

Charles Jones

Q: I think the questions we were talking about before were sort of beating around the bush a little bit. The central question is about SNCC's goals. What do you think are SNCC's goal or goals now?

Jones: I think, as I understand it, I think . . . the goal is to concentrate the resources now available in getting to the black community, the non-middle class, non-affiliated, non-mobile black community a sense of identity, a sense of worth, a sense of self-love which I think is essential for any group of people or any individual before he can proceed to make any kind of constructive life for himself and his family.

Q: Did SNCC have another long-range goal?

Jones: Well, let me say quite candidly that having been out of the decision-making processes of SNCC for the past three years I can't speak with any kind of authority. I would rather not deal so much with where SNCC is now because it would be my own reactions, my own reflections as I view it primarily from discussions with Stokely and people in the movement rather than the press. I think there is a basic difference in what Stokely is saying and what SNCC is saying and what the press reports, the difference being that Stokely was talking in a very logical, very analytical way of the problems of the black community and the white press is responding to their own problems and editorializing and interpreting what Stokely is saying on the basis of what kind of reactions they have to them. So essentially the whole Black Power battle, or lack of battle, the whole Black Power reaction has been primarily the reaction of the white community to the concept and the threat inherent and hasn't been so much the reaction of Negroes or Stokely.

Q: So there isn't a big Black Power dialogue going on in SNCC now?

Jones: Well, I'm sure there is but what I'm saying is the quality of it and the direction of it is somewhat different than what the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* or other papers that are primarily white opinion-makers, not just the written press but the radio and TV quarter. These are essentially

repeating interpretations by these sources, these institutions, of what they hear Stokely saying.

Q: Has SNCC's goal changed over time?

Jones: I don't think their goal has changed. I think the form of presenting the goal has changed.

Q: Could you expound on that?

Jones: Yeah, sure. The things we were thinking about when we first got together in Raleigh were primarily the interests of the black community. Because of our own, maybe lack of political sophistication, or because of the sophistication we had, we chose to present that form as an extension of the tradition of the civil rights movement but we never called it civil rights, that being the coalition of white, middle-class, labor, Jewish interests toward developing a concept of democracy and the cause of brotherhood which was essentially conceived by and developed by white middle-class people.

Q: Does that imply that SNCC all along was really concerned about non-middle-class Negroes, but was making it look another way?

Jones: No, it implies that SNCC has been saying pretty much the same thing it always has been saying but the way it's been understood has been different lately. The concern of SNCC as I understand it has been for the mass of the Negroes. The mass of the Negroes are not middle class so as that interest manifests itself consistently throughout this whole dialogue of the last four or five years, the understanding of it has changed, although the scope and the concern of SNCC has been pretty consistent.

Q: Within SNCC did people in the very early days, 1961, think in terms of the masses of Negroes?

Jones: Of course. That's why we went into Mississippi and Georgia and worked on organizing the total community, bringing in and developing leadership from all segments but primarily the poor segment because that's always the position that SNCC has been concerned about, the mass of the black people in itself definitively is a statement that SNCC is primarily concerned about poor people, because most Negroes are poor. That percentage which are mobile and middle class, of course, are effected by their concern but we always manifested that interest in all of the organization we ever did, to my knowledge.

Q: How about SNCC's methods? Do you think there have been changes over time and could you discuss that?

Jones: Well, when you say SNCC I assume you are talking about the effort of the organized group after the spring of 1960, which does not necessarily

encompass the sit-ins as such in terms of the first wave of them, but resulted after the first conference in Raleigh in April and then the development of a staff in the summer of '61. Now in response to your question about methods, after we organized the staff the methods were pretty consistent. That is, we would go into a community and attempt to organize and did organize the complete community, that is Negro community and where possible white support.

Q: So you don't think there have been any big changes in SNCC's methods since, say, the summer of 1961?

Jones: Only in degree. That is, the resources that we developed to enable that approach to be more effective through the central office, the research department, the fund-raising in the North, etc., is separate from the actual community organization, were simply added dimensions to support the basic approach of attempting to involve the total black community.

Q: How about SNCC's policy about nonviolence? Was that sort of a changing method? Could you discuss how that occurred? When were the big turning points for that?

Jones: I'm not sure I understand what you mean.

Q: In other words, before SNCC had a consistent policy of nonviolence and now it has a somewhat less consistent policy of nonviolence and the whites at least seem to interpret this as some kind of a major shift in methods.

Jones: Well, I think that's the problem of the whites. I don't think SNCC has any problem with nonviolence or has ever had any problem with nonviolence. What we said initially about, and that was a large and long dialogue within SNCC from the first time we got together, about nonviolence as a way of life or nonviolence as a tactic and there were those who pursued it as a way of life and those who pursued it as a tactic. But in terms of action there was always a commitment to nonviolence. We never went beyond the action phases of discussion of nonviolence. We never said, for instance, that once you were not engaged in an organized demonstration that you should not protect yourself. In the last two or three years this has come out more that it has been said and several people have taken the position that people should protect themselves.

Q: You said self-defense was always accepted except during organized demonstrations?

Jones: Well, I'm saying that we never discussed it in any public context except those who were purists in the sense of nonviolence as a way of life.

But there was never any discussion about what happened outside of a demonstration.

Q: So people were essentially left to follow what they thought was the best idea?

Jones: Of course. I might point out that I think the recent discussion about self-defense, to me represented a healthy next step in the process of growth of a concept of nonviolence.

Q: Why do you say that?

Jones: Well, I say that because I believe that the expression of one's integrity in the context of a choice between preserving his own life or eliminating someone who would, in the absence of any aggressive action, any defensive detaining action, destroy him is healthy. I never went so far in my own pilgrimage into nonviolence as to feel that to allow a nut to kill you was healthy. As a matter of fact, that seems to me to be an expression of something less than mental health. Because if you think you are important as a person, then to preserve that when there's a clear choice, a very clear choice, an unescapable choice of yourself being destroyed or someone else, I would have at that point no problem in preserving myself, absolutely not. I think I'm much more important than a psychotic Klansman. They are, as far as I'm concerned, a lot of psychotic middle-class bigots. Assuming that the choice is clear and it's unescapable that it's going to be your life or that person's life.

Q: Let's get on to some more specific things about the history of SNCC.

Jones: Yeah.

Q: After the Highlander Folk School conference you were put in charge of the voter registration section. Could you describe the events leading up to that conference?

Jones: I'd been in touch with Tim Jenkins for some time back as far as '56, '57 in NSA and during the initial stages of the sit-ins and demonstrations, and through that whole spring and summer Tim and I had been talking and into the next year. One of the things we wanted to do was to bring together some of the guys that emerged as strong leaders as a result of the sit-in. So Tim, in the summer of '61, it was around June or early July, arranged a conference or a discussion here in Washington with Belafonte and recruited several people into Washington for that purpose. Charles Sherrod, Diane Nash or now Diane Bevel, Lonnie King, Chuck McDew.

Q: Who was that after Diane Nash?

Jones: Lonnie King and Chuck McDew. And as a result of three days of discussion we decided that voter registration was the most important issue to be dealt with.

Q: Diane Nash was there?

Jones: Yes.

Q: She agreed?

Jones: No. We discussed with Harry at that point the necessity of having some money to proceed to determine how many guys were ready to take full time at working at this. And Tim wrote up a proposal that involved about \$3,000 and Harry promised to get some money.

Q: This was sometime in the spring of '61?

