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MEMORANDUM

To: Tim West

Fm: Joe Sinsheimer

Re: Interview with Victoria Gray Adams

Dt: February 16, 1999

Enclosed is an interview I conducted with Mrs. Victoria Gray Adams, who was a leading civil rights activist in Hattiesburg, Mississippi during the 1960's.

In the interview, Gray discussed: 1) Vernon Dahmer's leadership in the local civil rights campaign (Dahmer was later murdered in 1966 for his movement activities) 2) her first encounter with SNCC field secretary Hollis Watkins 4) economic reprisals directed against black civil rights workers by the local white community 5) the lack of adult leadership in Mississippi movement 6) and Lawrence Guyot's role in the Hattiesburg campaign.

Interview with Mrs. Victoria Gray Adams
Petersburg, Virginia
August 23, 1987

J. Sinsheimer: I can just go ahead and ask you questions if you would like to do it that way.

V. Adams: Yeah, why don't you do that because it is not easy going back.

Sinsheimer: I guess if you want to start with how you got interested in the movement and how you first heard about the movement, that might be a nice starting point. Where you were? What you were doing? What kinds of things led you to the movement?

Adams: Well, I guess most of my conscious life, conscious I mean by being aware of the social situation and what went on around me, I had my own personal movement going. I was always looking for opportunities to make necessary changes. I have a very high social consciousness. I don't know, I can't tell you why.

I was in business at the time that the movement came into Mississippi. I had been back home I guess three or four years. I had lived away from Mississippi for a number of years.

Sinsheimer: Where was that?

Adams: My husband was in the army and we had lived in different places in the country and we had spent three years out of the country and came back to the states and were stationed in the DC area. And domestic inconsistencies, I guess is a nice way of putting it, made me decide that the marriage was not being all that it ought to be and could be. So I left and took my children and went home. So that is how I happened to be in Mississippi at that particular time, otherwise I probably wouldn't have been there.

Sinsheimer: Hattiesburg was home to you?

Adams: Yes. S, as I said, I was running a business.

Sinsheimer: Which was exactly...?

Adams: I was operating a cosmetics direct-selling organization with home offices in DC. I was working at this firm when I left DC and so when I went home I just built myself my own business. {Interruption} Now where were we?

Sinsheimer: Do you know the name of the cosmetic company?

Adams: Beauty Queen Cosmetics and Household Misc., that was the name of the company. You know when the young people came to the Hattiesburg area-- that was Curtis {Hayes} and Hollis {Watkins} were the first two to come into Hattiesburg.

Sinsheimer: Right. How long had you been back at that point? That was in '61 or '62.

Adams: I had been back five or six years I guess. So they were looking for people to work with. And of course the usual course I think was to approach the local NAACP or the local leading minister or whatever. And they did, they followed the pattern.

Sinsheimer: Which was Mr. {Vernon} Dahmer at the time?

Adams: Yes. Dahmer was, if he wasn't the president, he was one of the leading figures. May have been the president, I am really am not sure. It has beem awhile now {laughter}. Dahmer, of course, was all for it in the beginning as I recall. However the "leading" minister was not.

Sinsheimer: Who was that?

Adams: That was Ray Willard. Rev. Willard.

Sinsheimer: Where did he pastor?

Adams: His base church was Antioch Baptist Church in Hattiesburg and he was quite a popular/powerful I guess person in certain segments of the community.

Sinsheimer: When you say certain segments you mean?

Adams: You know he had a very large congregation with satellite congregations. He was I believe a partial owner in a local

mortician firm. And it was rumored that he was a silent member of the White Citizen Council. I certainly can't affirm that. That is on the side if you will. Anyway, he certainly came down very, very hard on the young people and made it very clear that there wasn't going to be any of the bullshit going on in Hattiesburg if he had anything to do with it. Also apparently working down from wherever Dahmer and members of the local NAACP also that they should not support these youngsters.

And to be perfectly frank I don't really remember exactly how I first....

Sinsheimer: Were you a member of the NAACP?

Adams: I wasn't a member of anything except the United Methodist Church.

