

MFDP Chapter 8

ROBERT MILES

Interview 0253  
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Q: I wondered, could we find out first of all how you got involved in the Movement.

A: Well, that's a long story.

Q: Go ahead.

A: I guess I got involved in 1959 when we organized a NAACP chapter. And we had to have at least 50 members to get a charter. After we got the 50 men then we got the charter. And after the people found out--I mean the southern white people--found out that there was a movement around here called the NAACP in which they all afraid of or hated for some reason they called it a subversive organization. They begin to harass men who had jobs, mens that they have known all their lives by telling them that they didn't think they was this type of man to come involved in the NAACP. This was just a southern way of threatenin because they knew men could think that they wanted to do somethin for themselves but they didn't want men to think, they didn't want Negro men to think in that way, so they begin threatenin and arrestin them at their jobs and callin them in one by one askin whether they was a member of the organization. They all afraid as the old Southern tradition is, that 90% of the trouble now is fear,. So they begin to not atend the meetin, therefores we couldn't continue the NAACP chapter. Then the chapter went down, Then we thought to organiza a voter's league- about 10 to 12 men, and uh, after we organize this voter's league, then we said well begin to study the constitution of Mississ-ippi, which was extremely hard. Well, what's the use of trying to study this constitution--what's the use of having a voter's league when there's no registered voters. Suppose we try to register to vote. So, begin to ask who'll volunteer and go first, cause we knew this was a tough job, we knew this was what the power structure didn't want you to do. And we also know that that's where the power lies is in the ballot. And this particular thoughtfell in our minds knowin that it was a tough task, but still some of us was willing to volunteer anddo it first. So I was one of the first to say I would volunteer and go down to the court house and try to register. There was some older mens in the group by the name of Edward Thomas, Reverend Milton, and Reverend Wood(?) thought it wasn't a good idea for the younger men to go first. Since they was the oldest citizens, they thought it might have been best for them to go. Then one person made a suggestion that we go and ask some of the people who were in

A: authority if we could vote. And I knew that this was the wrong idea or was the wrong thought, to ask a man, could you do something that rightly belongs to you. Then when I objected, there was four more objected to going down and asking, could you register to vote. They said let's go and try, like other mens have gone into court. As we were citizens of the state of Mississippi, born and raised here, why can't we have all the citizenship as other people? So...the younger mens go in first, and they volunteered to go. As I can well remember, Edward Thomas and N. C. Cox and Rev. W. G. Milton say, "We go first." Since there were 9 or 12 of us in the group who organized it, then we divided into threes, I believe it was at least 9, and the three--this first three will go this week, and the next three, next week, and the next three, the next week. So that's the way we thought of doing. They went down--these three first went down--they was rejected in their way of doing in by saying that, "You didn't pass," regardless to what percentage that you made, in this test. Then the next three went--this included myself and C.J. Williams and...uh...Rev. Rood. We three went down, and when we got to the courthouse, there was an old lady in there, and she ask us what we want, and "We came in to register." She seems to be surprised, or thought we didn't know what we were talking about. By trying to throw us off, and I made it plain to her that we came down to register. So we can be able to vote, to let her know that we knew clearly what we wanted. So she said the Registrar wasn't there, and she would have to call him from the other Courthouse, which is in Silas, about 8 miles away. And it always fall into my mind, why did she go across the hall, into the sheriff's office, to use the telephone when she had one right there one her desk? But she went over, she told us to wait, and we waited. And when she came back, she said, "Mr. Dukes, the Registrar, will be in in a few minutes." Neither one of us didn't know Mr. Dukes. So we sit out in the hall, and we saw a man came in the back door, and we assumed that was Mr. Dukes. So we thought we go back in the office and see if it was him, because he went in to this particular office. So we went into the office, and he ask us, what did we want. If though he didn't know. I'm sure the young lady told him. So we explained what we wanted again, so he said, "Well, I have to take one by one; at least two of you at one time. No, one by one." Who will go first, he said. So I volunteered on taking the test. I went into the room beside the room, the office where he was in, where there was a lot of books; and he gave me a book and a pencil, and I saw it was a cons titution. And he told me to fill out the forms, which consist of 19...21 questions, to be exact. And some of them was simple, as your name, your age, your occupation, where you live, how long you have lived there, and things of that sort. And when we got down to the main question, which asked you to read a section of the constitution--and this was the section that he would particular point out himself--and he surely