Jones: No. This was the beginning of the summer, late June. Then we went back to where we had been. I was out at the University of Illinois. I was there for some kind of seminar. And in the meantime Tim had set up a conference, a seminar funded by the Field Foundation in Nashville of again the key leadership that emerged from the sit-in in Nashville and directed by Harlan Randolph. I guess there were about twenty some of us there, including all the names of the people I've given you.

Q: What was the purpose of this conference?

Jones: To evaluate the existing problems, to determine what were the issues, to determine how to communicate those issues and how to organize around those issues.

Q: Do you know James Laue?

Jones: James Laue? I'm sure I do but . . .

Q: Yeah. He also wrote a Ph.D. thesis on SNCC and he seems to think the purpose of that conference was to train something like almost a core of professional revolutionaries. Was there anything of that in it, a core of professional leaders rather than the somewhat amateurish leadership that had gone on before?

Jones: Yeah. I suppose that's his words. I've given you my estimation of it.

Q: That was in August or July?

Jones: No. I don't recall exactly whether the conference you ask about was just prior to or during, I think it was June. Diane had a lot of problems understanding how voter registration was direct action in a tradition of *satyagraha* and she had some logic which went something like this: "voter registration involves politics; politics is dirty; therefore voter registration is dirty and immoral. Nonviolence is truth and good; therefore to attempt to mix voter registration and nonviolence is immoral."

Q: She seems to have gotten over that.

Jones: Yeah, well see, what happened then was that Diane proceeded to organize a group of people who believed in pure nonviolence. This group had essentially come out of the "nonviolence as a way of life" and she didn't understand voter registration to be that, so she wanted the whole thrust of SNCC's staff to be *satyagraha* she called it. And we wanted, we meaning myself, Charles Sherrod, Chuck McDew, Stokely, Dion [Diamond]. . .

Q: Oh, Charles Sherrod was in your group?

Jones: Yeah.

Q: Did you mention Stokely?

Jones: Yeah. Dion, Tim Jenkins. As a result, primarily, of that three-day analytical discussion in Washington, in which we went through the whole problem and decided on voter registration and were insisting that voter registration be the main thrust of SNCC.

Q: You haven't mentioned Bobby Kennedy's Justice Department officials. Were they involved too? I think Zinn does mention them.

Jones: Yeah well, that's another aspect of this thing going on concurrently with, well, following the discussion with Harry and developing concurrently with the seminar in Nashville. Tim, Chuck, Sherrod and myself after the Belafonte session continued to work together. Tim and I had incidentally been . . .

Q: Was Sherrod there too in Belafonte's office?

Jones: Yes. I'm trying to get this timing straight. It was either prior to the Belafonte thing or it must have been right afterward. Tim and I went to a conference down in Virginia being sponsored by the Phelps Stokes Fund. It's a retreat and there were present representatives from the Justice Department, several foundations, several Negro college presidents. And Tim and I proceeded to develop the program of a group of students working full time going into the South. And this involved necessarily then what role the Justice Department would play pursuant to the Civil Rights Act of '60.

Q: SNCC before this didn't have a staff, a full time staff?

Jones: They had one guy who was working after or between the . . .

Q: Ed King?

Jones: Ed King. Between the Raleigh conference and that meeting up in Tennessee. And the discussion concerning the role of the Justice Department was essentially going into the South for the first time in this context would require the protection of the persons by the federal government. So our discussion with Justice was in relation to procedures of implementing the

protections made possible by the voter registration Civil Rights Act of '60, principally the section which protected voters, potential voters, those registering and those assisting them to register from any harassment, threats, intimidation, violence, etc. We continued those discussions. We also from that meeting set up a meeting of foundations and other people. I have some hesitancy at this time of going into some of the details because a lot of this is confidential.

Q: These were what—Taconic Foundation, the Field Foundation, the Phelps Stokes Foundation—where there any others?

Jones: New World. And as I recall we were discussing the Rockefeller Foundation. And again the issue here was . . .

Q: The reason I ask about the involvement of the Justice people was that I had the vague impression that one of the reasons that Diane Nash and her group were so opposed to the voter registration idea was that they were suspicious of the involvement of the federal government.

Jones: Yeah, but that follows the logic that I outlined to you earlier.

Q: She was opposed to the federal government?

Jones: She was opposed to anything that had to do with politics because politics was immoral and nonviolence was moral and that was her logic, quite succinctly and explicitly.

Q: Who else agreed with her?

Jones: Well, Diane proceeded then during the course of the summer after the Belafonte meeting here to contact people in support of her position and those people were, as I remember them now, Bevel, the Right Reverend James Bevel, Marion Barry, Brooks—John Brooks I think it was, Jim Forman.

Q: Forman?

Jones: Forman.

Q: Wait a second. She contacted him because she thought he was with her position?

Jones: Matter of fact he was.

Q: Someone else told me this but I just thought she picked him because she was bringing somebody from outside who could be executive secretary.

Jones: Diane was never objective. She contacted Jim because Jim wanted to come down and she had been talking to Jim in Chicago and he was coming down as a part of her staff, and I will get into more specifically how this worked in a minute. Again, all this is so you can develop the chronology of that summer because all of those things were essentially in how the staff

operation got under way. The meetings with the foundations and other people were to develop the idea of voter registration, Justice [Department] in terms of the Civil Rights Act, with the foundations in terms of a research program known as the Voter Education Project. There were several meetings in '60 with Tim, Chuck, Sherrod.

Q: That's connected with the founding of COFO?

Jones: Yeah, but not with the founding of COFO as such. COFO followed from the founding of VEP. I'll explain how that happened. Now we then all converged on Nashville for the seminar. All these things had gone on prior to that.

Q: Diane started contacting people before?

Jones: We had gotten Tim. Well, Tim and I had been working in NSA since '56. In '60, the summer of '60, we were working together and got Tim elected National Affairs Vice Chairman of NSA. I was kind of acting as campaign manager, coordinator or campaign manager. And one day in Philadelphia Dion Diamond came into Tim's office and we talked to him about the program. He wanted to come in. Now other things going on prior to that were the Freedom Rides.

Q: What was Dion Diamond's view?

Jones: Yeah. I'm just saying that's how the contact with Dion came in. Dion came down and became part of the voter registration thing. Let me digress for a second and . . .

Q: To the Freedom Rides?

Jones: Yeah, we'll go back even further than that. After the summer conference of '60 we developed an executive committee of SNCC. Chuck was made chairman and there were representatives from each state.

Q: Chuck McDew?

Jones: Chuck McDew. After the conference in '60 in Atlanta, Chuck was made chairman. And on the executive committee were several people, principally, but not exclusively, Diane, Sherrod, of course Chuck, Smith, Ruby Doris, myself and other people, I don't recall everybody. Of course, Ella was advisor and incidentally has always been a very strong, very powerful person in SNCC, essentially because we all respected her very much and loved her very much.

Q: I was very impressed with her when I met her.

Jones: Now, during the fall that year we met in executive committee once a month or something like that. And in the January meeting of '61 a group of guys in Rock Hill, South Carolina along with Tom Gaither, who was

working with CORE, had been arrested. They were from Friendship College, had been arrested for sitting-in at a lunch counter and they chose to take the thirty days rather than pay bond which was a current issue in SNCC at that point, jail versus bail, and was Diane's thing.

Q: She favored jail.

Jones: She favored jail. So in that discussion it became very clear that we had a very clear decision to make about jail versus bail. And I remember Sherrod saying, "okay, it's very clear to me what we've got to do." And I said, "yeah, I'm ready to go to Rock Hill." And Sherrod said, "well, I'm ready." So we both looked over at Diane and she fumbled around and finally said, "well, I guess I'm ready too." And then Ruby Doris wanted to go.