Sinsheimer: You just didn't want to belong to anything...? Had you ever been approached?

Adams: Not really. I had sought, I had really casually sought membership in the NAACP when I first came home but there was positive response toward my becoming a member. I didn't really need the NAACP, it was just hopefully a means of expression for what I felt and for some of the changes that I thought ought to be taking place at that you know very late date.

But as I said I can't remember the exact connection of how I became {involved}.

Sinsheimer: Do you mind if I ask you how old a woman you were at this time?

Adams: I was probably about twenty-- early 30's. Anyway, these young men-- I became aware of what was going on however. So my pastor also became aware of it. And I don't know if I became aware of it through him or if he came aware of them through me. I just can't honestly remember that.

Sinsheimer: And who was that?

Adams: L.P. Ponder.

Sinsheimer: And he pastored at?

Adams: St. John Methodist Church.

Sinsheimer: How big a church was that?

Adams: It was probably the second biggest church in that particular community. Big Methodist Church in that community. When I knew myself I was in the St. John Methodist Church, and my family were all members. So we were Christened there and later we made our own commitment there, etc.

So anyway we became aware of the fact that 1) all of the things, all of the work that the young people had been doing, you know setting up possible meetings and things, that the doors were simply being closed in their faces and there were being told no. They wouldn't be able to use the facilities and that sort of thing. So my pastor and I some way became aware of this, met the young people and invited them to use St. John. We did a lot of leg work, inviting people to come to the church for a meeting. And we announced it in the different churches and in our services on the Sunday preceding the meeting.

And I remember how disappointed I was that maybe a dozen people showed. Maybe. And I know I am being quite liberal there. But anyway, there we were. And some of the main people that I remember at that meeting was Virgil Robinson, who is my godmother and quite aged. Benny Hines, John Henry, both of whom were school bus drivers, local county school. I am not sure whether Billy Jean was there or not but I think she was. Billy Jean _____. The pastor and I. I am quite sure there must have been some other people there, these are the people I remember.

Of course they did their little presentation, helping people understand.

Sinsheimer: Now how you all heard about what had gone on in McComb.

Adams: Oh sure.

Sinsheimer: That word had spread.

Adams: We heard about what ever was going on. So I guess that had a lot to do maybe with the numbers of people who turned out.

Sinsheimer: Do you know whether most of your friends at

that time would have owned a TV or not?

Adams: A goodly portion of them owned TV's yes. A goodly portion.

Sinsheimer: Was that where you got the news or was it more word of mouth? When you say you heard about, people heard about what was going on in McComb or the Freedom Rides...

Adams: Oh yeah, that would come from the newsmedia. Television, newspaper, radio.

Siunsheimer: National papers?

Adams: Local paper. They would tell it in the light of their own screens, nevertheless {they told it}. Sure. Once in awhile maybe somebody traveling would happen to come across something that was going on. Like Billy Jean who I mentioned earlier was in Jackson at some point when the CORE group came into Jackson, Mississippi. And she was there, saw them being arrested and marched into the paddy wagon. And she came back ....

Sinsheimer: What was her last name?

Adams: Steps. My first cousin. And I recall being impressed with her telling about the courgage of these young people in the face of all that and how she was standing there looking and really just wanting to go and join herself but it probably never occurred to her if you want to do it. That is what I was thinking to myself. Well if I had been there-- I didn't say it to her but I said it to myself-- well if I had been there I would have just joined them. I wouldn't have just wanted to, I would have. That was the one on-hands experience that I heard. But the rest came from the media.

And anyway, that group of people, after Curtis and Hollis gave their little presentation that night and then invited people-- and one of the questions of course was would you like to see things change? And of course the answer is yes to that. Okay how many people will meet us in the morning at the courthouse in Hattiesburg. And of course that is the big question. And what ever the numbers of people were that

night, I looked around the room and I saw the hands weren't going but I raised mine. And Virgil raised hers-- I guess that is why these people stand out in my mind because they are the ones that said yes. And the two bus drivers, plus the pastor of course.