was going to give you one of the longest one, the hardest one, probably two or three lawyers be taken to understand it. But..he pointed out a particular section, in which I think it was 280--I know it was up in the 200's--sections of the constitution. I filled it out as best I could, not remembering just now what it meant. Then the other part which was so hard, was to tell the duty of a citizen under the constitutional form of government. Well, I can remember my explanation: the duty of a citizen is to register to vote, and vote in every election, obey all the laws of the county and state. So my test was rejected. And I asked him how often could a person come back and take the test? And as I can remember, he said, "If you fail one time, the first time, there's no need of coming back." I asked him, what percentage did a person have to make before he fail? And knowing, if you ever take tests, at least all the tests that I ever took in school, if you made 90% you be a scholar; if you made from 80-90% it was considered being good, and that a person could pass on a certain percwnt of a test. But in seeing this plain, that you had to make 99 $\frac{1}{2}$  or 100 percent, that even 99 $\frac{1}{2}$  wouldn't do--you had to make 100--so we goes out, and after the next week, then the other three was to go down. That was a brother in law of mine, Willie Condahl, and Jasper William, and another man that was supposed to have gone with those two but he didn't show up. So Willie was the only one in this group was allowed to take the test, because they give you some kind of phony take that you have to have paid your poll tax before you could register. Later we found out this wasn't true. That you could register before paying poll tax. But they objected to Jasper, because he hadn't paid but one year of poll tax. So after Willie reported to us what he had gone through, they acted as though they were going to kill him in that room, one was said to another one...that kind of thing. Why, we was taking our tests and we had all kinds of visitors; such as the sheriff, the marshal of the town, highway patrolmen...it seems like it had been a rumor all over town that there were...so they would call in their different friends and ask them to come by and visit. So I said to my friend, I said, "We having all kinds of visitors, I see this morning." I said, "We have the sheriff, the highway patrol, the marshal--" and he whispered to me, "Yes, and theundertaker."

Q: This is the time you took your test?

A: Yes, this is the time I took my test. So after we all reported that nobody hadn't passed the test, and I know there was some people in there oconsidered as being pretty smart, but we still was rejected. So we goes down to Klausdale to make an application against Mr. Dukes that he has been unfair to Negroes who are trying to register. So we had some FBI's

and members of the Justice Department to come in and take our testimony, and they came in, and we went over to Oxford, and they got the affidavits, in order to bring suit against Mr. Dukes. So we did that, and May 29, I believe--May 19, 1960 or 59, we entered the suit in Klausdale. And it took Judge Clayton oh, from the month of May about four or five months to pass the decision. And he finally passed the decision that Mr. Dukes was not discriminating against us. And the Justice Department immediately took the suit to the Fifth Circuit Court, and they overruled Judge Clayton and showed him where he was wrong. By so doing, Mr. Dukes would have to register the people, just as he did for white people, for one year. Now, I often wonder, why did he just give us 12 months to catch up on white people, when white people had been registering for the last hundred years, and it took a hundred years, and they give us 12 months to catch up. However, this was one step in our favor, and we accept that. So we get to register people. And they also ruled that the Registrar would have to leave out the form where people would have to interpret the Constitution and where you had to tell the duty of a citizen under a constitutional form of government. This was two hard points in the constitution. It was qwritten where Negroes couldn't pass this test, for we know that 80 or 90 percent of the Negroes could not interpret the constitution if they had gotten that hard test, the hard part of it. And we know that 90 percent of them probably knew the duties of a citizen, but he couldn't explain it on paper. Or he could easiest say the duty or tell the duty of a citizen by verbal--word of mouth--but when it comes down to writing it, maybe he co uldn't expain it. Not only Negroes couldn't, but 90 percent of the whites couldn't either. But I found out that 90 percent of the white people didn't have to have this--they didn't have to write no parts of the constitution. If your skin was white, you just went on in and registered. And he didn't have to be a good scholar to pass the tests. I found out in the court, that there was a young man, about 21, 22 years old, couldn't read or write, and they pointed out clearly that he did not pass the test, and Mr. Darby, who was running for sheriff that year, just carried him in to the courthouse, where these books were, and had him sign his name. I saw a young white lady, who was about 25 or 26 years old, she never learn anything in school; she had only gotten as far as third grade. The only thing she learn, her mother taught it to her. But still she was a registered voter. And this is why that I knew that the white people was not taking the test. And the court knew that Mr. Dukes had been unfair. And I have to say thank God for the Fifth Circuit Court for overruling Judge Clayton's decision. Then after we began to register, the workers came in, into the county in 1960--in May--and they found that we had a good voter's league, which is still going on, and they were willing to work with the workers.

Q: What workers were these?

A: They was workers, as they are now in the county; volunteer workers.

Q: Were they working with SNCC, or...

A: Some of them was with SNCC; some of them was COFO, and just a mixed group of people. And they all worked together, without that all of them was on the one chapter.

Q: This was back in 1960?

A: Yes...no, pardon me.. This was in 1963, that we began to, this is when the court...see, the started in '59, but it was not over until about 1963, when I registered. So...

Q: How many Negroes are registered that were registered in '63?

