

SRC 14

Interviewer: Susan Glisson

Interviewee: Thad Olive

Date: November 23, 2002

G: This is Susan Glisson and I'm with Thaddeus Olive.

O: That is correct.

G: It is November 23, 2002, we're in Atlanta, Georgia, with a native Atlantan, a rare breed these days.

O: That's true.

G: Thank you so much for your time Mr. Olive.

O: No problem.

G: Let's start with how you came to work or be affiliated with SRC [Southern Regional Council]. What did you know about the organization before you came to be involved with it?

O: I knew very little about the organization per se. I was attracted to the project by the director, we went to high school together, so that's [where] my involvement [began].

G: Okay, who was that director?

O: Vernon Jordan was the director. He was behind me in high school, we were in that high school band together. I was in accounting and he was looking for somebody to be the administrative assistant. Our former band director recommended me and that's how I became involved. As I became involved, then I learned more about what SRC was about and its mission and so forth.

G: What was your impression of what its work was? What was its mission at the time that you came?

O: Its mission was, as I see it, to be a bridge to both the majority and the minority community. That's how I perceived it and that's what they were working toward at that particular time, because at that time, that was the height of the [civil rights] movement. The movement was then really moving right along. It was just exciting to even be a part and to be around such people who were extremely dedicated to what they were about, and [they] took no second thoughts about what they were involved in.

G: I know that there were two VEPs [Voter Education Projects] and you were with the second.

O: I was with the second VEP.

G: So how did it come about that it got restarted?

O: Well, it's my understanding that they were funded for a three-year period and there was a brief lapse between the first and the second funding. Now, it's my understanding that the Teutonic Foundation was very interested in continuing the work of the first, and that's how it was re-funded and we worked right along. It was very interesting that the kick-off was launched by the former Attorney General Katzenbach. He came down to initiate the beginning of the second VEP.

G: That's Nicholas, right?

O: Nicholas Katzenbach, yes.

G: So, you were an administrative [assistant]?

O: I was the administrative assistant.

G: So, what did you do in that capacity?

O: Basically, I was responsible for sending the letters of approval, grantsmanship, I guess is what it is, basically. In order to receive a grant, as it was referred to then, you had to submit a proposal. We reviewed these proposals and then made small grants as sort of seed money. In the event that we received a proposal from two different organizations within the same community, it was part of our responsibility to try to bring these groups together, because we couldn't fund both, but just to fund one group. As a result of that, we felt that we did a pretty good job. In addition to that, there was a carry-over from the first VEP in South Carolina, where they had a statewide organization, and during the second VEP, we established state-wide organizations in North Carolina, Louisiana, Georgia, and Alabama, so we established four more state-wide organizations. This group, their primary responsibility was sort of to oversee the operations of the various groups within their states and to mobilize in areas where registration was needed and there was no organization.

G: So, how would it be that a local organization would find out about the VEP enough to know to apply or send a proposal?

O: Well, basically, we had a director who was very dynamic and who was very out-

front, so he was constantly out beating the bushes and spreading the word. He had formerly worked for the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]

and therefore he had a network out there that sort of knew what was going on.

G: Were there other organizations that you worked with?

O: We worked with the Urban League, we worked with SNCC [pronounced Snick, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], and we worked with various registration organizations within a state. It didn't necessarily have to be the NAACP, just local voter registration committees within the community.

G: SNCC didn't apply, right?

O: A local chapter, not the large organization, but a branch of SNCC...

G: ...would apply?

O: Would apply. Then, in addition to that, most of our activities were during the summer, because we involved quite a few young people and they were still in school. During the summer, we would also employ interns, they would assist in that program. In addition, there was one other thing the second VEP addressed, that I think grew out of the first one, we also did citizenship education. It's one thing to register, but unless you know the duty and the responsibility of the various offices – most people have an idea as to what the president or the governor or the mayor [does] but the other officers...

G: Like a chancery clerk?