So we said yes we will meet you there in the morning. And I guess the Hattiesburg movement was underway at that point.

Sinsheimer: So Mr. Dahmer was he at that first meeting?

Adams: No. The only people at that first meeting that were not local-- when I say local I mean the Palmers' Crossing area which is where we were--was Reverend Ponder but who lived in Hattiesburg. But all other persons present were people from the local area.

And as I said we were off. We were at the courthouse the next morning as promised. We were given the kind of treatment that you have heard about over and over again I am sure. Absolutely no cooperation. Very, very intimidating. What do you mean? What are you doing here? How dare you. I am sure you have heard about our circuit clerk. He was a huge, huge guy.

Sinsheimer: Theron Lynd.

Adams: He was a ferocious looking fellow. But each person was given-- not all at one time-- but so many at a time an opportunity to fill out the application. I am sure you have heard about the application. Personally, I didn't find the application that tough. The only problem for me was I didn't know what my local voting district was.

Sinsheimer: Your precinct number?

Adams: Right. None of the people in my family had ever voted. None of the people in my community had voted that I was aware of. So I had not been exposed to that. That was the only thing that gave me any problem. I asked him you know what it was and of course he wouldn't give the courtesy of returning me an answer. He just simply ignored me. Then I looked around the place to see if I could find some kind of a map

or something which would designate these things. There was nothing like that around. I just wrote a number down there. I hadn't the faintest notion what it was so I just wrote a number.

The next day, after we had done this, I guess Mr Lynd must have notified whoever you notify, people who are public employers. And John and Benny were immediately informed that they were no longer bus drivers. So they lost their jobs right off the bat. And of course that is a very intimidating thing, I don't have to tell you. It meant that not many people were going to be going down there. It was as simple as that. But of course we didn't pass. That was the word in those days, we didn't pass. In the beginning we would just go back every day. As often as we could. And then they passed a law real fast that you could only try once every thirty days.

So we just kept-- that first group we kept going except for Benny and John, it really was a traumatic experience for them. They just kind of dropped out and didn't attempt to go again, or certainly not for a very long time. But little by little with the educational efforts that were being made by the young people and those of us who were going. Little by little we began to get more and more people willing to go. And then SCLC you know also became a part of the effort. Somebody has told you about COFO. And we started taking people from the community to the week training sessions that the SCLC was conducting.

Sinsheimer: In Dorchester.

Adams: We would pull out people who had promise and courage and take them down to spend a week and get the training and come back. And each of these people would start what we called a citizenship class. But we didn't call them citizenship classes in the beginning, we called them adult education classes where you were teaching people to read and write. We used all of these kind of camaflages. But the fact of the matter was-- and we were doing that, we were teaching people to read and write it is true. But we were teaching them to read and write things totally different than what you would ordinarily expect to find in that

kind of class.

Sinsheimer: Now Hollis and Curtis left after two months?

Adams: Yes, they left after a while that is right. But I am not sure whether COFO was former before or after they left. It may have been after. And at that point of course we had a pretty nice group of people there representing most of the organizations.

Sinsheimer: They had left a seed group?

Adams: Yes. You know they would come and go. And we continued of course with the citizenship education classes, and through these classes we would get going more people, going down. This is the way, early on this is where our local core group came through those classes. Then we began to be more ambitious in terms of what we were going to be trying to do.

Sinsheimer: How many churches-- were you doing these meetings in churches?

Adams: For the most part, yes. St. John had a class, classes. I am not sure all these classes were done in churches because I am trying to remember ..... I am sorry I can't go back that far {laughter}. Well, St. John was kind of the headquarters for public meetings in Hattiesburg for a very long time because none of the other churches would open their doors. They just were afraid because churches were being bombed and all of that stuff going on.

Sinsheimer: Did Revernd Ponder come under a lot of heat for that?

Adams: You mean in the church?

Sinsheimer: Yes. From members of the congregation?

