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MEMORANDUM

To: Tim West

Fm: Joe Sinsheimer *JAS*

Re: Interview with Frank Smith

Dt: December 10, 1998

Enclosed is an interview I conducted with Frank Smith, a former member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Greenwood, Mississippi. Smith also is the author of Congressman from Mississippi.

In the interview, Smith discusses: 1) negotiations between the Kennedy administration and Greenwood, Mississippi during the 1963 civil rights demonstrations in the town 2) Hardy Lott's role in those negotiations 3) Hardy Lott's role in the Greenwood Citizens Council 4) Thatchall Walt's decision to leave Greenwood after threats from the Ku Klux Klan. 5) and the role of cotton production/warehousing in the city's economy.

Interview with Frank Smith
Jackson, Mississippi
June 28, 1985

Frank Smith:

As I said I hadn't been in direct touch with Greenwood and hadn't been contacted much. I was in Knoxville with the TVA. I had been very bitterly attacked by all sorts of folks at home because I opposed Governor Barnett and various things, what was going on in '62 with the Meredith thing and that was the last involvment I directly had in Mississippi with this civil rights thing-- except all sorts of people were talking to me indirectly, mostly people who were in a certain sense that I was-- exiled more or less either from home or in a sense if they were still in Mississippi they had nobody else to talk to situation.

Sinsheimer:

Right.

Smith:

But as this thing built up in Greenwood in '64 (1963), now I have got to say that I have forgotten times, but the people in Greenwood knew that I had access to-- I don't know what ideas they had-- but had access to people in the Kennedy administration. And I got a number of telephone calls from people who I think-- I don't know if Charlie Sampson talked to me or not. He had been, well in a sense everybody in Greenwood had been, all the prominent people in Greenwood had been my supporters in '62 (in his Congressional race against Jamie Whitten after a redistricting decision had put them in the same district) because of the, sort of, you know, local boy situation. You are familiar with the fact that, you have read my book?

Sinsheimer:

Right, I have read it.

Smith:

You know, I don't have to digress to get into that. But I can't remember whether Charlie called me or not. But I know a number of people, I remember one in particular, Gary Barret, he owned a drugstore there, he was one of my friends and supporters-- that it was obvious that he had been, my conclusion was that Charlie or somebody had suggested he call me-- and he was typical, that is the name I can remember-- there were three or four of them that called that I just can't place anybody, the others that made them.

And they wanted to know what could be done to get the COFO crowd, what the federal people could do to get the COFO crowd out of Greenwood, to release them. And I told him-- I agreed with him and others that it looked like it could be a very violent situation and would be bad for the town and bad for everybody. And somebody needed to talk to the federal authorities about what the local leadership could do, you know white, when I say leadership I mean the white establish-

Frank Smith (2)

Smith (cont.); ment or whatever you want to, however you refer to that, could od about it. And something would have to be done, and probably have to make some accomodation to somebody.

And I remember Gary saying, "We can't do that, that would be a compromise." And that was the thesis from which they operated. In the meantime, Burke Marshall who was, you know, the Assistant Attorney General called me. And as I say I can't remember the order in which some of this occurred, before or after. They (He) asked me, that he was trying to do something to get some responsible leadership in Mississippi, I mean in Greenwood, to accept some changes. And we went over, he asked who there was involved federal programs that could be, that had a direct linkage to being influenced by the federal government.

And I told him that an immediate contact would be the Cotton Association. At that time the Cotton Association was a more powerful institution in Greenwood than it is now. You know what the Cotton Association is, that is the big corporate market where most of the big planters marketed the cotton and so forth. It had its headquarters in Greenwood. It had probably as many employees as anybody-- plus they did the, and they probably still do, the grading of cotton, were agents of the Dept. of Agriculture in grading cotton, they had a very close working relationship.

I told him to talk to Jerry Sayre who was then the general manager or the president, I have forgotten what his title was. ... But anyhow, he is no longer the, the present fellow head of the Cotton Association is I believe Hank Hodges, he was at that stage just not more than a clerk somewhere in the management establishment. And I mentioned the bank president, I mentioned my step brother, Louis L.C. Spencer, Jr. who was head of the Delta Electric Power Association. He has recently died. The REA co-op, big headquarters in Greenwood. And one or two others, I just can't remember who I talked to, I mean who I gave the names for pressure.