O: Tell me about it. That's true.

G: I still have no idea what they do.

O: It's interesting that you would mention the chancery clerk, because that's quite prevalent in Mississippi, quite prevalent. So, we had citizenship education, voter registration, and leadership training, those were the dimensions of the second VEP.

G: Pick a representative location where you had a project and, if you can, walk me through from the proposal to the actual project.

O: Okay, the reason I was smiling was the fact that, prior to this, I had never been to Mississippi. I told Vernon, I said, now I have no problem going anywhere but to

Mississippi. I said, now, when I go to Mississippi, I can't go alone. It just happened that something developed that I had to go to Mississippi, and I went alone.

G: What happened?

O: It was the most rewarding experience I have ever had in my life. When I said rewarding, at that time Marian Wright [Edelman] was working [there] with the children and I met her in Mississippi. I got the opportunity to meet Aaron Henry, Unita Blackwell, and finally, I finally after many trips got to meet Fannie Lou Hamer. That in itself was an experience. Now, let me tell you about Ms. Hamer. I had called, I wrote, and tried to get an appointment to get Ms. Hamer, but because of my name, I never got a favorable response until such time as somebody told her that there's a young man that you should meet. She said, that man has been writing and calling me. She said, I thought he was a white man [laughing.] That's why I never got a response. I spent two days with Ms. Hamer. Her house was just like Grand Central Station. I just went there and sat, [because] people were in [and] everything that took place in Sunflower County came through her. That to me was the most rewarding experience. Really, I'd go to Mississippi any day now. Mississippi unfortunately has a reputation that, to me, is not quite fair to Mississippi.

G: Well, it's an interesting place.

O: I can't think of his name, he worked for SRC, he was the housing man, he was an architect, and he was from Alabama, Moreland Smith [was his name]. Moreland Smith was from Alabama and we were talking one day and he was asking me about my experience. I said, I felt very comfortable in Mississippi, I didn't feel comfortable, at all comfortable in Alabama. He said, I can understand why. The time I went to Alabama, I stayed at the Gaston Motel, which was right near the 16th Street Church [site of infamous bombing that killed four black girls].

G: Right, in Birmingham.

O: The thing that just depressed me about that was one of the young ladies that was killed in that explosion was the niece of our band director when I taught school, and that has stayed with me every since. He [Moreland Smith] told me, and I never will forget it and I find it to be true, he said, if you go to Mississippi and people don't like you, they will let you know up-front.

G: Yes, they will.

O: He said, but the people in Alabama are cowards. They'll make you believe that they are accepting you and, in the meantime, they'll stab you in the back. I said,

well, that's why I felt uncomfortable. He said, that's probably why. They literally ran him out of there, and he was a wealthy architect. He came to Atlanta, worked for SRC, and lived and died right here in Atlanta. Again, right back to your original question, once we get a proposal, we would have a meeting whereby we would review the proposals and decide that we were going to fund the ABC Voters League. They would then get a letter from the director, indicating that their proposal has been accepted, and is being funded in the amount of x-number of dollars for so many weeks, and there were other requirements. For example, we did not send money directly to the recipient; the money was deposited directly to a bank in that county. They would have to send cards with the name of the bank and deposit slips. The funds went directly to the bank and a copy went to them to let them know that the money had been placed there, so that was the next thing. As I said, we sent them enough money to operate for two weeks and then on an impress basis. They would have to report to the research director, which was Marvin Wall, the number of people registered, the number of contacts, the number of meetings, and so forth. That was the meat of what we were all about. That's where we were getting the information. Once the funds were exhausted, if we felt that there was a need, we would give them some additional funds to go on, to carry on. It was sort of like seed money. We referred to it, for want of a better term, a stipend. We wouldn't dare say it was wages, because it wasn't that much. It would be something for telephone [expenses], something for transportation, and basically, if it was an existing organization, they had space, so it was a little bit of money to encourage them [and] to keep them going.