Adams: No they didn't, they didn't bother, I can't recall him coming under any pressure except maybe from his peers. From people who were from the church proper none that I recall. I just don't recall. Maybe I was just not aware of it, that could be the other side of that. Ours was not a large congregation but the bulk of your adult support came out

of there. But certainly by no means did all of the congregation participate. And maybe there could have been some grumblings there but I don't really know.

Sinsheimer: It is fascinating in the history of this the role that the Methodist Church played as compared to the Baptist Church. In every little community this pattern of one Methodist Church, or the two Methodist Churches opening their doors. It is fascinating.

Adams: It is.

Sinsheimer: I think that very few people really understand that.

Adams: They don't. I am amazed that you are saying so because you are the first person I have heard say it to be perfectly frank.

Sinsheimer: Well, it is everywhere. I mean in Greenwood it is an extraordinary in that community. I guess finally I have asked the question so many times that I have at least some reasons why. It is something that I am interested in.

Adams: Something that I have thought a lot about. I guess the real big push came in Hattiesburg when we decided to really back the break the back of Lynd in terms of registration, voter registration. And so the focus was around bringing in-- and I don't even remember where the bright idea came from. I know it was a great idea however. Sending out the call to the church. And hoped you know that we would get a few people to respond from around the country.

And as the day neared, within the last twenty-four hours we were absolutely swamped with ministers from all over the country. It was just overwhelming really because first of all many of them came not really realizing what they were really getting themselves into. And once they were there we wouldn't even think about them going into the hotels or motels around there. That would have been suicide. And then here is the problem what are we going to do with these people {laughter}. You know all of these people what are we going

to do with them. And at that time even though there were a few adults participating, most people felt unwilling or unable to accomodate people in their homes.

Well, I was sitting up here with this great big old eleven room house and it looks like I was about I was the only person who was going to be willing to take some of these people in. And of course by this time all the other young freedom persons were coming in from everywhere. Housing was going to really be a big deal so we just decided that people had a sleeping bag or could borrow a sleeping bag-- my husband and I we did go back together for a time. We Just opened the house and said come on in.

I remember at the end of the first day when everyone was in-- because you had to be sure that everyone was in. You didn't go to bed anywhere in the movement without knowing everybody was put somewhere. And some of the guys were getting ready, we were getting ready and somebody said "Okay now, anybody need anything because we are just about to lie down and when we lie down there isn't going to be any moving space." And that was pretty close to right. you know. The place was packed, wall to wall, room to room.

But we were all there and everybody was put away. That day {the Hattiesburg Freedom Day} broke cold, rainy, oh Lord it rained like you had never seen before. And the question was are we going to do it? Do we dare? After a little conference the word was go.

Sinsheimer: Now who would have been in a position to make those decisions at that point.

Adams: COFO. The COFO group.

Sinsheimer: Which would have included?

Adams: That was Bob {Moses} or probably Annelle {Ponder}, Dave {Dennis}, myself, and by this time the NAACP-- the local members of the NAACP were really wanting to be a part and just made a decision to cooperate or participate or whatever.

Sinsheimer: Did you consider yourself a member of COFO?

A member of SNCC? A member of an organization?

Adams: I became affiliated with SCLC through their citizenship education program. So I suppose that was my connection if you will though I always worked with the SNCC group. But I guess my formal affiliation was with SCLC.

And so anyway it took off. People were marching around that courthouse. And it was a long block around the courthouse. But they walked, I mean they got soaked and they got arrested-- no, no, no they didn't arrest anybody at first! They arrested Bob the first thing off. They arrested Bob. And then they didn't bother to arrest anybody else. And so people marched, and they marched.

Bob's trial was to take place that night. And I guess we thought folks would go home and wouldn't come to the trial. People packed the courthouse and I think the trial was finally over around midnight or thereabouts. Very, very late. Bob was convicted of course. And I remember when all the people got in that night I remember when one minister from somewhere in upstate New York, he said, "You know I am so glad that I came to Mississippi for this occasion. Because if anybody had told me that this kind of a trial could take place in America I would not have believed it. There is no way that anybody could have made me believe that anything like this could happen in this country. So I am very thankful that I am here and I can see it first hand and I can know that it does happen in this country."