Q: You were in Atlanta then?

Jones: Yeah. So we decided to go to Rock Hill and join the people in jail. So Sherrod, Charles Sherrod, myself, Diane and Ruby Doris went to Rock Hill and we got arrested. We went to trial the next day and were found guilty of trespassing and we were sentenced to thirty days and we went to York County chain gang, York County prison camp. The girls went too but they were separated and we were working with John and the other guys and we were there for thirty days. Now that's important in that it explained some of the background of the relationship between us and Diane and the executive committee function of SNCC.

Q: You all spent thirty days in jail?

Jones: Yeah. On the chain gang in Rock Hill. The personal relationships and the way the organization was functioning at that point we were trying to coordinate the efforts of students all over the South. Now we came out and I went back to school and everybody went back to school.

Q: Could you spell out what you meant about the history of your relationship with Diane, why you told that story.

Jones: Yeah, because it's important to understand the interrelationships between these people going back to at least the summer of '60 which will also shed some light on the decision that was made in '61, the summer of '61 in Nashville about the direction of the program.

Jones: Now after the chain gang experience which is in itself another experience I don't want to get into now, we went back to school.

Q: You went to school in Atlanta?

Jones: No. I was in school at Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina. In the school of divinity. My local board tried to get me

into the service at that time, claiming I wasn't in school and I was on the chain gang. And the president of the college and the board of directors . . .

Q: They put you in jail, then they tried to draft you because you were in jail?

Jones: Yeah. And the president of the college and the board of directors took on the local board. The school took on the local selective service board and said that I was in school, that I was accepted back full time, that they reserved the right to determine who was a student in good standing and requested that the local board tend to its business. Well of course I can go on with that, but anyway in late spring, I guess it was in May, CORE in New York was talking about the Freedom Rides. And a group came to Charlotte, that was Jim Peck, James Farmer, John Moody is another name, another guy.

Q: These are all CORE people?

Jones: Yeah. Definitely. John Moody had been active with the group here that Stokely had been working with, and developed in Washington, somewhere. Moody was with Stokely . . . Anyway, they came through Charlotte and so we met them at the bus station. We had a planning discussion that night and some of them stayed at the house and caught the bus the next day. I was very much concerned about the group because I knew what they were getting into and some of them knew what they were getting into and some of them didn't. Anyway we followed them on down and then they ran into Birmingham, Alabama and then boom, all hell broke loose. I was going into finals. Oh, I had to write about twenty papers that semester because I had to make up some stuff because I had been out for thirty days and we had to make it all up, we had to comply with the requirements of divinity school at Johnson C. Smith University. Diane called me one night after the people had gotten beaten up in Birmingham and said, "what do you think about following up the Freedom Rides?" And she called me as SNCC executive committee, and I said "fine, we have to, there's no question about it." We had not been as successful in the Rock Hill thing in bringing together all of the students in the South. There had not been any one thing that had brought students out of their local sit-in movement activity into a joint action kind of program other than the executive committee of SNCC, and that one of the things that we were trying to do with the Rock Hill situation was provide that focal point for organized, cooperative action. And it was successful in that a couple of busloads came in from Nashville, but not totally. So this then provided the handle for

bringing together as many students as possible throughout the South. So I said, "of course we have to follow it up." And then I called Chuck McDew and I called Sherrod and she called several other people. And I finished my exams at 12:00 one day and I was on the bus at 1:00 the same day going with another guy, I'll think of his name in a minute, from the school of divinity who was from Birmingham, going to Atlanta, going to join the Freedom Rides in Montgomery. Diane and another group had gone in just prior to that and joined the group in Birmingham, or around Birmingham, and they were in Montgomery. Clyde, Clyde Carter was the guy that went down with me from Smith. Clyde and I got to Atlanta, we went out to the airport for some reason, I don't recall why. Oh, we were going to fly in so we could join the first group from Montgomery into Mississippi. We ran into, at the airport, John David Maguire, Bill [William Sloane] Coffin. Bill was the chaplain at Yale. John Maguire was from Wesleyan. George Bundy. Q: Not *the* George Bundy?

Jones: No. There's another George Bundy, a law student at Yale. These were white professors, ministers, teachers, Negro law students. So we decided rather than fly down, we would start the second wave from Atlanta. So we spent the night in Atlanta and the next morning proceeded by Greyhound, or was it Trailways, from Atlanta on the bus. We got to Montgomery and the crowd was very large and hostile. We got there about 1:00. The first group had left going to Mississippi at about 7:00 or 8:00. And we spent the night, there were numerous discussions and Bill Coffin was working with the Peace Corps at that point. And they were friends of George Bundy and I got to know their confidants, some of their confidants. They were on the phone with Bobby Kennedy . . .

Q: What do you think was the significance for the Freedom Rides?

Jones: Well, I was explaining that. Anyway we decided to go down. The next day we went down. All of us got arrested at the bus station in Montgomery and that included Ralph Abernathy, Fred Shuttlesworth, Wyatt Walker, myself, Clyde Carter, George Bundy and John Maguire and Bill Coffin, the whole group with the exception of Martin. We stayed in four or five days. Anyway, that case was appealed. Anyway it was finally resolved by the Supreme Court, which is another thing. We all met at the Supreme Court for the hearing of the case and sat in the judge's chambers, not the bench but in the chambers that were reserved for the judges and guests. But we had acted and, of course, the Freedom Rides continued to send waves in and that, of course, was Stokely and quite a few people. Dion had gone in

on that and Sherrod had been on that first wave and they got to Jackson and organized a lot of people. All right. That had essentially accomplished the bringing together of students from all over the South, and North too, but primarily the South in a project. It was coordinated and it was Southernwide rather than local cities. It also brought together these same people that we've been talking about since we started. Okay, now we all met back at Nashville, Tennessee. Incidentally, Reggie Robinson had gone down to McComb—well, that's another thing I'll talk about in a minute. We're all now back in Nashville and then the Highlander meeting was coming up. Now, one other important thing. Chuck, Tim, Sherrod, Chuck McDew, Tim Jenkins and Charles Sherrod and myself, Dion and Stokely had been talking during, I think, the first week, this conference was after the first week of summer, about the whole thing. No one had been in touch with Harry since Washington. Well, they'd been in touch but no one had followed through since Washington. No one wanted to take the responsibility. So I then proceeded to call Harry in Lake Tahoe and say, "where is the bread that you were supposed to get?" And he said, "let me call Martin and you call Martin and call Martin up in Martha's Vineyard."

Q: He was going to get the money from King?

Jones: Martin was involved. So I got to Martin. Martin said call Wyatt Walker, call Wyatt. It seems that Harry had gotten some money from somewhere to SCLC for voter registration for pretty much the same thing we've been talking about. Same \$3,000. And he told Martin to give up that money. Well anyway, we got back to Martin and Martin called Wyatt and Harry called Wyatt. So Wyatt sent me in Nashville a check for \$1,000 which I then deposited in a bank in Nashville and necessarily then became the focal point for everything that took place from that point until we turned the money over to the group much later. So I had the money and we then began to solidify very quickly. And then it was a matter of where the money was going to go. Who was going to have it, whether it was going to be the voter registration staff or the nonviolent *satyagraha*.

Q: Well, the money was raised for the voter registration, wasn't it?

Jones: Not this particular effort as such.

Q: What happened to the other \$2,000?