There wasn't a whole lot of things in the town that were directly related. The Cotton Association more than anything else had a link to the federal government and an annual financial stake, I mean in breaking the agreement with Dept. of Agriculture could cost them several hundred thousand maybe a million dollars in a year.

Sinsheimer: Right.

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Smith: I don't remember who else I mentioned and some of the details. And he did talk (Burke Marshall), he told me later that he did talk to some of these people, and they had begun, they told him that they were trying to do something, you know, to get something moving on the side of the community, making some concession that would ...

And it boiled down to finally the stage-- I can't say the details and I was just getting it by telephone and other kinds of reports that they had seven or eight, maybe a dozen COFO workers in the city jail (actually eight) up there. And there was actually real fear from some of my friends that were not in a position to do much about it, I mean in terms of the power entity, that some of the wild eyes in town would go in there and just execute those people, shoot or murder them, or kill 'em or whatever you want to do in the jail where they were all penned up." That was one of the-- there were people talking about that, this is why we are all here to do that.

And Burke, and I presume through John Doar or somebody there, I never talked to Doar I don't think at this stage, but I was talking directly to (Burke) Marshall. And they were really fearful of that. That they would be, a lot had happened, I mean you could not have stopped it without, if it appeared to be such a situation, you couldn't have stopped it without putting troops in there. You couldn't have stopped it with just a U.S. marshal or two. There would have been a _____, something similar to what had congregated at Oxford.

Sinsheimer: They knew how that could happen.

So finally one day Burke called me and said that, he reviewed what ... I talked to him two or three times. But they were scared that something would happen at any minute, just that close. And he said what could he do about the mayor. And I said quit talking to the mayor, he doesn't have any authority and he has no concept of what to do, and he has less backbone. And the man who runs the town is Hardy Lott. And certainly as far as Charlie Sampson is concerned.

So then he said that he would talk to him. But he wanted me to talk to Hardy. I guess to ask Hardy to talk to Burke. I don't know what the etiquette of the whole thing was, but he wasn't trying to follow it precisely. But it seemed to be a situation that somebody needed to tell Hardy that they were, the Justice Department was willing to talk to him what could be done.

Sinsheimer: Let me interrupt for a second. Now would Hardy Lott have supported you in '62.

Smith: Hardy Lott has been my adversary through the years. But he had been forced into being my supporter by the fact that he was, one of his biggest legal clients was Louis Spencer and the REA. Plus the fact that it wasn't a position to be in overall. Well, Hardy had been a big Dixie-crut, states-righter back in

Frank Smith (4)

Smith (cont.): '48. He would support me in that thing and he knew that I wasn't sympathetic with it, although I hadn't actually been opposed to it in '48 because that would have been very poor politics for an ambitious person to be in. Well he had supported me in '50, not too enthusiastically for me, but he could also point that my opponent wasn't anything that he was strong for either (laughter). But he had, so he had gone along with me and I had tried-- it just was, I accommodated him with anything (that was) not privation to my sense all through the period.

In fact one of my-- Louis (Spencer) my step-brother was acknowledged as my closest representative at home, the one that people went to when they wanted to talk to me, or you know anything, was He was wrapped up in me, my career, my success, but at the same time he was also wrapped up in, he was just as devoted to segregation and whatnot as anybody.

Sinsheimer: Louis was?

Smith: Right. It was just something that we didn't talk about. He didn't raise the question and I didn't either.

Sinsheimer: He was your brother-in-law?

Smith: Step-brother. My mother had remarried only after I was grown and just a couple of years before I ... in '47. She married his father and lived out in Carroll county. But Louis had become my very, as I said my closest associate in terms of the congressional office. All sorts of help. And of course I was a benefit to him. You know he was the local man to see if We had a very good mutual relations and everything except this issue that came over. And he understood that I was-- I don't know what he attributed it all too-- but he didn't, he never talked to me about it.

But he could give me reports about I am sure-- I don't know whether it was he attending them or whether some of his employees-- but he could tell me about how the local controlled influence, the local Citizens' Council, what the discussion was, and things like that.