And certainly I would assume it was inspiration for him to realize that there was much work to be done. That is one of the things that stands out from that time. The guys were there, after they became involved, after they recognized the danger, because then they started locking people up. But basically they locked up local people. Then people became reluctant to leave and yet they had not come prepared to stay. They had come prepared just to give this big push and support. But they of course did have to leave. Some left fairly soon, others stayed on for awhile. Whatever they needed to do.

But that gave the momentum in

Hattiesburg and that part of the state really to carry on a sustained movement.

Sinsheimer: Let me back you up just a little bit because I believe that was in about January of 1964, that Freedom Day. The previous fall they had the Freedom Vote.

Adams: Right.

Sinsheimer: Could you tell me-- people also link that as a beginning.

Adams: Definitely. Well, that was the groundwork really. That was where our groundwork got laid I think. Not only there but across the state in those areas where things were really trying to happen.

Sinsheimer: Who did the day-to-day stuff there?

Adams: The volunteers, the volunteers. A few local people like myself. My daughter....

Sinsheimer: Was Guyot there then?

Adams: Yes, Guyot was there, yes. Very definitely. My daughter, my niece, the children in that age range. I recall during that time that SNCC had a training activity at Mount Beulah. And they were bringing in youngsters in from all over the state.

Well, people from all over the state was the invitation of course. And I remember I took a carload of youngsters from my area. I couldn't get anybody else to go, so I took the youngsters. My daughter, my niece, my friend's daughter. Those children, let's see, those kids were I guess fourteen to sixteen or so, something like that. And we took them all up to Mount Beulah, we all met there. That is why I remember that so vividly because that is where I first met Ella Baker who became a very dear person in my life.

And I was so shocked when I got there because Ella and I were the only adults for all practical purposes. Here we were with the SNCC young people of course, who were basically older teenagers and I was just shocked because I figures I was going to meet all of these other people like myself from other places in the state and that was going to be real good because sometimes I

got very lonely in that role there.

Sinsheimer: Right.

Adams: But that is who did the day-to-day work. The volunteers and the people who became involved in the different areas.

Sinsheimer: You were still trying to keep your business going?

Adams: Well, I was doing more and more of the movement and less and less business. That is precisely what happened. And I am not even sure I ever made a conscious decision but just.... With my domestic life not being in the best kind of shape, with my interests, my deeper and deeper involvment with the movement, the business was just getting less and less attention. And at some point, I am not even sure what happened. Like I said I don't think I made a conscious decision, I just kind of let it go.

Sinsheimer: Let me ask one other question about the Freedom Vote. Was Aaron Henry being from the Delta and from the NAACP, the kind of person that people in Hattiesburg could identify with. I mean was there a personal element, or it was really the symbol....

Adams: Henry came to Hattiesburg. I know he came once. Possible more than once. I distinctly remember him coming.

Sinsheimer: There was some incident with the fire engine.

Adams: Yeah, that was the one I was going to tell you about. He came to that.

Sinsheimer: What happened that night?

Adams: Well, they just brought the fire engines down and surrounded the building and turned on their sirens and attempted to drive us out and intimidate us. A lot of pictures got made that night. But the people who came-- and we did have a very good turnout that night. I am trying to remember what was the occasion that brought those people out that night because we had a fairly full house that night. It may have been Henry's

appearance I am not sure because at that time, of course, his name was quite a drawing card. Because he had the courage to really act when many people were not doing anything, not very much.

But anyway, the big thing there was the nice turnout we got and the response of course from the community was to bring all of the firetrucks down and set up a little siren thing that tried to drown us out. And some of the local reporters came. I guess that is where they got most of their pictures and there was a write-up in the paper the next day and so forth. It was this guy, Elliot Shays, I believe his name was. I think he did the best he thought he could do at that time and in that place.

Sinsheimer: As a reporter?

Adams: In doing objective reporting.

Sinsheimer: Was he working for the Petal paper or the Hattiesburg paper.

Adams: Hattiesburg. And eventually at some point his work in covering the movement got him a job offer in New York with one of the larger papers.