Jones: Well, we got it at a different point. I guess for my own ego purposes it's important to point out that nobody wanted to take the responsibility of calling Harry or take the responsibility of handling the money, so I did. So we then all gathered at Highlander Folk School. I had been delegated within

the group the responsibility of carrying the voter registration at the conference. I developed a program for effective . . .

Q: How come this was done through King?

Jones: Martin?

Q: Yeah.

Jones: Well, it wasn't done through King, it was done through some money that Harry raised.

Q: No. How come the money that Belafonte raised was given . . . ?

Jones: No, this was much prior to our first discussion with Harry that the money went down there.

Q: I see. Right after the Freedom Rides. Then you had been getting money from Belafonte?

Jones: No. We didn't get any money from Harry at all. There was no money involved up to that time of the call to Harry in Lake Tahoe. Except Harry, well somebody had paid for the flight.

Q: Before the Washington meeting Belafonte had already raised this \$3,000 for you.

Jones: Not for us, no. For voter registration. And it had gone then to SCLC.

Q: And then after that you had the Washington conference and he agreed to raise more money.

Jones: He agreed to raise some money.

Q: Some unspecified sum.

Jones: See, we were not working with SCLC. It was two different functions at that point.

Q: I was just wondering why it did happen that way.

Jones: Because the money wasn't being used, first of all, by SCLC. I mean it was just sitting there. They didn't have a program.

Q: It seems odd for one organization to give money to another.

Jones: Well. I won't go into it but you have to understand the nature of Harry's relationship with Martin and SCLC. It was money that Harry had raised and it was earmarked for voter registration and Harry said that the money should go to SNCC and told Martin to tell Wyatt that the money should go, well, to us.

Q: Well, then later on you said it was a question at SNCC, a matter of debate where the money would go.

Jones: Well, yeah, what I mean is, it was earmarked to us for the use of determining whether or not, as a matter of fact, we could establish a staff,

a group of guys. About two pages back you'll see that right after the conference in Washington, when we presented Harry with the necessity of having money, the money was to be used to do research and contact the guys to see whether sufficient people were ready.

Q: That was the Washington meeting.

Jones: That's right.

Q: But this money was before the Washington meeting.

Jones: Yeah, but it doesn't make any difference about where the money came from. The fact was that Harry had made the commitment and it was then that I called him in Tahoe that we were asking where the money was and he proceeded to get the money. It's not important where the money came from.

Q: It seems funny to me that he raised the money for purposes of developing a SNCC staff.

Jones: No, he didn't.

Q: He raised it for voter registration?

Jones: You see, this is prior to. When he got the money, money probably gotten back in early spring and there was no such thing at that point as a SNCC staff working full time. And the money had gotten transmitted to Atlanta, and was in the bank in Atlanta. Now subsequent to that, completely unrelated to that as such, we got together with Harry and the whole thing we've been talking about developed. So when I called Harry . . .

Q: Didn't SCLC think that Belafonte was kind of an Indian giver?

Jones: I'm sure that's true, but that wasn't our problem.

Q: Okay. He had given it to them to be used for voter registration.

Jones: They had raised it.

Q: They raised it?

Jones: They had gone to him. He got this money. It was earmarked for voter registration. Well of course there were some problems in Atlanta and that's why we went to Harry and to Martin. But that's something else.

Q: What happened was when he raised the money he thought it was for voter registration and then he changed his mind and decided it would be to develop a SNCC staff?

Jones: But they aren't inconsistent. They were the same thing, because when we agreed in Washington we were agreeing that we would be working on voter registration. That was the only purpose that we left Washington with an agreement with Harry, ourselves and Harry. So the money went for voter registration.

Q: The only question is why there was a debate in SNCC afterwards on where the money would go.

Jones: Then you understand Diane Nash's role in the whole thing. Diane wouldn't go along with the consensus that the rest of us had reached. She wanted the money to be used for nonviolence, *satyagraha*, which brings us right down to the succinct issues at Highlander Folk School. And everybody was there except Forman. Everybody was there including Ed King who was with Diane because we, well, a lot of reasons, no need to go into them. And we had a very intensive debate that everybody participated in. I presented the voter registration program and Diane presented the nonviolence *satyagraha* program and we got down to a vote on what the emphasis of SNCC would be. And Ella was very key on this too. She was trying to keep us all together and she did, and again, it was a fact of our respect for her though we would have gone against Ella if Ella had taken the position that the money should go for direct action.

Q: Okay, you were in the Highlander Folk School and Ella Baker was holding the group together.

Jones: Well, see, we'd been trying and trying and trying and trying with Diane to get her to come in and she kept insisting not to, so we had the votes to carry the thing but there was concern on all of our parts that we have everybody with us, though we had gotten to the point where that was absolutely not necessary. We were going to go.

Q: Diane did threaten at that point to break away from SNCC? Was there a serious danger of that, of SNCC splitting?

Jones: I thought there would have been. But then there was a matter of who would have been with her and the resources and her definition of why she was out there, going back to the premise I told you earlier about voter registration being politics and politics being immoral, therefore voter registration being immoral.

Q: Did she eventually change her mind? What did happen?

Jones: So we went into the whole thing, discussed quite a while, got quite involved. So we hammered away at a compromise and Ella was there.

Q: She's very modest but I got the impression when talking to her that she had . . .

Jones: And the compromise was that we have two programs in SNCC, voter registration and I would be head of that and direct action and Diane would be head of that. I still had the money. So we went back to Nashville and

finished the seminar, which was excellent, incidentally, was exactly for the purposes for which it was designed.

Q: You had speakers?

Jones: Yeah, we had all kinds.

Q: Who spoke there?

Jones: I don't remember. Now Bob Moses had as a result of several things, primarily his working in Mississippi to get people to the 1960 conference, run into Steptoe and several people down there, and he had gone down the beginning of the summer, around the end of the summer of '61.

Q: Which '60 conference did he work to get people for?

Jones: SNCC. The only big conference in 1960, the summer of '60. He went back and went down to McComb, Mississippi and was working there the summer of '61. He'd been there through all of this stuff. And meantime several people had gone down with him. Reggie Robinson was one, a guy named Travis Britt was another. I called Bob and told him we had some money. And he was then part of the voter registration program. And we started sending him some money which was the best thing since popcorn. We pulled Bob out of there. Well, we did several things. One, we left Nashville. We all congregated in New York City at the Atlantic Hilton or the Atlantic Sheraton and discussed detailed plans of going into Mississippi. The plan was that we would go to McComb and have a staff meeting, have a meeting in which we would develop the whole specifics of the administration of the program. We'd already begun to talk about it.

Q: Why did you decide on Mississippi?

Jones: Well, because Bob was there and he didn't want to pull out and several other people who were active at that point were in McComb and we wanted to get with him and also we wanted to go out and have a first meeting. So for all of the psychological and physical obvious reasons we wanted to start it right in the hub.

Q: Would you say that choosing to go to Mississippi, go into the very worst area, is connected with SNCC's concern with self-love and dignity for the Negro?

Jones: Yes. See, it was a symbol, Mississippi was a symbol. We had to break that psychological symbol, both in our own minds and the minds of the people in the rest of the South and the country. So Diane was at the meeting in New York and we decided to go away for two weeks, all of us to get ready for the possibility of death, also the possibility of revolution and changes in the South. And we did. We each got a little money, I gave

everybody some money and everybody went to different places. Most people went home . . . I went home and we were to meet back in New York in two weeks and then proceed to Mississippi. Diane wanted some money to get her people together and she wanted more, she wanted a heck of a lot of money, but anyway . . .

Q: Did Diane go to Mississippi?