G: It sounds like the continued funding was tied pretty closely to results.

O: Thank you, it was. It was tied to results, that is correct. One other thing we [would] do, just prior to an election, which was all a part of this, in the event that there were candidates running, we would have a meeting for candidates. The purpose of that was more or less to explain to them their rights. One of the first [things we did] –once again, we go back to Mississippi – we wrote all these letters to these elected officials in Mississippi inviting them to a three-day seminar in Jackson. After ten days, we didn't have a single response. So, at that time, we had hired a field director, Wilden Rusio. Vernon called us in and said, the two of you go to Mississippi, and don't come back until you find everyone of these. We found every one of them, but there was one thing they had in common, they said, we didn't know anything about the SRC or the VEP per se, and who is this going to be bringing us and sponsoring us? So, after we explained, we had a tremendous turnout. What it came down to was, and I can understand, these people could not very well afford to take off three days from their jobs. So, when we explained that to them, we were able to at least give them a stipend. We couldn't cover their daily wages for that, but we picked up their expenses and a little something on the side. Here again, then we brought

in people who had been elected in other states, we brought in journalists, and they had workshops and seminars on how to deal with the press.

They had constantly told that the press had more than one way of asking the same thing. All of this was part of citizenship education and leadership training. One of the things that grew out of that whole experience in Mississippi with those first elected officials was the fact that they said, we do not plan to run for re-election, we realized that there are people much better qualified even within our group, but we wanted to show you that it could be done. That's what they did, more or less breaking the ice so they could run. That's when I found out about this chancery clerk and all that [referring to earlier part of interview], so it was quite an experience. I guess, although we operated in the eleven southern states, most of memories are from Mississippi. Now, we did some things in Texas, we did a little in Arkansas, but primarily it was Alabama, Mississippi, North and South Carolina, Virginia, and, outside of Atlanta, south Georgia. We did quite a bit in south Georgia. It was very interesting, I just saw in the paper a couple weeks ago where C.B. King's wife...

G: They had a big celebration there.

O: ...and they named a building and we did quite a bit down in Baker County and down in that area. That was very interesting. There was another thing, I had an opportunity to meet Charlie Sherrod. Charlie Sherrod was an original SNCCster, very involved, and in the book *Climbing Jacob's Ladder*, I think Pat devotes almost a whole chapter to Sherrod. Charlie is quite a character.

G: You know, they had a reunion for SNCC in 2000. It was the fortieth anniversary and they had it at Shaw [University in Raleigh, North Carolina], and I went and one of the meetings took place in this big chapel on campus. Chuck McDew was up on the stage, you know he was the chair when Sherrod came on board, and Sherrod walked in the back of the church and the church is full and Sherrod yells out, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman, can I come home now?

O: [laughing] That's Charlie, that's Charlie. Are you familiar with the book *The Children* [by David Halberstam on the Nashville sit-ins]?

G: Yes, I'm reading that now.

O: I am too.

G: It is great.

O: It is fantastic.

G: Yes.

O: It fills in all the missing pieces for me.

G: Yes, it is good. His daughter is in Mississippi right now, she's doing Teach for America [volunteer teaching program].

O: Is that right?

G: Yes.

O: Oh, he can get the details...

G: He gets into it.

O: He gets into it...

G: [He's] even better than Taylor Branch [Pulitzer Prize-winning civil rights author], I think...

O: I've read his stuff too, yes....

G: Which I liked...

O: I do too...

G: And Halberstam is good...

O: Oh, he's very good. Can I deviate?

G: That's all right.

O: I didn't know too much about Marion Barry [former SNCC leader and later mayor of Washington D.C.] and he's from Itta Bena [Mississippi].

G: Well, now the other thing that [is] different just in terms of, I mean, I know there was once the VEP and there's a second VEP, but the thing that changed in between is that there's that Voting Rights Act in 1965?

O: That came in while we were there.

G: Did that change or shape what you were doing?