Sinsheimer: What was the name of the Hattiesburg paper.

Adams: Hattiesburg-American.

Sinsheimer: And he {Shays} was trying to be as fair as he could.

Adams: I think so. I got the feeling that he was doing the best as he thought he could afford to do it. There was a very thin line there if he intended to stay. And apparently he did intend to stay.

Sinsheimer: Guyot did say that the the newspaper there in Hattiesburg was better than in different parts. That they would actually print letters-to-the-editors {from black citizens}?

Adams: Oh yeah, I got in some of the biggest trouble in my life sending letters-to-the-editors that got printed {laughter}.

Sinsheimer: Because you got harassed because of that?

Adams: Yes, indeed. In fact, very shortly before Medgar was killed, I was getting all kinds of threatening calls. And I don't know how Medgar became aware of it but somewhere he found out it was going on and I remember him calling me and asking me just what was going on and I shared with him what was going on. And he was saying that probably nothing was going to come of it but on the other hand you know you can't just assume that is the case.

So, of course, if you are going to do what you are going to do, there is nowhere to hide. But you just have to be as careful as you can and got to learn to live with it without letting it get the best of you. And we had you know a nice conservation and it was really, for me it was really helpful for him to be caring enough to take time out to call and try and give me that support at that time. In the beginning it was very frightening. I mean I wouldn't kid you it was terribly frightening. They would call you at 2:00 am in the morning and saying all these things and then hanging up before you could even get a chance to respond.

But as I said his calling was really supportive, helpful. My pastor likewise was quite supportive. Other people, many other people, community people, well they just had cause to kind of withdraw. It was like "Victoria, why don't you leave this stuff alone." "Victoria, you shouldn't do this."

Sinsheimer: So that was coming from other black leaders in the city?

Adams: No, most of the black leaders in the city, traditional black leaders were simply not involved at that time. This was simply just community people.

Sinsheimer: Who would some of those names been? Who were the big names in the community {who weren't involved}?

Adams: Ray Willard, as mentioned earlier. Then there was Riley-- these are all preachers, preachers of influence. Riley, Jones. Usually in the black community your principals and teachers were people who

were looked up to in the community. But none of these people were {involved}.

Sinsheimer: Wasn't there a docter who had some connection to Paul Johnson?

Adams: I don't know. There may have been but I wasn't aware of it. So these people were simply not participating. That is the way it was. Movement people of course, they were quite supportive and quite caring. So you can imagine how shocked I was when Medgar was killed.

And what really was rough for me, Medgar was killed several days before I knew anything about it. I also did extension work for the general board of education for the Methodist Church. And at the time that Medgar was killed, I was up in I think Clarke County. I was up there working that week, or that two weeks, whatever span of time I was working at that time. And this was very, very much in the rural area. I didn't hear anything about it. I knew nothing about it.

Sinsheimer: You just missed it.

Adams: And when I came back I came by way of my in-laws home in Waynesboro and was sitting there talking with my mother-in-law and so she said something about Medgar's funeral and I said what are you talking about? She said, "You know they killed that man Medgar Evers." And I said, "What?" And she said, "Yes, you hadn't heard about it." Oh man, that was awful. I mean that was really awful, terrible.

Sinsheimer: Did you go the funderal?

Adams: No, there wasn't enough time. By the time you know I got the word and everything. I was really kind of like paralyzed. It was just one of those things. Anyway, let's see, where were we? I am getting lost.

Sinsheimer: Well, you talked about the ministers getting things off the ground in Hattiesburg finally.

Adams: Oh yeah, we were talking about the Freedom Vote we had done prior to that. The

interesting thing about that was-- and at that time I could not understand why there was such negative and harsh response to those efforts in the community. I understood but I didn't understand. Okay? But of course as time went by and I became far more mature myself in the sense of all this, I realized that if I had been them I would have been frightened too.

Sinsheimer: You mean the response from the white community about the Freedom Vote?

Adams: Yes. Yes, I just couldn't believe the harshness and the harassment and the worst that came from them as a result of that.