Sinsheimer: Now would Hardy Lott have been involved in the Citizens' Council?

Smith: Well, Hardy was the whole brains of the Citizens' Council. Now whether he was actually an official of it, I don't know who the officials were but he was ...

Sinsheimer: The brains.

Smith: He had the link. You know he was city attorney. And he made through the years all sorts of money. Became an issue in later elections how much money he made defending all

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Smith (cont.): these various suits. But he very carefully calculated and made money out of it, but he also very strongly believed in it.

Sinsheimer: Let me interrupt for a second. Was city attorney an elected office?

Smith: No, that is appointed by the mayor and the board. But in most cases-- I presume that it was pretty well appointed by the mayor. But maybe the mayor, I just can't, I don't know that. It was accepted that Hardy had supported Charlie Sampson over Alan Sapho who had been the mayor who was defeated oh in the early 50's. Then Hardy became the city attorney.

Sinsheimer: So Charlie (Sampson) had been mayor for a good bit then, for about ten years.

Smith: About ten years I think. Sometime in there, I have forgotten precisely. It might have been that he was elected in '50, ten or twelve years he had been mayor. He had been my strong supporter in terms of _____ during the campaign in '62. He would put out statements saying that the people in Greenwood were pulling And I got two-thirds of the vote in Greenwood, not as much as I got in Greenville, percentage probably.

But anyway, well I told Burke to quit trying to talk to the mayor. I mean they couldn't get anywhere with the mayor, the man, the only man that had the power to make an agreement that would, might sound fair to -- that would be acceptable to the mayor that would obviously involve concessions on their part is Hardy Lott. To talk to him. So he wanted me to talk to him. I immediately called Hardy. Hardy wasn't in, so I talked to Stanny Sanders who was his law partner.

Stanny was once again, going back into all, in terms of the personal relationships. He was my very close friend from childhood. He had been basically, (had) all the same political instincts that I had. He had been district attorney for many years. He was regarded as the most-- I won't digress too much-- as the most able courtroom lawyer as well as being good in other respects, but especially in terms of the courtroom in the Delta. Hardy had brought him, Stanny, the district attorney had nothing like the income that he ought to, like lawyers of his capacity had. And so Hardy had, he didn't agree with him on politics or other things, but of course it is one of those things that, brought him into his firm. And I am sure that was a relatively fabulous pay for Stanny.

Sinsheimer: Was it Sanders or Saunders?

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Smith: Sanders.

Sinsheimer: Because he would have helped Hardy Lott in the Beckwith trial.

Smith: Oh yeah, he was the man who really was the lead attorney in terms of the courtroom. Of course, Hardy was, is a-- Stanny is dead now ... they lived in Sidon Anyway, I talked to Stanny and told him all this and from that they-- I am sure that it was Hardy that did the talking-- now who talked to who in what stage of the preliminaries I don't know. I never knew.

I don't know whether you recall, they agreed, what it amounted to is they agreed to accept bail or something for--which was later forfeited-- and they would get out of town until things quieted down. The deal was worked out, Robert Kennedy had to okay it. As I say I wasn't there, but he had I am sure as a result of an earlier suggestion I made, Bobby didn't say yes until he had gotten the local approval from Gray Evans. Gray is now a circuit judge in Greenwood (for Leflore county). He came to Greenwood as law partner of Charlie Deaton and they were both more or less sponsored by me. I put Charlie in the legislature-- Charlie got in the legislature, they both worked for me in Washington at that time., Charlie first and then Gray later.

But Gray ran for _____, but finally he was appointed by Governor Winter. But (Robert) Kennedy told him that he had to have Gray say that ... that he would vouch for the fact that these people had carried forth the agreement.

Sinsheimer: Now why Gray Evans?

Smith: Well, he was, he may have been the assistant city judge, I say he may have had some title in the city government as a young lawyer.

Sinsheimer: Oh, I see.

Smith: But it was Gray because I had given, he knew that Gray had worked for me and that I would vouch for what he did. And he was the one person that they knew that was mutually acceptable you might say (laughter). And so Gray did.