Jones: Yeah, well I gave her some money. She went and did her stuff and got her people together and she came back. We all met in New York. Tim Jenkins, Chuck McDew, Charles Sherrod, Diane and myself. And I had an old car, a Pontiac '55. And we proceeded to drive from New York to Mississippi. Stopped in my home, stopped in Sherrod's home. Diane was very sick at one point. We got her to a doctor.

Q: Did Diane go on in the car?

Jones: No, Diane split somewhere. So anyway, we stopped in Atlanta and that was the first time for me in the car.

Q: First time for what?

Jones: That we had gone to Mississippi. Chuck Sherrod had been to Mississippi, but not the rest of us. I never in my life will forget going into Mississippi. We had stopped just on this side of the state line to get some gas and Sherrod had gone to the bathroom and gone to the white bathroom and the man pulled out a gun.

Q: In Mississippi?

Jones: No, this was in Alabama. We had stopped for gas and he almost shot Sherrod. We had that experience and then we went across the state line. We had been singing and stuff. The minute we passed that state line everybody in the car was crying. And then I think McDew started singing. We all started singing. We carefully picked our way to . . .

Q: What were you singing? Do you remember?

Jones: *We Shall Overcome*, I think, was the thing we started off singing. Everybody was scared as hell. That's what happened and we realized how profound that concept of Mississippi was to everybody. We drove on down to McComb, went through Jackson and got there about 10:00 at night. We were riding up the dirt road and Reggie Robinson says, "oh yeah." The next day we started to meet, Diane's people had come in by that time, by the next morning and we're all around together and we started all developing the program. We agreed on forty dollars a week. And then somebody said that there were . . .

Q: How many of you were there then?

Jones: Oh hell, there were about fifteen of us.

Q: That was all of SNCC?

Jones: Yeah. Somebody said there were some kids in jail. Marion Barry had come down in August. This was September 4th. Marion had come down early in August and gotten these kids involved in a sit-in at the Trailways bus station, Woolworths, and they all got arrested and they were in jail and they were in there about three weeks.

Q: In Jackson?

Jones: No, in McComb. I went to see them and they had been there and there was Hollis, Curtis Hayes, Brenda Travis, Hollis Watkins, one other guy. And those kids were just full of confidence, singing. That was the first time they had any kind of experience like this and we came back and decided we had to get them out before we could do anything and so we raised money. So we all split and went in different directions to raise \$5,000. Diane's people, our people, Sherrod, McDew and myself and we went and Chuck McDew and myself raised \$5,000. We all gathered back a month later.

Q: Where did you get it from?

Jones: I don't remember. Norman found some.

Q: Norman?

Jones: Anyway, we got back and I got the kids out.

Q: That was for them?

Jones: What?

Q: What was the \$5,000 for?

Jones: For bail for those kids. Anyway, we got the kids out and we didn't have to use that check. I don't know how we did it but anyway we then continued the meeting and got the kids out. They wouldn't let one of the girls back in. Brenda Travis.

Q: Back in where?

Jones: School.

Q: That's right. She went to a reform school.

Jones: So we had a mass meeting and that was one of the great mass meetings of the movement. The tension was high, I'll never forget that.

Q: How did you get people to come?

Jones: We just got them out there. And that place was packed and we came marching in singing all of us there.

Q: Was SNCC working anywhere else at this point or was the whole staff in McComb?

Jones: Bevel preached, Reggie was leading it, and Sherrod was singing and preaching. And the tension just built and built.

Q: They just preached about politics?

Jones: Yeah, they were talking about the situation there. And the thing was so great that none of us went to bed that whole night. It was after the meeting and people were just ready. The kids were going to come out of school the next day and we stayed up all night. Nobody could sleep, wanted to sleep, just stayed up communing, because that had been the thing that brought us spiritually together. Very emotional.

Q: Exactly when was this mass meeting?

Jones: It was about October 5th or 6th. The next day we all gathered up at the office. Bob Zellner came down that morning, yes he did. And he looked out the window and here came a huge crowd of kids, about 136 in the school. He came into the office upstairs and talked about what it was going to involve. Bob was very concerned about the fact that this was going to be direct action and we were going to have to stick with those kids and follow through.

Q: What school were they from?

Jones: McComb something. The high school. And we agreed that we would stick with them. And it was also agreed that I would stay out.

Q: These kids wanted to do direct action?

Jones: They wanted to go to the courthouse and insist that Brenda Travis be allowed back in school. I was to stay out and organize pressure and public attention around the issue.

Q: Zellner was concerned about the safety?

Jones: No, that was Bob Moses.

Q: Bob Moses?

Jones: Bob Moses was concerned that we stick with those kids.

Q: He wanted you to stick with the kids?

Jones: Yeah, no question. And he was saying in a very serious vein that he didn't really, he wasn't at first very committed but once he saw it developing he was seeing how serious this thing was.

Q: Was there any feeling that this would distract from voter registration?

Jones: Not terribly. Bob expressed it more than anyone else, but once it developed we were in it all together. So they all walked down to the courthouse and everybody got arrested. Chuck can tell you about it. Are you going to see Chuck?

Q: Chuck McDew?

Jones: Yeah. He can tell you about what happened down there.

Q: Everybody, the whole SNCC staff?

Jones: The whole SNCC staff, all the kids, everybody but Reggie was arrested.

Q: Skipping back a little, the mass meeting, was that mainly about voter registration?

Jones: Voter registration, what had happened and the movement.

Q: I was wondering about how the split worked out. I mean the problems of those two courts.

Jones: Oh, well, see one of Diane's people had gotten the kids in jail and all of us went out to get them out. So that in effect, that bridged, began to bridge the gap. Marion Barry got them in jail and had split. And we were supposed to go around the country raising some money. I mean we were all extending ourselves.

Q: And then what happened?

Jones: All right. Everybody got arrested except Reggie.

Q: How did he escape?

Jones: That's another story . . .

Q: I'm just kidding.

Jones: He's been involved in quite a few things. I was the only one out at that point, back of the little grocery store. And the cops had a warrant out for me and they would come in and I would put on . . .

Q: And you also were arrested?

Jones: No, I wasn't. See, I was the one that was to stay out and make the contact with the world. And this is a very profound thing to understand. Those guys went in there knowing full well that they were going to get arrested and the potential consequences of that arrest. In McComb, Mississippi we had absolutely nothing at that point in terms of office. There was no kind of office operation, nothing of what we know now in terms of any kind of contact with the press or anything. And those guys went. We all moved on the faith in each other that we would do what we had to do to save their lives and to get them out and to get the movement going. And they went in, went down there with the knowledge that they were likely to get arrested and that I would be the only cat out there between them and death. And, of course I was aware of that too. So we started the phone calls. The cops would be coming in. I'd put on this white jacket and be back there chopping meat. I must have messed up \$5 worth of pork chops. I didn't

know what I was doing but the guy's be asking for Charles Jones. "No, sir." I'd be just back there.

Q: Did you say "No, sir"?

Jones: Oh, of course. And I'd go back to the phone.

Q: Why were you chopping meat?

Jones: Well, I was a butcher. I had to be there because if I had been arrested then it would be all over. No one else was out. So I had to go into this disguise. They didn't know what I looked like, they just had a warrant for Charles Jones. As a matter of fact that warrant is still outstanding. So then I started calling. I called Jim Forman. I called the SNCC office in Atlanta and Jim had just walked in the office. Had just arrived from Chicago, just walked in the office. I told him to see me and he said, "okay baby." I never met him in my life and from that point he worked. Then we started calling. I called Harry, I called the Justice Department. Anyway, we were in touch with a group in Chicago at that point, the press. See that was the only link. That was the first contact with the world with SNCC in that kind of situation. These kids, you know, everybody in jail, and we were getting all kinds of publicity.