Sinsheimer: The white community almost understood more than the black community what the importance of this whole thing was.

Adams: Exactly. Exactly. Very true. And of course, like I said earlier I was in my early 30's at that time but politically I was about as young as you could be. But all I knew, what I understood very clearly was if we didn't move break it, it was not going to change. So whatever was necessary to do that, I was just all for it. Like I said I had ben carrying on my personal movement about as long as I could remember. I was always rebelling. I imagine if I had been male I never would have lived to maturity, to an adult there because I was always doing things that you weren't supposed to do.

Sinsheimer: What kinds of things?

Adams: Like you were supposed to automatically sit in the back of the bus or if there are no seats at the back of the bus you are supposed to stand. I refused to stand if there was a seat that could be sat in. And I have never been able to know until today while I was not challenged about it.

Sinsheimer: I am switching gears on you again but Guyot recalled-- I haven't been able to talk with anyone else about this-- about some folks, right around the time of that Freedom Day in January of '64.... {Break} Guyot was talking about some folks who wanted to start a bus boycott in Hattiesburg. And he remembers getting a group of folks together

to stop that idea. He didn't think it was a good idea at the time....

Adams: {Most of the people} didn't have any other way. Not that many people had automobiles at that time. You know I had practically forgotten that, but yes, but now that you mention it I do remember something about that. I remember Guyot saying, "No that is not the best way to expend our energies." And it made sense to me so I must have supported it because I was always pretty clear to my support when I agreed on things like that.

Sinsheimer: What was Guyot like as an organizer?

Adams: Guyot was an excellent organizer. Didn't always get along with his peers because he thought very differently from a lot of the people who worked. This is one person's opinion of course. Could be quite cooperative, supportive, could give what was needed when he agreed, or when he was in agreement, or when you were in agreement or whatever. Could be very harsh when there was a disagreement, or I guess what he felt was a show of non-support for lack of a better word.

I personally thought Guyot was one of the not only very strong young people in the movement, probably one of the most perceptive. One who understood the political impact far beyond his years and also with the understanding of many of the people around him. Some people I guess would call it a very wise person, I don't know. But he was, he did have that perceptiveness, that understanding of the political arena. An understanding of the mentality of the enemy that many other people did not have, most other people did not have.

I guess Guyot was probably one of the very key people in making sure that the MFDP was the people's movement also as I recall. He really wanted to see the people go with it.

Sinsheimer: Before I ask you some questions about the MFDP, do you remember discussions around having the Summer Project. Did you participate in those, whether or not you should have the Summer Project or not?

Adams: Yes, I am sure I did.

Sinsheimer: Did you have a stand on that?

Adams: Oh, I was a hundred percent for it.

Sinsheimer: Did you know Louis Allen?

Adams: Louis Allen. It doesn't ring a bell.

Sinsheimer: He was the fellow who witnessed Herbert Lee's murder down in McComb {actually Liberty, Mississippi}.

Adams: Okay. No, I did not. I did not know very much about the people or the history of what happened down there. As I told you .....

Sinsheimer: The interesting thing, I mention that because when I talked to Bob Moses about his own decision-making about the Summer Project, he talked about being torn between the different arguments with Sam and Willie and Hollis being pretty vehemently against it, and people like yourself and Mrs. Hamer and other people being for it, and that tension. And it was when Louis Allen was finally killed in Hattiesburg, when Bob had come down for a meeting just about the time of the Freedom Day, is when he switched his mind. Which is something that really hasn't been talked about.

But you know he was the one who had dug up Louis Allen in McComb to try to find a witness to Herbert Lee's murder. And that was when he said he really threw his weight behind having the Summer Project because he felt like Louis Allen was supposed to have FBI protection. He felt like he couldn't protect....

Adams: Okay, I remember now, it is coming back.

Sinsheimer: He felt like he just couldn't protect people. And that was why he felt that there had to be some change. That one by one they were just going to knock people off.

Adams: That is right. I remember now. It is coming back. That is right. I remember-- talking . . .

(end)