Now what, as I say, what the actual dramatic effect of it I don't know. But as I was told as I recall from what Gray said and what, of course ... politics to talk about in Greenwood and what other people said about it

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Sinsheimer: So Bobby waited to say yes until Gray Evans did?

Smith: Yes, you know on the telephone.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Smith: Probably all may have been ... the details of it I just don't know. I never talked with Bobby about it or any of the details, it was just one of those things that passed. Now that incident there, I don't know whether you have read Climbing Jacob's Ladder (Pat Watters and Reese Cleghorne), they list that as a defection from, the Kennedy administration betrayed the civil rights (movement). I don't recall regarding it as a betrayal, it was a situation where -- and of course a lot of folks in the civil rights movement at that time would have been quite happy if those people had been massacred. That would have made a flaming incident which would have also made the situation where still Greenwood, I mean as bad as Greenwood is, if that had happened it would have still, you know it just never could have -- but there were people in the civil rights, activists at the time, who wouldn't have been, well I don't know how to put it, who wouldn't have minded the martyrs being there at all.

And that is, I know Reese and knew him, and I told him at the time that they had it wrong. I know them both, they were associated with the Southern Regional Council But that is, in a way that is a part of history that needs to be corrected. The details of that, the whole idea has been that the Kennedy's, Bobby and Burke maybe the president, all caved in to Eastland or somebody like that in the political establishment. But they weren't talking -- I mean I am sure that they were talking to them or they had to, but in terms of what they were really doing, the negotiations that they did as far as Greenwood is concerned, the people were talking to me and the people that I reported to them. Other details and what they told people I couldn't tell you. But it worked out, the thing calmed down after the COFO people left. But that is just a little background that I wanted you to

Sinsheimer: No, that is fascinating because I know exactly the time that you are talking about. What is interesting is that Burke Marshall is very open to talking today, and John Doar who really would have done a lot of the detail work just isn't interested in talking to anybody any more. Have you ever met John Dittmer, a friend of Ed King's?

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Smith: Yeah.

Sinsheimer: John just was up in New York and he had an interview with John Doar and it just didn't go very well. But I imagine that those two do know the true story of it.

Smith: I don't know, as I say I don't, I am not even sure that Doar was there. I don't know if he was the one that was ... I know he was in Greenwood some but ...

Sinsheimer: He was the person in the newspapers, at least Burke Marshall was keeping his name out of the ...

Smith: Oh yeah. I don't think Burke ever came down here specifically, but he was, he had people whom I presume that Doar was the principal one. But as I say I didn't talk to anybody other than Marhsall in the Justice Department during that period. It was just one of those situation where I think they did the right thing. The details, the specific details, was something that had to work out where to some degree-- of course you know the Greenwood people were saying that they would never let them out of jail. They were all going to Parchman or wherever they were allegedly going to be tried and convicted or whatever they were charged with there. It was all right to them they would then keep the civil rights workers out of town ...

Sinsheimer: That is fascinating. I will check their version in Climbing Jacob's Ladder. How did ...

Smith: But a, oh excuse me, go ahead ...

Sinsheimer: No, I am sorry.

Smith: I don't know of any more details of that particular incident.

Sinsheimer: Let me see if I can't piece a little bit back. How did, did Hardy Lott come from an established family in Greenwood? I mean how did he get so much power so?

Smith: Well, just because he is a very intelligent person. He is a very hard person. I think he just had a very dedicated belief in not only in segregation but in just in what you might call general ultra-conservative reactionary concepts. He came up, oh his family had, he was not a native of Greenwood. He had some connections in south Mississippi or something. He came up to work as a lawyer for one of the prominent lawyers of the 1920's in Greenwood, a fellow named Sam Quinn. I think Quinn's daughter is one of the several, one of the rabid right wing types ... and had been in Hardy's firm. She came to Greenwood about this time a few ... I think primarily to get involved in that side of things.

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Sinsheimer: What is the name of that firm?

Smith: Oh, I don't know what it is, it is Lott and something, I don't know what it is now. It was Lott and Sanders at that time.

Sinsheimer: At that time.