Q: Did the Justice Department do anything?

Jones: Well, we got this word that the Klan came down and told some Negroes that they were going to take Bob Moses out of jail. They were taking everybody over to Magnolia, which is the county jail, about eight miles from there. We got the word they were going to take Bob out and kill him. [Herbert] Lee had already been shot by this guy, a state representative [E. H. Hurst], and he was first on the list and Bob moved up to number one on the list of the Klan to be killed. So I called the Justice Department and told them all this and they told me to talk to the local FBI guy and told him where to come to find me and he came up and I told him what the scene was and he said, "oh, I don't think so, I know them people. I've been living with them. I don't think they'd do anything like that." And then I called back [Washington] and I told them to get somebody down here because their guy was from the South and he was saying "oh, I don't think they'd do that." So, John Doar [a Justice Department Civil Rights Division lawyer] . . . I'll never forget this as long as I live. I was sitting back there. People were still in jail and, lord knows, were relying on the Justice Department, to protect people. I called Burke Marshall and told him "get on the FBI, man" and Burke said, "it's a matter of jurisdiction." And I sat right there not knowing when the cops were going to come in. And all of a

sudden John Doar walked in and he said, "I'm John Doar." I said, you know, "very good" and I was relaxed and I had all the might of the federal government. I told him the whole scene and he said, "well, I'm sorry but there ain't nothing that I can do."

Q: Did he come down from Washington just to tell you there was nothing he could do?

Jones: I don't know why he came but he said, "I'm just as scared of them as you are, man, there's nothing I can do." I looked at him and here was all the force, honor, the military technology, power, of the greatest country, the most powerful country in the history of the world, represented in the form of John Doar, and he says to me, "I'm just scared as you are, man, ain't nothing I can do." And that pretty much completely shook me out of any illusions that I might have had about the federal government.

There was a Dr. Anderson where I was staying and he had a gun . . . And I was very pleased that he would have just as soon shot anybody that came up to the door.

Q: He was just a local Negro?

Jones: Yeah, a local Negro doctor. So we decided to get Chuck out. I couldn't be seen. If I was ever picked up again it was all over. So Anderson got together some money and went and got Chuck out. Chuck came in. I'll never forget that evening. He came over and we embraced. Chuck probably never would say this, but tears came to his eyes and tears came to mine. The money order was in his name and mine. It was either/or, that's what it was. Charles Jones or Chuck McDew. So he went down to the bank and cashed it and went and got everybody out.

Q: Where did that come from?

Jones: This was that \$5,000 money order we had gotten to get those kids out. Chuck can tell you about that. And he went into the bank with that \$5,000 money order. Anyway, we got everybody out and we were having a meeting at Anderson's house and we were talking about how we're going to follow up and stick with the people. And Diane, of all people, and Bevel were saying, "uh, uh, we're leaving." We decided that we had to get organized so we decided everybody would go to Atlanta but Chuck. Chuck made that decision. He was going to stay. Everybody pulled into Atlanta to organize.

Q: Didn't Bob Moses stay?

Jones: No. Nobody but Chuck. That was another beautiful scene. And we pulled into Atlanta to get organized. We decided that Sherrod had developed

a thing about Southwest Georgia and I was staying around for a while but then I wanted to go to Atlanta. I went to Atlanta. I mean I went to Albany and joined the Albany Movement. At that point the function of the staff became a group thing and I passed, somewhat reluctantly, I was still young and insecure, but I kind of began to pass all the authority I had as a result of the money and the money.

Q: Did you say it was in your name?

Jones: Yeah.

Q: How come?

Jones: Well, I had to take out the responsibility.

Q: Could you follow up? Before we go into talking about Albany, do you want to follow up on what happened in Mississippi with the McComb project?

Jones: Well Chuck stayed there during the time we pulled back, during the time we pulled back to Atlanta to organize.

Q: Did he get anything done?

Jones: Well, once we left everybody was saying, "oops, SNCC done snuck." And Chuck put up a little sign on the door saying, "SNCC ain't snuck, SNCC done stuck."

Q: How long did he stay there?

Jones: He stayed there a month and a half, something like that. So at the Atlanta meeting Bob went back, Dion went down, Chuck stayed and they, all the kids, got kicked out of school.

Q: All the high school students?

Jones: The ones that had been demonstrating and gotten arrested. So Chuck and . . .

Q: Mississippi has no compulsory education law?

Jones: Well, yeah, but for a criminal activity like that you don't deserve an education. You know, like going down to the courthouse and saying we would like to have our fellow students back in. Of course they kicked all of them out. And Chuck and Dion and Bob started Nonviolent High School for those kids up in the office. Nonviolent High. Chuck was teaching.

Q: That's its official name?

Jones: That's right. Nonviolent High School. Dion was teaching Physics. Bob was teaching English Literature. They all combined.

Q: Did they teach anything besides standard subjects?

Jones: They all combined on Negro history. That's where we got into the stuff about textbooks in Mississippi. I remember they had a section in there talking about the "war of Northern aggression."

Q: That's the civil war?

Jones: Yeah, the "war of Northern aggression" and how the "best friends to the semi-savage," this was 1961.

Q: Was this textbook used in Negro high schools?

Jones: Oh, yes, the "best friend" to the semi-savage African was not the Northern so-called liberals, abolitionists, but the kindhearted loving Southern patriots. Then we finally got all those kids into school in Atlanta, I mean in Jackson.

Q: The regular public schools?

Jones: No, it was a private high school. Dion was left there and Chuck, for a while Bob, Dion was there by himself a lot, at least he was pulling there by himself for a while. He's, incidentally, white. That's the response to your question.

Q: Right. Yeah, that's what I missed. So after Atlanta it sort of slowed down.

Jones: Yeah, Dion was supposed to have been there but more and more came up from CORE. They came up and were calling them Freedom Rides through McComb and they got arrested and a lot of publicity and looked around and Dion wasn't there. But we stayed there and Bob stayed there.

Q: You worked in Albany. Could you tell me how that got started and what happened?

Jones: Yeah, Charles Sherrod had done a research paper proposal on Southwest Georgia. The end of the summer of '61 in that first organization meeting right after McComb in Atlanta we considered program proposals and considered Sherrod's proposal and decided to support that proposal.

Q: What else was considered?

Jones: A project called MOM, Move on Mississippi, presented by Diane Nash, in which she proposed to organize the state of Mississippi for a grand mass march on the state capital.

Q: March on Mississippi, or move on . . .

Jones: Move on Mississippi.

Q: That was rejected?

Jones: No. The Committee would support that and the Albany project, continue to support McComb. Sherrod and Cordell Reagon proceeded to Albany. I worked in there for a while and went back for a trial in

Montgomery on the Freedom Rides, did some fundraising in New York and then about three weeks later went to Albany.

Q: How was the Albany experience different than the one in McComb?

Jones: We had done much more community contact. We had developed the approach around a mass community involvement, total community involvement. Voter registration and direct action, which action was separate from voter registration. That is to say, that an attempt to register to vote in most parts of the South at that point was very much a direct action. In light of the intimidation, shooting presently being conducted both in that section of Georgia and Mississippi and throughout the South.

Q: Was this mass, or community involvement different from McComb?