A: In '63 I was...the second Negro man to register since reconstruction days, in the county. While I was second, because there was a young man by the name of Houston Park, who was going to school in Hollis Springs. Now he registered, he really registered before the court decision was passed. We was on the understanding that if we had gone back while we was in this suit, Mr. Dukes would have gladly let us register. And this doing, during this time, this young man went in to register. And being a Negro, Mr. Dukes was glad to see him coming, so he could point out in court that there are some Negroes registered. But we held out; we even asked the FBI, should we go back. They thought that we should; but among ourselves, we could see--and knowing the conditions in Mississippi, we could see, that if...if we had gone back, Mr. Dukes would have let us register. Then this meant that all the rest of the people would have to come like we did. So by going in this way, we knew that our step would made a clear way for those that come behind. So we would rather see the thing go through court, than go through a partial way of registering, seeing people rejected. So after we got this court order, for one year, we began to register Negroes. When the workers came into the county--this was the volunteers from different parts of the country--such as New York, Chicago, California--other parts of the country--come down to help Negroes, to teach Negroes how to register to vote. They came in and found out that we had only about 31 registered to vote. This was in the summer, of June, 1963. And before January of the same year, we had approximately 1000 Negroes registered. Then...we organized the freedom Democratic Party in the same year, and by having our precinct meeting, from precinct meeting to county meeting, and from county meeting to district meeting, and from district meeting to state meeting. I was elected as the chairman of the Pinola County Voter's League, and from there, I was chosen as delegate to the convention in Atlantic City. And that's the way I got started in the movement. Then I got on the executive

board of the Freedom Democratic Party.

Q: State executive board?

A: State executive board. So I am now the Secretary of the Pinola County Voter's League, the chairman of the county, and on the executive board for the Freedom Democratic Party. State executive board.

Q: Could you tell us a little about how the idea was first formed for the Freedom Democratic Party? And a little bit about Atlantic City, also?

A: Well, the idea came up about the Freedom Democratic Party because people was found in the state, not eligible to vote, or not...was being rejected; the regular Democratic Party, this has been their way of life. Is to reject the Negro. Then we said, we were the Freedom Democratic Party, by wanting to stay with the Democratic Party, but by saying we give every man a free chance to register, a free chance to vote. Then we run our different election, what we call the Freedom Ballot. See, we had mens running for different offices in the state. They were way over the regular office. For an instance, to point out clearly what I really mean, Dr. Henry once was running for governor of the state. And his... votes outnumbered Gov. Johnson 2 to 1, by being in the Freedom Ballot. And we knew that there were people willing to register to go and vote, so we wanted to make sure these people was allowed to register and vote. Then at Atlantic City, when we went to Atlantic City, we knew that there was 26 or 24 votes for the state of Mississippi. We knew that we rightful belonged to those votes. That that ballot rightful belongs to us, because we were on the Freedom side and they were not. There were many many white people were not allowed to register, same as Negroes, mostly on the poor side. This is the way the power structure of Mississippi works. One man stay in office his lifetime, and after that, he probably encourage his son to run for the same governor, the same office that he takes. And by his goodness of keeping Negroes to register or vote, he probably would win on this ticket. And this is the way the Freedom Democratic Party start.

Q: When did this happen?

A: This was in '63. Oh, the party probably started in '62.

Q: Started in '62?

A: Yeah; I don't know the exact date or month, but it was around '62 when it was organized. Then after we going to Atlantic City, I imagine 5 or 600 Negroes was there, waiting to get this vote. And the...convention was spellbound for

three days, because they knew that we were right. They knew that the other, regular, was wrong. But we were not allowed our seats in the convention; we were told that we could compromise with two seats...they would point out clearly who was going to cast our ballots for us. That was Rev. Ed King, Aaron Henry. We were spellbound because we thought we had sense enough to choose who we wanted to cast the ballots for us, or cast the vote, or whatever it was. Then we rejected it, because we rejected, we rejected the two seats because this was what we'd been used to all our lives. Just a little measly bite. They're going to give us two, and they still have 22 more. They could cast those themselves. So we used to the back seat of the bus, we just used to going around to the kitchen, we used to second class citizen; we used to poor schools. Now why would we go way to Atlantic City and get the same thing that we had at home? That wasn't what we wanted. We would have compromised with 12, or with half of the ballot, because we knew that the population of Mississippi was practically half populated with whites, or half populated with Negro. Then if this was the case, we rightfully were due at least half of the votes.

Q: Did everybody agree that the compromise should be rejected? That the offer...

A: Well, I wouldn't say everybody; but the majority, they agreed.

Q: What has happened to the Freedom Democratic Party since last year; I mean, what things have you been engaged in?

A: Well, the most things that we've been engaged in was to unseat the regular white congressmen from Mississippi. That one is the main thing. We also have been engaged in trying to get at least 90 percent of Negroes registered to vote. And this is what we still are engaged in, and we still are interested in the five congressmen from Mississippi, because we knew that they were not...we were not given a chance to vote for them, or vote against them. And this is what makes us interested, because we want a chance; we want the same chance, no more or no less, than the other man have.