Smith: This girl who is Quinn's daughter, she has some, she is now married, something with a K, some sort of German name as I recall. She may have a name in the firm but I sort of doubt it. But Hardy is just a, well he was someone with brains ... why he dominated and he also sort of did things, he built up his law business. Over the years he collected, in fact one of the, in the late sixties or maybe early seventies, no it was the late sixties when I guess when Charlie Sampson was eventually defeated as mayor-- one of the reporters added all of the fees, all of the legal fees that were paid to Lott. And he had been something of a hero among the Kluxers because, you know, he was a man who stood up for, he was the prestigious lawyer who made our fight. They didn't realize how he was making money out of it. Because he charged the full fee for all of the ... (laughter)

Sinsheimer: Wow, that is interesting.

Smith: He incidently he is, his son-in-law is the congressman, you know, Webb Franklin.

Sinsheimer: I didn't realize that. How much-- well one of the things that surprises me is that-- how much influence would the planters have had in all of this? Would they have been ... ?

Smith: Oh, they had their influence. They had influence. And if had been some universal fear then ... they are not any organized power group. I mean they have considerable influence in the town, and always have had more in Greenwood than anywhere else, you know, in a relative comparison, in a comparative sense to Washington county. But they never spoke as one, they probably would have been more accessible to compromise in the situations, you know, with individual exceptions, but overall because that would have been the most peaceful way to do it. I mean to avoid trouble with labor, I mean to keep people working. I mean none of them wanted to make concessions, but they never had any conscious ...

Sinsheimer: Banding together?

Smith: On their part. There were various individuals who had various positions, but I doubt that any of them were ... well I shouldn't say that because I didn't keep up with it

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Smith (cont.): enough ... I don't know how the Citizens' Council came to decisions, but I always assumed that the basic decisions were either controlled or primarily influenced by Hardy.

Sinsheimer: Right. What about the newspaper at the time?

Smith: Incidentally, one way to put how the Citizens' Council, this was before '62. Somebody talking about the pervasiveness of the Citizen's Council told me that at a meeting one time they said that everybody in Greenwood, every white male in Greenwood belonged to it except me and the Circuit Judge. I am sure that was incorrect, there were I am sure most of the preachers didn't, people like that, but there were just talking about I guess what you might call the so-called power structure in town. Now of course a lot of those people belonged just because you had to belong. Not that they were active, but nobody opposed their decisions as such. I mean nobody in the local white structure did.

Now what did you-- the paper had no positions about these things. ... The managing editor was a young fellow named Thatchall Walt, originally from Clarksdale. And he had more independence than the average, because he was an ambitious young newspaper man with some sense of ethics. During the period after I left-- and I have forgotten this was before the big crisis I guess-- he was, because he knew that he wasn't safe ... he was threatened by the Kluxers and so forth. He eventually left town because of some of the threats, to Florida. At one stage he was in great fear of his life. He had specific threats from people he felt pretty sure had been involved in some of the violence against blacks.

He called me in Knoxville-- as I said I had a number of things like that-- but I don't remember all the things of Thatchall's thing. But it boiled down to the fact that he thought somebody was going.... And he was going to take his family to Knoxville-- to Clarksdale-- that weekend. I mean they had planned on it. And wound up-- he had talked to the FBI but he wasn't sure what they were going to do. And I wound up, this was on a Saturday night or Saturday afternoon, so I wound up calling the duty officer of the FBI. I mean I put in a call for Hoover, I guess he was still, of course there was nobody on duty, nobody available. Well, I wound up talking to whoever was the highest ranking guy in the FBI office on a Saturday afternoon.

Sinsheimer: The janitor? (laughter)

Frank Smith (11)