O: No, it more or less enhanced what we were doing, because in fact, I think

Georgia is still under the Voting Rights Acts.

G: So is Mississippi.

O: Yes, there are certain counties [that are under the Act]. So it enhanced what we were doing.

G: But it didn't change your [focus]?

O: No, it didn't change the focus, it more or less just gave us another boost.

G: It reinforced?

O: It reinforced, that's true.

G: We talked a little bit about how it differed from the first. VEP had some pretty amazing personalities associated with it. You mentioned Vernon Jordan.

O: Well, yes, that's true.

G: And there's John Lewis [U.S. Congressman from Georgia, 1986-present] ?

O: [Yes] John Lewis and Julian [Bond] worked with us.

G: Could you talk about those three gentlemen and sort of what strengths they brought to the project?

O: I worked longer with Vernon, [who is] very outgoing, very dynamic. I used to work with his mother. When I say grew up, I mean his mother was a caterer, so I knew what he was about and he knew what I was about, so it made it easy. He would tell you what he wanted and how and he would go on about his business and you would do it, and that was it.

G: He didn't micro-manage?

O: Oh no, not at all, not at all. In all fairness, John [Lewis] didn't micro manage either. Now I had heard all this talk about John Lewis. I was just eager and waiting to meet him. I finally met him [when] he was working for [Les] Dunbar, because he went to the field when he left and he came down to one of the board meetings of SRC before he came on board, [and] that was my first opportunity to meet him. Now John was, well, I mean all of us are different, but he was quiet. But he, again, if you knew what you were expected to do, you did it and that was it. Now the interesting thing, getting back to Vernon, he was one of the Kennedy Fellows. He went to Harvard for six months. It was very interesting, his

secretary and I were sort of left in charge, so to speak, and he called one day. They called me Fessor, [which comes from] professor, that's [why]. He said, send Fessor over to the bank and get some money and take it to Shirley. She said, you've been assigned to go ahead and sign the check. She signed his name just like that, and I carried it to the bank and go the bank and came right on down there. That was the sort of relationship [we had]. We had been around him, so we could write any style and people would never know the difference. Now, Julian [Bond] was never a director, he was just really another employee on the staff, but he was very easygoing to work with.

G: Did he work out in the field?

O: Basically so, yes. Now, after I left, Julian and John were still there and then he [Julian Bond] went more out into the field then, but during the time that I was there, he was primarily an in-house person. We had a meeting whereby all of the black elected officials were invited to Atlanta for a workshop. John Morris was an Episcopal priest [and] he sort of spearheaded that. It was just an exciting time. There was always something going on, even during what we called the off-season, when groups would be in retreats and planning for the spring, we would always be invited. There was always something that we always had, I know every year that I was there [we had it], we would have a retreat where the entire staff, and we didn't refer to them as board members but the advisory council, and...

G: Of the SRC?

O: No, of the VEP. [Also,] representatives from the foundations would meet [with us] for three or four days and brainstorm and come up with program ideas for the following spring. It was out of that that this meeting that I was talking about all of the black elected officials was had. That's when [Les] Dunbar and what was the other, he was Dunbar's replacement?

G: Was it [Harold S.] Fleming?

O: Harold Fleming and Paul Anthony and all these people, they would come together and plan programs and strategies for the following year. It was just an exciting time.

G: Talk some more about that relationship between VEP and SRC. Did the staffs of the two organizations work together on a regular basis?

O: [We worked together on a] daily [basis], in fact, we were in the same offices. In fact, it was only after the entire [SRC] organization grew that the VEP moved down to the fourth floor. At one time, we were all on the fifth floor. SRC operated

on the whole fifth floor, but it grew so large that the VEP moved down to a portion of the fourth floor, but the relationship was always there. In fact, we shared a common receptionist, mail room, and everything else was in common. When SRC had their board meetings, VEP was always involved.

G: So you had a pretty good opportunity to observe how the SRC staff worked?