Q: Do you think there's much of a chance of unseating them?

A: Well, at least I believe we have a 50-50 chance.

Q: How successful have you been in registering voters?

A: Well, so far in Pinola County, we have been, I say, much more successful than any other county. Compared with any other county. I noticed that there are some counties, adjoining counties, such as Tallahatchie, and if we go down



as far as Sunflower County, oh, you have a few, very few, Negroes registered. As of just this month, I think it's only 14 registered in Sunflower County, because of the intimidation, because of the threat, to people...and this has been going for the last hundred years. Threatening lives. Not only threat. When I say threat, I just mean...people probably shot at you, threat you over the hphone, threat your home, threat your home b burn, and things of that kind. My home has been shot at twice, it has been bombed a couple of times, and numerous and numerous phone threats. And I still get them. Up til last night, as you can witness this. We get a lot of phone threats.

Q: How many Negroes are registered here?

A: We think approximately 2200 registered.

Q: And how many Negroes are there in the county?

A: Um....eligible Negroes to register to vote is 7,000.

Q: Has the registration pace slowed down?

A: Well, it had, before the six question form came out, this last summer; but now it begin to pick up a little bit more. While we had some of the workers here, they have been a great deal of help, in encouraging people, in encouraging Negroes, to go and register.

Q: It had slowed down before the six-question form came out?

A: Yes, it had slowed down considerable.

Q: But wasn't it still...isn't the...isn't there still the Federal injunction?

A: No; Mr. Dukes is no more in office; Mr. Sinker is in the office, and he's still under Federal injunction.

Q: How did the six-question form change it?

A: Well, the last legislature, or a special section of the legislature, changed this six-question form. Now, when they met, in I believe it was June, they formed this law. In my idea, they formed the law because they knew Federal Registrars could come on into the county if they hadn't done something. And this is what they call doing something to apologize to the Federal Government. They can point out that we only have six questions now, and we sure that all our...people can at least pass the six questions. And this is the way that they have to apologize, not because they had done something great

in the favor of Negroes, but this came about, in my idea, becausee this is a way of saying, "You can pass the test now." And say the Federal government that they don't need Federal Registrars now; Negroes can pass the test.

Q: How many questions did you have to pass when the registrar was under the injunction?

A: You had about...19.

Q: They took away the two hardest, then?

A: Yeah.

Q: What position are you taking on the election which is coming up?

A: Well, the Freedom Democratic Party is encouraging Negroes to vote for the referendum. And I guess that's what we'll do.

Q: What type of communication do you have with the central office in Jackson? Do they pass the decisions down to you, or do you suggest to them?

A: Well, it's the matter of calling the executive board together, and we all decide, as what. We probably will take a vote in the executive board, and whatever the board say, we take it to the body. And the body decides on it. And whatever thing they see fit, or whatever things that they vote on, that's what we'll do.

Q: Is every decision of the executive board approved by the membership, then? As a whole, or by...

A: I say, yes.

Q: Do you have yearlyy conventions, or...

A: Well, yes, we have a yearly convention, and...we have district meetings, we have county meetings, and we also have in touch with the office in Jackson. The office in Jackson notifies the executive...or the county chairmen and the county chairmen in their county meeting, they suggest the same thingss that we work on there.

Q: I'd like to hear a little about the school situation here. You're not trying to desegregate the schools, as I understand it. Could you explain this?

A: Yeah. Well, the school desegregation came about when they had to sign a certain bill of satisfaction to the governor, in order to maintain their share of the government funds. And if...their bill was accepted from the government,

then they would get the federal funds, but if it was rejected, then they would not get the federal funds. And as you know, the federal funds mean more than the state funds, so they were very careful about trying to work out some plan that would be acceptable for the federal government. And so the plan that they worked out was to integrate four grades a year. This year, from the first through the fourth. And it seems like it's going to work well in Pinola County. We have approximately 60 to 70 Negro kids registered in white schools.

Q: Are you satisfied with this?

A: Well, I buy the idea of four grades a year.

Q: I understand you have children.

A: My children? yes, I have two kids that have registered in white schools.

Q: Why did you let them?

A: Well, I like to point out the fact, that it's not the fact that I thought that my teachers, especial in this low grade, was not sufficient to teach the kids; but they have spent four dollars in their school for the white kids, to one dollar in the Negro school, and this makes me think that the white schools are the best schools. And knowing, not that I really know, but it's kind of a thing that you feel, that you think so hard until you're...that this school is the best school. And this is why I want my child to go to school there, because they have the best school, and I want him to have the best, because he's a citizen of Mississippi and I think he deserves the best. I pay tax, and I think I let my child go to school where I want him to go.

Q: Are you afraid of any consequences?