Jones: Yes. Different in that we organized the Albany movement prior to action or simultaneously with action, but most of it was prior to the action. We established an umbrella structure that involved all of the local groups, NAACP, citizens groups, and then proceeded to set up an office which was in the community and paid for by the community, made possible by our personal contact and involvement of people. We went to the bus station. There were three or four people who went to the bus station which was located adjacent to a Negro community—Harlem, they called it—and this was . . .

Q: They called it Harlem?

Jones: In Albany. And this was as the students from Albany State were going home for Thanksgiving. A couple of people got arrested when they went into the white section. Keep in mind that this was after the Interstate Commerce ruling and after the Freedom Rides. One of the persons was a girl—Bertha Gober—who decided to stay in jail rather than be bailed out. And she stayed in over Thanksgiving Day and the day after and we took that occasion to develop the issue by extensive coverage, most of which we did including pictures that we took of her in jail behind bars by means of a camera we took in unbeknownst to them, to Chief Pritchett, and her statements of why she was staying in, which were printed in a Negro weekly of Southwest Georgia. The *Albany Herald*, owned and operated by a Massachusetts resident who had come to Albany and out-Southerned the Southerners, who would not carry either full factual accounts or wouldn't carry any account at all.

Q: Did it in fact print this whole incident?

Jones: In an article buried in the back pages. We proceeded from that to institute these meetings at which time we talked about the whole problem

of voter registration and discrimination in Albany. Now that's prior to the trial of Bertha. At the trial itself, during the trial we had been in touch with several students at Albany State College who then organized on campus. We had had an organization there and the president had told us not to come around talking about these black issues. As a result of that organization, at the trial there were 200 students who walked from Albany State College, who walked to the courthouse. At that scene police proceeded to attempt to disperse the crowd and I took the offensive and told people to proceed to walk around single file not blocking the sidewalk. And the action involved not only students but picked up many other people in the process of emotion. It also projected me as a "particularly light-skinned, blue eyed Negro" spokesman in the *Albany Herald*. Negro.

Q: They wrote out Negro?

Jones: Yes, I'm quoting the description. That action precipitated a very large mass meeting. At which point the Albany movement relationship as we had previously developed it began to emerge.

Q: Local leadership, you mean?

Jones: Our roles were defined primarily as a catalyst in developing leadership.

Q: Was SNCC successful in developing local leadership? That is, did the movement carry on after SNCC left?

Jones: Yeah. That was obviously around November when the national celebration of the turkey commences. Now around the first of December the Freedom Rides, Jim Forman, Tom and . . .

Q: Tom?

Jones: Hayden, Tom Hayden

Q: Oh, Tom Hayden.

Jones: Tom Martin, a lieutenant. Was that his name?

Q: A white guy?

Jones: A white guy who went down to McComb, came down to McComb that first time, a very important kid on the staff, was up at Brandeis the last couple of years. I'll think of his name. On the train they used the "white waiting room," whereupon several of us did and whereupon we proceeded to walk to our cars. We were all, several of us, were arrested for disorderly conduct and taken to jail in a Cadillac. Most all of the Freedom Riders were arrested, and myself, Sherrod and . . . proceeded to organize. Several of us came out, all of us came out the night of the mass meeting and proceeded down the hall and we had all been . . . and the next day a large number, in the hundreds, went down to the jail to protest, most of whom, a large

number, were arrested and it was during that whole week some 1,200 people were arrested. We were up to Nashville, Albany, Georgia during that week. Several key members of the executive committee of Albany negotiated with the city. They got certain notice that they would release all of the people in jail, would not press charges, would open up the interstate bus station and train stations. So on that agreement we all came out. Martin came in in the meantime.

Q: Did the facilities remain integrated?

Jones: Hell, no. Not only did they not prosecute, they did attempt to prosecute the cases. They also continued to arrest people at the bus station and train stations.

Q: So they went back on their word completely?

Jones: Yeah, that was in the finest tradition of Southern gentlemen integrity.

Q: In general, in the Albany movement what do you think was accomplished?

Jones: The development of a mass approach, a complete mass city approach to the problems, everybody coming out.

Q: Was progress made toward the solution of any of the problems?

Jones: We had to subsequently go into a bus boycott, voter registration campaign, a federal suit, picketing, other jail arrests for lunch counters. The federal government was very shaky in most of its feelings with that whole situation. Howard Zinn pretty accurately describes the role of the federal government in that thing.

Q: What happened with the Move on Mississippi?

Jones: Nothing.

Q: Never?

Jones: No. Diane went down and after the Albany movement we came back and had an executive committee meeting. All of us were very anxious to know, we had gone to Albany and thrown in all our other resources and gotten Albany going and we all came back anxious to find out what Diane had been doing in Mississippi on the MOM project and asked Diane how many people she had ready to go and she said, oh, about twelve.

Q: You mentioned before the founding of COFO. Switching over to that could you explain how that developed out of VEP?

Jones: Well, Bob Moses stayed in Mississippi, began to make contacts throughout the state, got some funds from the voter education project for some research in the problem of voter registration in Mississippi generally. And got it funded through an organization he had developed which was a

coalition of community organizations in Mississippi which I guess is what COFO is. He had drawn together all of his efforts in Mississippi into that organization.

Q: Into COFO?

Jones: Yes. And this was funded through the Voter Education Project.

Q: What do you think was the significance of COFO over all?

Jones: The organization on a statewide level is just another dimension to the organization on a citywide level that we had in Albany. Local organizations dealing with . . .

Q: Was there collaboration with groups like the NAACP?

Jones: They were all members of COFO. Well, I would rather not go into that because of my limited knowledge of the in-fighting that was associated with COFO except to point out that there was at all times, there were problems with NAACP. We ran into them directly in Albany. As a matter of fact there was a point in the organization of the Albany movement where the regional director informed the Albany leadership, many of whom had been old NAACP workers that either they direct all their activities to NAACP or NAACP would pull out completely. And our approach to that was to take a position that everybody should be a member of the NAACP. We should all be working toward getting everybody in Albany to be a member of NAACP. And as a matter of fact that was all they were doing in Albany anyway, that was the extent of their program so we shouldn't have any problem.

Q: That is, having everybody as a member was the extent of their program?

Jones: So we pretty effectively coopted them.

Q: This is a program in Mississippi?

Jones: Albany.

Q: In Albany. Wait, I'm confused.

Jones: No, I stated earlier that we had problems all the time within NAACP and we had handled it in Albany to some great extent the way it was handled in Mississippi, where they took that kind of position.

Q: What was going on in SNCC in 1962? Could you tell me about the various events that led up to the decline of the summer of . . . That seems like a period people don't talk about much.

Jones: Cut that [tape recorder] off a sec . . .

Q: In '63 people started working on FDP and stuff. '61 was Albany. In '62 Greenwood was . . . things were going on there.

Jones: Cut that off a second and I'll think. The organization in Albany, the follow-up, went through the winter of '62 and spring. We initiated the bus boycott, we went back, Charles Sherrod and myself went back one day to the bus station and were arrested as we were proceeding to get the bus, arrested for loitering. We were in touch with the Justice Department who promised faithfully to prosecute the case. We got back into mass demonstrations in the spring and early summer. As Martin, who had come in during the Christmas thing, came back in, in relation to a trial pursuant to an arrest that involved him during the time he was there in the December or early January part of it. He came back and they decided to prosecute the case in contradiction to their agreement during the negotiations in December. We started another phase of mass demonstrations and mass arrests.

Q: This was in early '62?