O: Oh, very much so, very much so.

G: Could I ask you about that a little bit?

O: Sure.

G: Do you have a sense, because it was pretty much predominately white organization right?

O: Pretty much, well, you mean staff-wise?

G: Staff-wise.

O: Staff-wise, yes.

G: So, did that begin to change as the movement gains momentum? Does the role of African Americans or women change in the SRC?

O: I wouldn't think so, because it was very well integrated. You had two project directors that were black, you had clericals that were black, [and] you had research directors [who were black]. It didn't change that much, but the thing that kind of bothered me was that after leaving for awhile and finding out number one, that when the VEP went under, that just hurt. After the Republicans gained office, the scuttlebutt was that they were going to do SRC in, and it seems that that's what happened, because they jumped on the foundations and the foundations couldn't do it, so they kind of undercut what they were all about. If there was ever a need for what SRC's mission was then, it is now, just as much as it was thirty or forty years ago. I'm mighty afraid we have been lulled back to sleep.

G: Well, that's part of the importance of doing these stories, so folks can know.

O: That's true, I think that's true. It kind of bothers me a little bit, see, I'm a high-school teacher and this summer we went to Boston and New England, and this young lady said something that has been on my mind ever since. She is a teacher and she is working with the group, because she said the average Afro-American young person thinks when you think of black history, they think only of

Martin Luther King. She said, not that I'm trying to belittle that, but that's sad, because there are so many people who made it possible for what he did to take place and they're not being taught that. I find that to be extremely true.

G: And disturbing.

O: Very disturbing. Because most of them think what they see now has always been, and we know it has not always been and it hasn't been that long. That's why I said if there was ever a need for the SRC, it is now. You know, another thing that they used to have which I thought was very good, this was a part of the SRC umbrella, they had state councils. There was a Georgia Council, a Mississippi Council, Candine...

G: ...and Happy Lee ran the Virginia one.

O: That's what I'm saying. These councils, they would come periodically and then every first or second week in November, they had what was the annual meeting where all of the SRC people would come together, and that was an experience. That was truly an experience.

G: Now I have a sense that SRC Atlanta is more sort of research...

O: Basically it was a research...

G: They are more research-oriented and then the councils are more active, is that accurate?

O: That's the way I perceived it. They would have, I guess what I'm talking about is a coalition, because Connie [Curry] and them was working for the American Friends Service [Committee]. Winifred Green, where is she? Did Connie mention her?

G: Is she not in Mississippi still?

O: I know she left here when...

G: I think she's still in Mississippi.

O: Okay, well, see, that's where I met them, with the American Friends Service Committee. It was an umbrella organization; a coalition would come together.

G: Did the folks who were doing the activist work resent the SRC? Did they feel like they should be doing more, they should be out in the field?

- O: I never got that impression, because I think they were more or less providing the raw materials for which SRC finished and sent forward. They both had a role.
- G: Both of those roles were necessary?
- O: Extremely, and even more so now.
- G: A lot of the work that you're doing comes at the time that the [civil rights] movement is beginning to change some...
- O: That is correct.
- G: ...and there's the beginning of the Black Power movement.
- O: That is correct.
- G: How did SRC respond to that, initially?
- O: At first I think they were a little apprehensive and eventually they opened up. At first, like most people I guess, their initial reaction was a little...
- G: Not sure what it was going to be?
- O: ...not sure what it was going to be, but after they got into it and found out it was just another way of doing pretty much the same thing. That's my [opinion].
- G: You mentioned the Republicans coming in and undermining some of this stuff. Then [Richard M.] Nixon [U.S. President, 1969-1974] comes in...
- O: Oh [laughing], I didn't want to go there. That's why I said the Republicans were in...
- G: Well, we'll go one more, there's the [George W.] Wallace campaigns [Ran for President, 1964, 1968, 1972].
- O: Oh, yes, well, that's true.
- G: Nixon had this southern strategy, there's all this seeming backlash against the kind of stuff that you were doing.
- O: It's just hard for me to accept, although I saw it with my own two eyes, that the Capitol is on this side and Martin's church was across the street [laughing]. That's just hard, and giving the image and everything that was going on at that particular time, because it was during that time that Mrs. [Lurleen] Wallace ran

for governor. Has the name Douglas C. Patton come up? Well, I don't know if Mr. Patton is still alive or not, but he was a NAACP man and he was in Birmingham. He was a friend of old Mr., [I can't remember his name]. Toni went to Spelman when I was at Morehouse.