A: Well, I'm not afraid, but it does keep me on the wonder as to what will happen. But...this, we'll have to see. Because I think that these mens who are in power, the power structure, I don't believe that they want any violence. They are going to do what they can to prevent violence, and they can prevent violence. The only thing they have to do is speak to their people, and let their people know that they're not going to stand for no violence. Then there won't be no violence.

Q: I'd like to ask you about the labor union, the Freedom Labor Union. What type of relationship is there between the Freedom Democratic Party and the labor union?

A: Well, as chairman of the Freedom Democratic Party, I go along with the labor union, but I'm sorry that I don't know too much about it.

Q: Well, coming back to when the NAA first came to this area; when was that?

A: Yeah, that was in '59.

Q: When they first came, how did people get interested?

A: Well, we knew that the NAACP was the strong arm; we knew some of the work that they had done, in trying to bring justice, and trying to go through the systems of law suits. So...any kind of organization like that, people in their right mind, especially Negro, would join it. And we still say, "Hats off to the NAACP." Because they have done a great job.

Q: In the first...well, what convinced the people about joining? It'd been around for a long time; why in 1959 did people start joining it?

A: Well, I guess it took them that long, where it could get down into the state. I imagine the NAACP just has been organized in the state of Mississippi, not any earlier than '48. And it took considerable time for it could spread, across the state.

Q: Why did you first join?

A: Well, I imagine I been a member of NAACP before there was a chapter in Mississippi.

Q: And you just became active?

A: Yeah, I became active when there were a chapter organized. I think I joined the NAACP, a chapter in Chicago. I don't know was I visiting there, or did I join through my brother-in-law, or just what happened. But I knew there was a chapter from Chicago, Illinois, and they called me to join. And reading the things that they had done, and seeing things that they had done, it encourages me to join.

Q: When was it that you joined?

A: I probably joined in '42. I can't remember now; but it was back in '42, '44, somewhere in that neighborhood. Somewhere in that time.

Q: Did you help to form the chapter here?

A: Yes, I was in on the organization there. Our pastor also was well at work in the movement, because Aaron Henry, he was from Klausdale, and they had a good chapter there, and he knew a lot about it. He was the one who helped set up

the organization there.

Q: How many people joined?

A: We had more than 50 men.

Q: And who was it that got it started?

A: What do you mean?

Q: Well, you said before that the whitepower structure had something to do with it.

A: No, that was mens that they thought was on their jobs, you know, that was called in. Who was working for them. I never have been asked.

Q: Such as who?

A: Such as men that were working for the railroad company. Maybe his boss, or the agent, would call him in and ask him. Men that were working for the funeral home, his agent would probably call him in. Maybe a maid, a cook, ladies working as maids, their boss lady probably call them in. Things of that kind. Any kind of intimidation, this is what I call it.

Q: What's the plan within the movement for increasing the amount of jobs available to Negroes? What responsibility do you think the Freedom Democratic Party would have for these people if they are fired because of their connection?

A: I don't know; we'd probably organize some kind of a plan whereby we hope to purchase some land where these people can have places to stay. For....or at least have homes. They don't have no homes now.

Q: Where are you going to try to get the money to purchase the land?

A: I don't know; the federal government have plenty of money. We'll probably make a step like that.

Q: Is this the same as the cooperative that I've been hearing about?

A: No, this cooperative is something different.

Q: Could you go into that?

A: Yeah; the cooperative is arrived from the okra growers; when they talked to the man who had handled their okras.... for the last three or four years, they goes to him and asked him about raising the price of the okras. They had been getting four cents a pound for all the okras that they grew. And he told them that he couldn't raise the price

and he wrote them all letters. They had a certain contract that you come in and sign, to work with him, if you're going to. So they held out this contract; they wouldn't sign it. Then he finally wrote them a card, saying that he would raise their okra price half a cent. And talked as though that was all he was going to be able to do to run his business. And they said, they couldn't run his business when they had a business too. I think...this put them to thinking, that they could run a business for themselves. Then they began to ask people who they thought knew about marketing vegetables, and they gave them the best information about trying to find places in different cities where they could...carry their vegetables to market, even in county agents and people in that different office. And from that...to...they began to talk about schools. Opening in September instead of the split session. And we know we can't pick your cotton in September without the children. Then we began to talk among ourselves, that it's time for us to begin to think as other people think; as a group of small farmers, we knew that no one small farmer would be able to purchase heavy machinery--that's cotton pickers and combiner--to pull the thing together. We found this was the way we could form a cooperative. And began to have meetings of this sort. By having meetings, trying to figure out what we really needed, and then going from there to the FSA, we began to get involved. Then we began to make surveys, as they advised us, as to how many acres cotton has each person got, how many acres do you expect to pick with a mechanical picker, and this survey was run and we found that we have from 700 to 1000 acres of cotton. Then it puts us eligible to purchase these different kinds of machinery. And from that, that's the way we got started. And so far, we think we are in a good position. Borrowing \$113,000, and this would purchase three cotton pickers, two combiners, and two trucks, buy two acres of land to build sheds for these machinery. And in this shed we're going to build part of it for an office for handling this vegetable market. We hope to go in a big way, in another year.

