. And there were about six pall bearers, all white, and with all them decorations on them. And nobody ever thought about that that would be a It didn't look right to me and it didn't look right to anybody else in the church. Yeah, sure bring some whites, but don't bring all white. And don't bring all black. I don't know maybe we always have that. Maybe we will. It is sickening, it is sickening.

But now part of the--you didn't ask this-- but on clarity when you mentioned about those white kids coming from all over down here. I actually spent more time campaigning, I started in the fall of '61 I believe it was. Yeah. Started in the fall of '61. And the WLBT television refused to sell me time. And we had to sue them, Church of Christ sued them. And they were threatening to sue them right then, later on they did bring the suit on. And they brought it on, of course, Dr. (Aaron) Henry, refused him, so they joined him in the suit along with the United Church of Christ.

So I was invited to come up to Harvard, to speak to the Mississippi club. And this young lawyer, what was that boy's name? He _____ from Jackson. He finished in there, and John Oliver had come back for a refresher course, he is the editor of the Greenwood Commonwealth now. His daddy was editor of the McComb Enterprise, I forget the name of this But anyway John Oliver .. (Emmerich) was out there, he was president of the club at that time. And it was about ten or twelve of them in that Mississippi club. Okay, and after that I had to go out to clubs round there, other clubs round there, and to other universities there.

Smith: And the day school, I believe they call that a day school out in the country. Any where you go out from that Boston metropolitan area, but you finally get out in the country. Nothing fine, you beyond a doubt, you have already been to them-- the dining hall was just a place almost like a barracks hall. And they had an aluminum bowl, aluminum cups, and spoons And I was told that one of these schools, that most of the children were the children of millionaires. They sent them out there, you may know more about that than I know. But anyway they invited me to-- I don't know how many of them-- I would go out and talk, and just a few minutes. But what I found out later, at some other time somebody else would come in, if not the teacher of that class, somebody else would come in and elaborate on, they would speak on the political situation here. And then they could stress the fact that this man, you know, came from down there. And what he said was just the tip of the iceberg, or something to that effect.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Smith: But now in arousing all-- that is where most of the money that I got for the campaign came from, back that way. Most of it they gave me, folk back here they did a little something, they didn't have nothing to do nothing with. And those that had it (laughter) You know this sounds like a joke but some of the biggest Negroes, even though, looking around for a dollar or five dollars. If one gave you ten dollars he thought he was really giving you something. And they would look it all around and double it, and hand it to you right quick. Nobody in the room there, but you in here. It is just about as disgusting, you want to tell him to keep it, but you couldn't afford to tell him that.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Smith: No. It wasn't that that was all, fact in every case. I mentioned the preacher awhile ago. He was the exception. A few exceptions. But these folk with the big jobs, big jobs. They were afraid to see you, afraid to see the power structure even talking to you. That is the whole truth. Didn't want to be caught talking to me and others who were trying to help bring about change, called us troublemakers. Troublemakers, ought to go on up north. "Go North? I was born and reared here and I am going to die here. Unless I accidentally die somewhere else. You ain'tt going to run me nowhere." And I knew I meant that too. I meant that.

So we have come a long way. And men like Mr. Medgar Evers, native of this state, level headed, did all he could. Wasn't trying to rob nobody of anything. Dr. Martin Luther King, so many others who were black, but there were so many others who were white. So I love them all, I honor them all. I honor them all. Yes sir. I don't know, but we have come a long way. I hope, well I hope you have great success in life, great success in life. You take so many times-- I am a

Smith (cont.) preacher, I am a Baptist preacher. I have been a preacher a long, long time. And I wouldn't hazard a guess how many times I have spoken to an audience from folk that were out of this pastor, and made reference to what they gave me as history was propaganda. So I can tell you that. That is the truth. What they gave me as history was simply propaganda. It was a long time before I knew that Jeff Davis and Robert E. Lee were not on the same level as Abraham Lincoln and U.S. Grant. I know as a military man and trainee professional, and as a southern gentleman you would have to recognize General Robert E. Lee. He had certain talents and certain dignities of man, and had expressed certain ideas that, well you could interpret it that he really wanted to do the right thing finally. I don't know whether or not, as it is we accept him as he was. So the kind of history, the kind of propaganda we read, and the kind of holidays we enjoy-- we didn't enjoy many of the federal holidays, but out in the country there naturally if the mail rider didn't run you didn't know why. Nobody got no news. No blacks out there got newspapers. My grandmother did get a newspaper, the Atlanta Constitution, I remember that. I never have been able to-- in fact I didn't understand it-- she could read a newspaper, she couldn't read long hand, she couldn't write long hand. Never have been able to understand it. But we have come a long way. America is a great experience in justice for man. We are still in trouble now (laughter). I am getting way off now, you may be ... I am not going to ask you what you are.

End of Interview.