G: Toni Dunbar, you mean?

O: No, Toni Johns.

G: Vernon's son?

O: No, it's his daughter. Her name is Toni. He used to come and speak at chapel for us at Morehouse [College].

G: I would love to have heard him preach.

O: What was his name? Mr. Nixon, E.D. Nixon...

G: Rosa Parks worked in his office.

O: That's right, in fact, it was Mr. Nixon who invited Martin to the meeting that night. That's how Martin became the spokesman for the movement.

G: Because he was new to the community and he hadn't had time to tick anybody off.

O: That's right. I had an opportunity to meet Mr. Nixon. That was another thing, you met so many interesting and dedicated people during that time to work [for] what everything was about.

G: So, this Republican backlash, how did it affect your work?

O: It affected our work because we weren't getting any money. Basically, since we were a project of the SRC, it sort of cut back on what we could do. I was there in 1968 when the assassination of Martin [Luther King Jr.] took place, and it was just unreal what SRC did. It was really unreal. It happened on a Thursday night, we went to work that Friday morning and Paul called a staff meeting. He said SRC would be sort of the clearing-house for everything that would be taking place during that time, and whatever each individual wanted to do, do it. If it meant not coming to work or going somewhere else, do it. It was during that time that the foundations poured in some more money to do additional voter registration, which was what he was all about. So that just gave us an opportunity to do even a little more. To me, it was the most rewarding experience that I have had in life, in terms of work. I mean, I didn't think it was

no job, it was a learning experience for me, a tremendous experience. Most of the people who I've worked with agreed on much the same thing. It was an opportunity to learn.

G: So when did you leave?

O: I left in 1969. John Lewis was there when I left. Eventually he left, but then, when I heard that it had gone under, I could never see why it would ever go under.

G: The VEP, you mean?

O: Yes, but I realize that it takes money.

G: And the funding was being cut off.

O: The interesting thing about it was, it doesn't take a large staff, but in order to reach out into the community, it takes a lot of staff. That's what happened.

G: I know some of the other kinds of programs they began to do were sort of around housing, prison reform, or worker's rights.

O: That's right, in fact, John Boone, who had been a warden, was in charge of the prison program. Moreland Smith, that I was telling you about, was the architect, was in the housing [program].

G: Did you have a sense that these programs were retreating from the kind of racial work that SRC had done, or was it just re-envisioning what racial work was supposed to do?

O: I think it was re-envisioning, because here again, I looked upon it as an opportunity to expand. They were really reaching into areas that at this point and time had not been reached. I'm sure you've heard they mention a name, Ms. Tilly.

G: Yes.

O: [They mention Ms. Tilly] and her women's work and all that stuff. That was well on the way, and Pat was the research director, Moreland was housing, John Boone was prisons, Vernon was voter registration, and Emory Vior was sort of the labor man. So, they were sort of trying to hit all phases of what was going on.

G: Did you have any sense of the work that the organization was doing after you

left, into the 1970s and the 1980s?