- Smith: You know, it was probably into the night by then, I don't know the timing of it. And he started giving me the story, you know, that they couldn't be bodyguards for people like that. But I wound up, I told him that they could make it very clear to the local police department that they were aware of the threats and if anything happened it was going to be the fault of the police department. And I said if anything does happen I am going to be on the phone to people in the White House and to the FBI and tell them-- I don't know what his name was-- tell them that you refused to do anything about it. So I am sure that he did something.
- Sinsheimer: That is fascinating because I got a completely different version of that story yesterday where he said-- the newspaper man-- said that Thatchall Walt just left town in the middle of the night, one night, went to Florida, and wrote a series of articles for all the magazines about Greenwood. And everything he did was for his personal gain. So that ...
- Smith: Well, actually he was scared to death. I mean primarily I think because they threatened not only him but his wife and children, babies. Of course I don't blame him trying to telephone-- I never saw what he wrote. I don't know what he said about it. But I know that he talked to me several times during that particular time-- maybe I talked to him a time or two before the thing, just in general. But he talked to me specifically the threats he had.
- Sinsheimer: Now the paper at that point would have been owned by Bill Richardson.
- Smith: No, Bill Richardson's step-mother-in-law owned it. They took it away from Bill Richardson.
- Sinsheimer: What was her name Gillespie.
- Smith: Gillespie. I don't know the details of this either.
- Sinsheimer: How did they own the paper? They had bought the paper?
- Smith: No, Mrs. Richardson's father owned it. She inherited it by the natural progression.
- Sinsheimer: I see.
- Smith: Except Mr. Gillespie in his later life married this widow from New York, Binghamton I think, who was the wife of a New York politician. Told me she was a big Democrat. And I don't know the details of Mr. Gillespie's will, but I do know it was left in such a situation that _____ and her husband-- he wasn't a very aggressive type who was

Smith (cont.): squeezed out of it. And then Mrs. Richardson, I mean Mrs. Gillespie ... she had a couple of daughters and then one of them wound up running the paper until I think it was sold to the present owner. She did publish the stuff about Hardy's legal fees, that was one, she broke away from that. But she was very much, in my book I mentioned that I hadn't thought of any recriminations of my admiration for _____ who had been the editor (of the Greenwood Commonwealth) back in the 20's. And when I was delivery boy-- I was delivery boy for the Commonwealth for eight years-- and I mentioned that he had never gotten adequately paid or what not for his, I don't know how he kept the paper going. So I don't know what this girl, this second Mrs. Gillespie daughter I think she is dead, she eventually lost out, I have forgotten she married the local dairyman. I can't remember the name.

Sinsheimer: You mentioned in your book, Congressman From Mississippi, that when you won your first election that it would have been the fewest votes cast in any Congressional district in the country.

Smith: Well, I don't know whether I said it about my, I said that overall in my, in elections it was what you might call some, there were fewer cast. In the primary I doubt that that was so.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Smith: I don't recall what I said. But see in the general election it didn't amount to anything there. What it was an embaressment in a sense that there was no contest and people didn't turn and vote. But in terms of voting though we probably had the lowest-- I am sure that there were other parts of the South where blacks didn't vote where the percentage participation was also low. But we had perhaps a higher percentage of blacks than anywhere else. But there is no question that we had overall ...

Sinsheimer: But the percentage of whites voting was small too?

Smith: Yeah, But it wasn't small in the sense, in the primaries. In a general election it was small but what is the point of it. It looks, it makes some headline in a _____ paper, but it meant nothing when you know there wasn't any contest. Not that it was high, the percentages overall were very high, but it was as high as a lot of other places, among whites.

Frank Smith (13)

Sinsheimer: What influence would have Baldwin Piano had at that point, I mean was it the largest employer?

Smith: It was brand new then. I don't know whether it had any thing in particular. I had, as I recall it wasn't all that big at the time.

Sinsheimer: But was it there when you are in Congress?

Smith: It was there, not when I first ran (in 1950), but in 1962 it was. It wasn't real big then.

Sinsheimer: Right. And who owned that factory, was it national.

Smith: I don't know, maybe the actual Baldwin Piano people ... oh they had some character who had some criminal record or something. But when it came to Greenwood initially it was to make cases for the pianos or something I think. It was just the old legitimate Baldwin Piano Company in Cincinnati, Ohio. I had some relations with them because they were in my district. And the people from Cincinnati-- I have forgotten what the details were-- but they talked to me from time to time. But they were still relatively small, although of course we were happy to have any kind of industrial growth.

Sinsheimer: What was the difference between the Cotton Association and the Delta Council?

Smith: Well, the Cotton Association is a growing commercial organization.

Sinsheimer: It is a trade association.