Jones: This was in the spring and early summer of '62. It was at this point that the city of Albany got an injunction, a temporary restraining order against any further demonstrations, using a very curious argument based on the Fourteenth Amendment which went . . . [tape cut off] Martin had come down for the trial and the fact of the trial itself was a repudiation by the city of its promises in the December negotiations. This then triggered other mass demonstrations at the city hall. The city then got a temporary restraining order from the district court using the very strange . . .

Q: Restraining what? Demonstrations?

Jones: Yeah. Using a very strange legal concept of the Fourteenth Amendment, an argument which was essentially this: that demonstrations require the presence of policemen; policemen who are present during demonstrations could not handle other complaints of other citizens in the community; therefore, the demonstrations were denying other citizens, white citizens, equal protection of the law. So we should be restrained from engaging in any activities, First Amendment protected or otherwise because it tended to deny equal protection to white citizens. A temporary restraining order was granted. We appealed it and it was lifted. Then we went into the restraining order itself.

Q: Was this all in federal court?

Jones: Yes. Heard by one J. Robert Elliott, a Kennedy appointee, payoff to Southwest Georgia segregationists and I'm going to deny any authorship of the statement because I may have an occasion to be in Judge Elliott's court. He was in the finest tradition of the Southwest Georgia segregationist tradition.

Q: Well, I'm sure he'd take that as a compliment.

Jones: Well, I'm not sure.

Q: But I won't quote you.

Jones: We then counterclaimed and raised several issues about the suit. The Justice Department entered the suit *amicus curiae*, primarily on the theory of clean hands, which means that a man cannot come into an equity court if his own hands are not clean. The theory here related to the fact that the city had perpetuated segregation and it cannot then come into court and ask that persons who are engaged in conduct to eliminate those practices which are constitutionally invalid—"the city cannot be heard to complain of the activities of those attempting to eliminate unconstitutional practices." The judge took his time in dealing with all those things, but anyway, the case was finally resolved. But that grew out of the late spring '62 reactivation of Albany, Georgia?

Q: Did you work with Greenwood?

Jones: No. Mississippi.

Q: Do you want to talk more about Albany?

Jones: No. I left Albany and the active, front-line movement of SNCC in September of '62 and went to Mexico, at which place I recuperated physically and psychologically. And have been associated with SNCC in various forms subsequent to that, but in terms of active, full-time work, I have not been involved in that.

Q: What would you say were SNCC's greatest successes in that period?

Jones: Well, I think that the fact that the movement developed and was actively coordinated by young Negro students was the most important thing that happened in that the leadership, the direction, the content of the programs were being decided by Negroes. The other thing is I think we dramatized . . .

Q: What sort of thing do you think SNCC—well, that's been happening in SCLC too, with the Negroes?

Jones: In fact that very independence is the most important thing we gave to the whole movement.

Q: How do you distinguish SNCC from SCLC, the movement?

Jones: One, the ability to organize from the grass roots and from nothing to a viable movement. At this point SCLC would inevitably come in.

Q: Why couldn't SCLC do that or did it try?

Jones: Well, I'm not sure they didn't, but it was at least the fact that we were young, idealistic, though very practical, very committed people.

Committed to working for nothing if necessary, committed to an idea of living with, organizing with, sharing with the lives of the people on a full time basis is the basic difference. Plus we tended not to play the institutional games. When people had money and said, well, we'll give you this if you get rid of Chuck McDew or Charles Sherrod.

Q: Did anyone actually . . .

Jones: Yes, of course. We'd say, well, take this and ram it.

Q: Careful, this is on tape.

Jones: And this was pretty consistent for the first couple of years. I'm not sure what happened after that.

Q: You felt that SNCC had taken the initiative in asking for funds for voter registration?

Jones: Well, it wasn't SNCC at that point but the people that were involved prior to, during or after, as an accurate description of what happened will reflect.

Q: How would you evaluate the Voter Education Project?

Jones: It provided the resources to get the job done, principally money.

Q: You have no complaints about SNCC?

Jones: Well, yeah, you asked me about the successes.

Q: Okay. Have you any complaints against it? Want to talk about that?

Jones: No, I think it objectively did an effective job of bringing together all of the organizations. At the time I was involved in SNCC, I was more concerned about how it related its resources to us, assuming the premise that we were doing the most important (and the most) work.

Q: Okay. Now what do you think was SNCC's biggest problem? Areas which you thought weren't so successful?

Jones: For some reason I have a block.

Q: What did people talk about when they talked about SNCC? What were the kinds of things that were discussed, what were the issues?

Jones: I think I'll let you establish your own criteria on the basis of what information you get. . . . A lot to criticize . . . See the reason I'm not responding to this is you have to assume some premises that are agreed on from which you can then decide what are effective and not effective. As a matter of fact there were no premises at that point. We were developing them as we went along. On the basis of premises we developed at that point we were successful. As a hindsight analysis of someone else's premises of what we were doing at that time, I'm sure many people will come up with all kinds of things. It is not necessary for me to do that. It is not desirable

for me to do that. I don't think it's for me important. So I tend not to be terribly concerned about failures in the sense of who or what criteria of what is a success or failure. In terms of my own concepts of our objectives, I thought we were very effective. The problems were those that naturally flow from young leadership acquiring all of a sudden a tremendous amount of power and attempting to deal with that in an altruistic, human-oriented context.

Q: How big was SNCC at the time you left it?

Jones: I guess there were fifty people.

Q: Was there already beginning to be any sort of problem of, you know, who makes decisions?

Jones: No. There were points at which persons attempted to assert, because of their belief in the correctness of their idea and approach, themselves, but the worth of an idea and program was in direct relation to the amount of self one was able to put into it and effectiveness that one could develop from placing oneself into it. And there was a hell of a lot of trust and a hell of a lot of love and a hell of a lot of confidence at this point in each other. People were encouraged and supported in doing what they could do best. And this was based on the fact that they were in the movement and everybody was important. Everybody had a right to say, and say as fully as possible, what he wanted to say. And his right to say it was respected and the content of what he said was respected, and inevitably had an effect on the ultimate decision, whether people completely disagreed or not.

Q: You said something before about a change in SNCC's mood around the time you were working in Albany.

Jones: Not SNCC.

Q: Not SNCC? Something about love and trust?

Jones: No.

Q: Okay.

Jones: No. This was primarily the result of Martin's involvement in Albany and the different type of approach Martin and company brought to relationships to people. I always tended to recognize and give support to local leadership. Martin tended to recognize and give support to Martin at the expense of local leadership. So that once he left, the impetus principally associated with him receded and the day-to-day responsibilities of what he had created tended to fall back on the local leadership itself, which created some problems in Albany in terms of the attitude of the people, of the leadership there toward kind of distrusting.

Q: The reason I ask about the problem areas is that SNCC in a later period used different tactics on developing political power, such as the FDP, and I figured one way of finding out why was to ask about the problem areas. Let's see. Is there anything else you want to add or do you think you've given me a pretty full picture of what went on?

Jones: I would just suggest that SNCC probably is and was one of the most important human social group developments in our recent history.

Q: I think so too, that's why I'm writing this.

Jones: Because of the basic commitment to people, human problems, human values and the commitment of the total self to achieving a recognition of those and the total fabric of American society.

Q: Do you want to say anything more about what happened to SNCC since you left it yourself?

Jones: There's no question but that my experience with SNCC has presented me with a much larger dimension of my own self, has developed within me a much greater sensitivity to people and myself and given me a very profound sense of strength, integrity, love and determination. Had I not been in it I would have been a much less effective human being, both to myself and other people.

Q: Do you think SNCC had this effect on other people too?

Jones: There's no question in my mind that it had.