- O: Very little [awareness], because it seems that they stopped publishing that publication, *New South*. I'm sure that was because of money. They just did not get the publicity that they had gotten prior to that. It could have been the fact that the time that we were getting all the publicity, we were across the street from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, and surprisingly, quite a few staff-people on SRC came from across the street. So maybe those connections were lost.
- G: A lot of folks, when [Jimmy] Carter [U.S. President, 1977-1981] was elected, a lot of SRC-affiliated folks went to [Washington] D.C. to be in the Carter Administration. The folks who were left, I heard this, had a sense of kind of, you know, all the best people went and they kind of had to deal with that.
- O: Yes, they just have not been publishing to the extent that they were doing prior to that time.
- G: Do you have any sense on what their stance was on busing or any of those issues that came along in the 1970s?
- O: They wanted busing. Yeah, they were for busing.
- G: Weren't they supportive of the Charlotte case [*Swann v. Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, School Board* – a watershed case for using busing to achieve racial integration]?
- O: Yeah, it's my understanding that they were. I don't know why they stopped publishing. Well, I guess, like you said, with the Carter thing and their contacts being limited and moving away. What's the group out of D.C. just doing registration, policy something, where they get the statistics from? See, at one time, if anybody wanted to know anything about registration it was always the VEP or SRC, but the center in D.C. now seems to have that responsibility. I see more in the paper from them than I've seen even from SRC.
- G: Well, they are searching for a new director.
- O: They are?
- G: The SRC is. So maybe that will help revitalize.
- O: Did they have a lady?
- G: Wendy Johnson

O: And she is?

G: She's moving on. I'm not sure where she's going, but she's moving on. Connie [Curry] asked me about applying actually, but I'm happy in Mississippi. There's lots of work to do there, as you might remember. [laughing]

O: Still, still! Well, do they still have the annual meeting, SRC?

G: See, I know they have a publication now. It's called *Southern Changes*, I think. They did a series of radio broadcasts called *Will the Circle Be Unbroken?*, and it's about the civil rights movement, so it's all these stories.

O: Wasn't Julian [Bond involved]?

G: I think Julian narrated it, maybe.

O: Yes, he was the narrator there.

G: So that's kind of the big thing that they've been doing recently. I know they do some other things, but I'm not [sure what]. I know they give some awards out for some books every year...

O: Yes, cause they had the Lillian Smith Award. Oh, my God, I think about Maggie because that was her thing.

G: I know they honored Anne Braden, after some tension. Is that a diplomatic way to put it?

O: Yes, very diplomatic.

G: Let me ask you some concluding questions. From your perspective with the organization, how would you sum up the strengths and weaknesses of the SRC?

O: Then or now?

G: Well, from your experience, your time there.

O: I think it's a wonderful organization. The concept is just fantastic. The only thing, the weakness, is the funding. Since they rely primarily upon grants, there's very little [money], although they had these subscriptions, that was a minimal amount they needed to operate on. That, to me, is the weakness, the financial part. Their strength is the fact that they will take stands and they are out front on the issues. It's just too bad, because of staff changes, shifts, and political structures, that they do not have the staff to get out there and explore that. As I

said before, if there's ever a time, it's needed now more so than ever.

G: How do you think historians should write about the SRC in terms of its relationship to the civil rights movement, the African American struggle for freedom?

O: [It should be written] that it played a tremendous role, a tremendous role. It provided opportunities, encouragement, as well as leadership in all these areas of registration, housing, prisons, women's rights, all that. They've been out front. I just think that it's neat.

G: What about more generally in terms of just post-World War II southern history, what has been the role of the Southern Regional Council in the South?

O: To help transform...well, I won't say transform. I'll say, to educate. That's what's being done.

G: Why do you suppose the SRC's role has been relatively unacknowledged?

O: We're still in the South. I'm not being facetious. Every time I see one of those tags, [saying] "Forget, [Hell!]"[bumper sticker with Confederate Battle Flag], I feel like these people are not forgetting. If you don't believe that, they are trying to smooth over what happened even here in Georgia in the last two weeks....

G: I have paid attention to the elections. There was a huge backlash because of that flag [the Georgia state flag that prominently incorporated the Confederate Battle Flag was changed in January 2001 causing a political backlash that led to Gov. Roy Barnes' losing bid for re-election to Republican Sonny Perdue, who promised a referendum to pick a state flag design].