Q: Are the plantation workers included in the cooperative?

A: Well, no, they're not. But we don't segregate ourselves from plantations. If they wish to join us.

Q: I see; is there going to be an effort to try to get people into the cooperative? Particularly the ones who are losing their jobs, and being discriminated against.

A: Well, there's not much that we can do along that area, only to give them jobs. We'd like to do that. But...all the people who are members of the coop, are people who own land. It's not segregated, but...if people own plantation or somebody else, they have to say whether they want this machine to come

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in on their land or not. We will gladly, we will be glad to go in and help, if they will accept.

Q: Will, say, poor white farmers be accepted in this cooperative?

A: We don't discriminate nobody. White, black--grisly gray.

Q: You are a member?

A: Oh, yeah; I am a member. I am the president of the coop.

Q: How long has the coop been going?

A: We started our regular monthly meeting, or weekly meeting in February, I believe. And it just began to start in February and March.

Q: And you hope to borrow the \$113,000?

A: Yes, we hope to borrow it. We are...think we have it already borrowed.

Q: Is there any...how do you have to pay it back?

A: It's paid back in ten years; \$14,000 a year. That's what it's based on.

Q: Is there any thought of getting more land together and maybe putting plantation workers on the land? You know, in this way offering the union, people who strike in the union, some place to go, if they're put out?

A: This is a very hard task, because the land is practically owned by the white power structure, and you never know it's for sale. That way, it's hard for us to purchase. In the coop, we hope that many many things shall be drawn from it. Yes, we hope to purchase land; we hope to build homes; we hope to build a gym; we hope to have insurance of different kinds, to lead out from this cooperative. We hope to sell gas, oil, vegetables, and market our produce.

Q: What is the FSA?

A: The FHA is the Federal Home Administration. In fact, it's a form of government where people go and purchase money to operate their farm across the summer, across from the time they begin to farm until they...harvest. Not only money for homes, not only money for operating farms, but you can also borrow money from this same office for building houses, or purchasing land, or anything that you wish to

purchase to help the poor farmers. That's what they're for.

Q: Coming back to education, what is your connection with Operation Head Start here? How do you think the program's working out?

A: Well, the program is working fine; in fact about it, we had enrolled 65 before we began the Head Start; that was our budget was based on 65. And we have almost three times that many, which is 169, enrolled now. And this makes it very hard to operate with a budget for 65 and 169, as you know. I'm also the chairman of this center here. I always call myself the flunker.

Q: What do you do? What does this entail?

A: Well, in this job, I'm looked upon to purchase the food, pay out all the money for teachers, things of that sort. And I can hire and I can fire, anyone that works here. We have worked together so far; we have gotten along so very well, that I haven't had to fire anyone. All I can do is keep from hiring more.

Q: What kind of budget do you run on?

A: Well, we use a budget of \$180 a week for food, plus the \$65 petty cash; and this petty cash can be spent most any way that we see is necessary, such as buying toys, or crayons, or things that we don't have on hand right now. But we have not been able to purchase things of that sort, because it takes practically all of the money for food.

Q: What...you say 169 students have come. How many are there in the community who could come?

A: Well, as you know, there is another Head Start run through another channel, across the street from us. They have about the same amount of kids that we do. The children that we have are the poor family people, people who live on these plantations. And I guess they're from 25 or 30 miles apart, some of these kind are. This way it makes it very hard to try to transfer these kids. But we done a good job; the teachers transfer them; everyone works here that has transportation, has been doing a good job, by transferring these kids free of charge. Then we purchase a bus, in which the man--the owner of the bus--let us have it for \$100 for two months, and that was very reasonable. But we do have a problem of trying to buy gas for it, which goes in the area of 50 miles a day.

Q: What is the difference between the two Head Start programs?



A: Well, as I see it, it's quite a bit different. For instance, we pays our teachers \$150 a month--a week, and they pays their teacher \$130, I'm informed--not that I know. We have trainees--8--and they only have a trainee. And that way, as I understand the program, we pay for health--to have them physically examined--and the other Head Start do not; the parents have to pay for that. So we feel that wehave the best program.

Q: What are the two run by?

A: This is the child development group. And I don't know their name, or who they operate under, or what channel they go through; I haven't been too interested in trying to find out.

Q: Are they mostly Negro also?

A: Well yes, they're segregated, too.

Q: They're segregated?

A: Our group is not segregated, because it's based on the fact that anyone who comes'll be accepted. But they do run two groups;;they have a white classroom, which is up in town, and separate from the Negro class. They have a good chance to integrate if they want to. Our staff is integrated, and that's about all we could do.