Smith: The farmers, you know, they would act as inspector and everything else, mainly though they sold the cotton. To tell the truth it was a cooperative of which all the members were millionaires. That wasn't true of course, but you know it wasn't dominated by them. Being organized is the best way to handle those things for the tax advantage way back in the 20's, prospered very well.

Where as the Delta Council is just sort of a super Chamber of Commerce for the region. It is financed, a good part of the, the main part of its, the bulk of its financial support from that time came from payments from county governments or city governments. In the same sense that they pay for industrial promotion. They had membership fees, but the bulk of its money came from there. It was different in the sense, probably more the individual numbers wasn't the kind of people who had stores or what not, the wealthy planters ... (inaudible). I guess probably the largest individual occupation of the status of the members was planters. But they sold, they were very happy to take a membership from anybody. They sold

Frank Smith (14)

- Smith (cont.); them just like you sell Chamber of Commerce memberships in an average small town.
- Sinsheimer: Greenwood, in making the 50's and 60's, if you use the term Cotton Capital of the world. Charlie Deaton said that it really wasn't the gin operation that made it that, because there were still at that point a number of small gins all over the region. But it was the warehouse ... is that?
- Smith: Compresses. That is a warehouse, compressing warehouse. That is where you know you compress the bale before you store it.
- Sinsheimer: This is a hard question but how far outside of Greenwood did cotton come into Greenwood for the compresses.
- Smith: (Break) ... People like Leroy Percy who had his own, who was head of a big compress, the biggest one, in Washington county. Frankly, I couldn't tell you who, you know, how the compresses were, but he (Charlie Deaton) is right in the sense that that was part of how Greenwood ... in a progressive state somewhere along the line it was partly that, and partly the Cotton Association and all of that. They were cotton merchants ...(inaudible)
- Sinsheimer: Now what about-- I mean I am just ignorant about all this-- what ... the cotton was baled in the compresses. Was the actual buying and selling done in Greenwood then, so that became the center?
- Smith: In the main. See the people from the mills in North Carolina you know would come, primarily they come check the cotton. The merchants had the samples that could identify the quality of each bale that was stored.
- Sinsheimer: Was it auctioned like tobacco is?
- Smith: No, perhaps upon occasion, but primarily it was just individual trade. The only kind of cotton auctions that I know anything about is when people would make up a little stunt each year, the first bale of the year. I don't recall any cotton auctions.
- Sinsheimer: All right, you have been enormously helpful. Thank you. ... I know what I wanted to ask you. Ed Billings told me yesterday that he thought that Buck Hammond was really one the heroes of that time.
- Smith: Well, he was in several ways. I mean in the sense that he was one who had a face-to-face confrontation with Dick Gregory back then. That it was one of the dramatic highlights. Gregory cussed him out or something, and he

Smith (cont.): didn't try to hit him or have him arrested or whatever, which would have been the normal, that is what Gregory was trying to do. Them people accepted that as what he had done. And he actually would have been a role for, I think he was-- I couldn't tell you-- but I think he was what I would describe as a moderate among the officials who would accept some change. But I couldn't-- once again I wasn't involved in the day to day decisions or the gossip or anything like that even before I left Greenwood. That was one of the ways I stayed out of things like that.

Sinsheimer: What about Chief Larry? Would he have had any influence or was he ...?

Smith: I would say he would just go along, that is my guess. Once again I couldn't tell you.

Sinsheimer: What is interesting about Hammond is that Ed Billings said it wasn't so much that he was moderate or anything, but just that he was a real believer in law and order in his town. That he had sort of accepted this ... doctrine that he wasn't going to have any trouble in his town, and that meant from the white or the black.

Smith: Well, you could accept that as moderation in the sense-- ... He was, I know I always got it from talking to people, that he was gainst any kind of white violence too, violence by the whites. And they accepted what he had done in relation to Gregory, being that he was standing up for the town too.

Sinsheimer: Well, have I missed any of the other influences in Greenwood.

Smith: Well, I think one of the things that-- I noticed it-- a month or two ago after the elections when David Jordan was elected city commissioner (to the city council) or something, the Commonwealth carried an editorial-- I guess it is part of their tring to be peaceful-- praising him as a civil rights leader. ...

End of tape.