O: That's another reason why...

[End of Side A1]

G: We were talking about the flag and the election.

O: I really empathize with the incoming government, because this is going to take a constitutional amendment. He [Gov. Sonny Perdue] went out there and shook them up, and if he's not able to deliver, then he's going to be up a tree. Now, I'll admit that maybe the present governor bit off more than he could chew when he took on the teachers, took on the flag, and that arch. I mean, three strikes. Basically, I guess what I'm saying [is], outside of Augusta, Savannah, Columbus, Atlanta, and maybe a few other places, this is still a rural state. This is still a rural state.

- G: Well, you know, in Mississippi, those of us who were trying to get a new flag in Mississippi, we watched Georgia with envy. We kept wishing that our legislature would just get in there and do it. We had to have that statewide vote, and more people turned out to vote for that flag than voted in the late gubernatorial election
- O: I'm sure they did. When I say I empathize with the incoming government, is that he's going to have to deal with the chamber of commerce.
- G: They know what it will cost them.
- O: Right, and they just expanded the World Congress Center, and right there you're talking about mega-bucks. See, another thing I think that some of the voters failed to realize [is] that, although you were upset with the flag-changing, some of the positions that you occupy – these companies, you know, if they decide to relocate, then you're up the creek. So I really think, here again, I think we're back to square one, education. We've got to get the basics. I guess it would be a role of an organization like SRC to help explain what this is all about. I mean, sit down and rationally look at it, [and] talk all the emotions out of it now.
- G: I'm directing a new institute at Ole Miss, that's the Institute for Racial Reconciliation.
- O: Okay, all right!
- G: I have been mindful, as I talk to people about the SRC, of that example of education. One of the things that we want to do is to create an econometric model. In other words, we want to have an economist develop a formula that shows a community, okay, if you have x-percentage of unemployment, x-percentage of high school drop-outs, x-percentage of this, and these are all factors that are influenced by race, then this is how much this is costing your community, right? And this is how much better your community would be doing economically if you would eliminate those factors.
- O: Okay, I hear what you're saying, I agree with what you're saying. I guess what you're saying basically is, we've got to get down to basics.
- G: Not only that, but if you grab someone by a pocketbook, then you've got him.
- O: That's right, that's basic, you've got it.
- G: Now, I would love to be able to motivate people based on ideals and morals, but I'm afraid that's not...
- O: But if you can't, then you have to have plan B.

- G: You have to have plan B, or you have to have A and B, and you get the people you can with A...
- O: And then pick up the rest of them with B, that's right. I think that's where we are right now. That's exactly where we are right now.
- G: Well, we'll see if it works.
- O: I would like for plan A to work.
- G: I would too. I would too.
- O: But like you said, you've got to have a plan B. I think, unfortunately, more people will realize plan B than plan A.
- G: I think, unfortunately, more people are motivated by their self-interest than they are with some collective good.
- O: Oh, very much so.
- G: You've got to sneak them in to understand the collective good [laughing]. Is there anything else that I should have asked you about SRC or VEP?
- O: I don't think so. I just wish that, when your research is complete, that you send it to our old friends in New York at the foundations.
- G: [laughing] And get some more money?
- O: Get some more money and let some other young people do it.
- G: That's a good idea. Mr. Olive, thank you so much for time.
- O: I've enjoyed it, just sitting here reminiscing over [it]. It's good to go back and think about those, but I didn't know Pat was dead. I knew Bob Anderson had died. He worked in the research department, but I guess when you're old, I guess when you look at the fact that I must have been thirty-six when I went to work there and I'm seventy-nine. [laughing]
- G: You don't look it.
- O: I guess it does make a difference.
- G: Well, I'm going to let you get back to that Notre Dame game.

SRC 14
Page 20

O: No, it's probably over. Don't worry about it.

[End of Interview.]