Q: Has there been much parent involvement, in the sense of forming a group and trying to keep the program goin?

A: Quite a bit of it. The parents in this vicinity is very, very interested in the Headstart here, and they would like to do anything that they can to keep the, the school going across the winter. I don't know what step that we will take, and we hope to get it, and anything that we can do, we will continue.

Q: Has there actually been an organization formed, a parents' organization?

A: Well, I mean, it has been a group of interested parents.

Q: Do you think that they might form an organization?

A: I imagine they will. We going to work to that effect.

Q: Do kids usually come everyday, or is there a restriction on when they come?

A: They come everyday.

Q: Is there...(inaudible)?

A: Well, yes, it's enrolled in Headstart, but we don't insist on the young one going because he has been in kindergarten for the last three years, and we're afraid to intrude on him going to too much school, as the Headstart is right across the summer, and right out of the Headstart and into another school. We thought that would make him bored, so he is enrolled...

Q: This Headstart is basically a kindergarten type of thing?

A: Yes, Headstart is basically--that's where it gets its name from--to start a child in school in order that he might get used to...classroom, used to visiting teachers, other children, and this way they're not really made to take up any subject, but they do learn some things as alphabetical form, as 'ball' is for 'b' and 'a' is for 'apple' and things of that sort. It's just really means what it says, Headstart.

Q: What do you think about...well, say the future of Mississippi? A lot of the young people, I understand, and especially the ones with ambitions to be doctors, lawyers, and so on, very often leave the state. Do you think more of them are going to start staying, you know, to improve their own home?

A: Well, I think they should, yeah. I believe the integration of school will break down a whole lot of prejudice. This is why that...young people leave the state when they have their different degrees, because there is a...lots of prejudice against people, and this is why they're not hired in some jobs. It's not because they don't know...it's because they're prejudiced, and that has followed the power structure from his youth, when his parents taught him that he's so much better than someone else, and...this is a lot of prejudice, and if the kids are going to school together, no matter what the parents tell his child, when he learns to know Negro children as well as he knows white, he will see the difference, and he will know better himself, and there won't be no more 'Mr. Charlie' or 'Mr. Joe,' it will just be plain Charlie or plain Joe while going to school with him, and in this way, he will hire Joe in his clinic, or he will talk to Joe and say 'let's build a clinic,' and there will be Joe and Charlie in the same clinic together, and any kind of business party. And Joe will not have to go to Chicago to find a job. He can find a job right in the state of Mississippi. Yes, I think this is the best thing that can happen, and integration of schools is 100% the thing that will be--and this will be a better state.

Q: I was wondering, when you were a child, did you have a chance to play with white kids and all?

A: No, no more than white kids that lived near me in the country area. We played together and got along together.

We ate together, and things of that sort, and...this particular child knew me, he loved me, I loved him, until he started school, and when he started school, then he turned white, and I turned black. But if we had gone to school together, we'd been the same way through life that we were when were children. You see, I'm a Christian, and I believe in the Bible. I believe in the part where it says, 'As you come as this--Except you come as this little child, you shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven.' And children are so tenderhearted. They fight this minute, and the next minute they're playing. They love each other that much. But unless they come as a little child, they will never get along. If they grow up together until they're men, they will always love each other.

Q: What do you think the Freedom Democratic Party will be able to do in the future to help things along?

A: Well, I really haven't thought that deep into it, but we'd hope that we'd make out some plan that the future will be better than the past. Uh...the Freedom Democratic Party has done a lot, they've done a good deal of helping in the plan of integration, of helping in the plan of registering people, because we know that's where the power lies. When Mississippi has all registered Negroes and all registered white people, then we could put people into office that we want, we can elect our own superintendent, we can elect our own sheriff, and things of that sort. They will find that the law is not for the white man in the community and against the Negroes; it's for all people. And in this way, it will be a better country.

Q: What are your immediate plans?

A: For what?

Q: For the Freedom Democratic Party in the next year or so?

A: Well, our plans may be changed. Our plans are based upon the challenge--that's according to how the challenge goes, then we have other plans. Other than that, we have no future plans until September. After the first of September is when the challenge is decided.

Q: Has there been any success, or is there any probability that you may be able to get some of the poor whites into the Freedom Democratic Party and in this way, begin to create an integrated party this year?

A: Well, uh...as I said in the beginning that we don't believe in integ--I mean, segregation. We do believe in integration. We do have white peoples working in the Freedom Democratic Party. However, they're from the state of Mississippi, we hope that they will stay and become citizens, and in this way, we know we'll have an integrated party.

We will accept anybody that would like to come into the party. We will not turn you away because of your colored skin. We like to have people, poor, rich, black, or white.

Q: What I was thinking is that actually whites will still refuse to become close with...

A: Of course, they call it subversive, but they know better, but they teach their people that it's a subversive organization, but...they're all not being rigid to white people. There are some good ones in Mississippi, but people is afraid to speak out than we are because I'll point out that if a white man in Mississippi would speak out for Negroes, he is completely isolated. He has no white friends, and no Negroes, as he thinks, rather he's been taught that...he's superior to Negroes, and he won't accept Negro friends, and this way, this is why I say that he has no Negro friends because he won't make any Negro friends, and he definitely won't have any white people because...he just said he's a 'nigger-lover,' and he's just left out--he's isolated. That's why he doesn't speak out.

Q: What is your... How many years have white volunteers worked in the South?

A: As I know, they've been here since '63, was the first.

Q: How much good have they done?

A: Well, you can say it in this way: we had thirty-one registered voters. Before they left the state in September, we had more than a thousand, so you can see the good that they've done.

Q: Do you think it would be a good idea for them to come back in next summer?

A: Yes, I do. Uh...I would say they've done 930% good.

Q: How close did you work with them?

A: I worked very close. I kept them in my home, and I loved to love them. I fed them, and I protected them. I let them use my car and my trucks and the things I had. In every way that they feel I can help them, I do it.

Q: Some of them are becoming great...(inaudible)...(chuckle)

A: Yeah (chuckle)

Q: You think that they're well needed?

A: Yes, they'd be well needed even next year. I say that because...uh...we have a practically, as I said before, 2200 registered Negroes, where we know there are 7000 eligible to

vote, and there are many many people who haven't made up their mind yet to register, and it seems like these people from different states can do more with my people than I can myself. One, one reason, they have more time than I do. I have to work. I don't have time to do visiting. See, these volunteers comes in, and they're never working, well, they are working, but this is the work that they're doing. This is their job, and every man has a job, and every man does his job, and this way we can meet our plans better.

Q: Do most of the people in FDP feel this way about the volunteers also?

A: Well, yes, I think so because before the volunteers came this summer, we knew that FDP was going to sponsor a volunteer program more so than COFO or SNCC, and we had a meeting, and we asked people their feeling of volunteers, and they said yes, we need volunteers, then we had to vote on how many that you really need, and the final vote on the maximum would be twenty in this counting. We felt that this countie was a step ahead of other counties, and in order to allow other counties to have more...but we still don't have over seven, and just in this case, we're twelve or thirteen short.

Q: Do you see any difference between the programs of SNCC and COFO and that of FDP?

A: Yes, in some instances I see some differences. One difference, COFO work is based upon the people in the state, and the people in the state is the ones that have the say of what they want. COFO is based upon...the top men as what the top men say, that's what they have to work to, but this program is based upon what you want here in the state.

Q: The FDP is?

A: Yeah.

Q: Uh, have you had any problems with the volunteers coming in and organizing things and doing things, and then they leave, and the things don't continue?

A: Well, yes...that will always happen. When they come in and do things and then leave, this particular thing that they were doing, it falls apart. It doesn't continue, but we look at the work that it has been helpful. Maybe they come in and they organize a school and try to teach people that can't read or write, and if we get fifteen or twenty that learn to read or write while they're here, we say they've done some good.

Q: I understand that the volunteers that are here now are under the control of the county FDP.

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A: That's right.

Q: They do what you want them to do?

A: Well, I won't say they do what I want them to do, but they do what the party wants them to do.

Q: But there should be no problem now about too many organizations and intonations.

A: Uh, about future plans?

Q: Yeah.

A: No, it's not. I'm thinking that they will vote 100% or unanimously to get these people back into the state, or into the county rather, another year, under some way, even if the voters league has to sponsor the program, and if the county organization instead of a state organization, even if FDP is broke to where they can't sponsor the program another year, I'm sure FDP will if they can see some way where they can. But if they can't, not being losely woven in our own spider web, but we will se some way where it can be sponsered through the voter's league.

Q: What is the relationship between these two groups - the voter's league and the FDP?

A: Well, I have to hit on wood, as the old signs says, so he won't feel any. But as for Penoba County, we had no strength but no envy between the two organizations. They work along very well with each other.

Q: Is generally the FDP ~~more~~ active?

A: Well, I would say yes, because it's a county organization, and a state organization, I'd say. It has more active people across the county. The voter's league probably have one or two chapters. In that way it's kind of woven into one particular longitude, particulãar spots.

Q: You're in both..?

A: Well, I'm in one. Voter's league, that's what you mean?

Q: Yeah, you're in it?

A: Oh, the county and in FDP?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yes, of course. I hold a office in each one.

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Q: What is your office in the voter's league?

A: I'm the secretary of the Penoba County voter's league.

Q: What do you do as secretary?

A: Oh, to keep up all records and things of that sort.

Q: Do you think that the...(inaudible)

A: Well, it's a little too early for me to say.  
(end of tape)