

Interview with **Annie Devine**

November 9, 1985

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Interview gathered as part of *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years (1954-1965)*. Produced by Blackside, Inc. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Henry Hampton Collection.

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**Note:** These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in *bold italics* was used in the final version of *Eyes on the Prize*.

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[audio only]

[sound roll 1321]

INTERVIEWER: IT'S IN JUNE AND THEY'VE BEEN THERE A LITTLE WHILE—

[sync tone]

INTERVIEWER: —AND THESE WORKERS—

Devine: This was May.

INTERVIEWER: —AND THESE WORKERS.

Devine: This was May.

INTERVIEWER: THIS IS MAY?

Devine: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: WELL, WE'RE NOW, WE'RE NOW EXTENDING TO JUNE.

Devine: Right, right, right.

INTERVIEWER: AND THESE WORKERS ARE MISSING. CAN YOU TELL ME WHAT THIS MEANS AT THIS TIME—WHAT YOU'RE FEEL—WHAT YOU THINK IS

HAPPENING AT THIS TIME AND HOW THE COUNTRY—HOW MISSISSIPPI IS RESPONDING TO IT?

Devine: What is happening at this time, I think, there is—

INTERVIEWER: CAN WE TALK—STOP YOU ONE SECOND. TELL ME WHAT THIS TIME IS. OK—

Devine: You mean—

INTERVIEWER: TELL ME WHO WE'RE TALKING ABOUT AND WHAT THIS TIME IS THAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.

Devine: You mean—

INTERVIEWER: YEAH BEFORE YOU GET INTO IT.

Devine: '65?

INTERVIEWER: '64. '64 THE SUMMER. THREE MISSING VOLUNTEERS.

Devine: Yes, '64, you're getting me all right. Three missing volunteers and we're back in Mississippi from Oxford. All right. Our volunteers were assigned areas in the county. Some of them were to do day to day contacts with the local people. They were to assist in having meetings. They were to assist the local people in discovering what was the purpose, benefits to be received from existing agencies or the government and organizations that meant Welfare, farm programs, housing, including voter registration which was a continuous thing. Voter registration, education that was something that we dealt with daily. Many volunteers we're prohibited, in many instances, from reaching agencies as well as getting to local people. Transportation was a terrible problem at that time. One or two people might be assigned to an area to visit with the local people and they might be stopped. They might get in jail and that stops work of the program because there's the business of finding ways to get out of jail. Many times in our county that person would be George Raymond which was the head, head of the project—

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INTERVIEWER: OK. GET ME TO, GET ME TO SCHWERNER. GET ME TO CHANEY.

Devine: Well, Chaney and Schwerner—Chaney had been in my county prior to his going back to his home in Meridian which was in Lauderdale County. Good—Schwerner, who had been with us in Oxford, brought his fifty volunteers back to Lauderdale County and I brought my—our thirty volunteers back to my county which is Madison County. And they were, as I said, they were scattered all over the county to do certain, tasks.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Devine: That is communicating with the local people and our counties there's, something like forty more than forty thousand people in Madison County. So that meant trying to cover the whole county.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Devine: We had another SNCC volunteer in the county na—named Andrew, Andrew—but anyways his name was Andrew and he had a small area in the county where he organized which is called the—

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INTERVIEWER: THAT'S OK.

Devine: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: NOW, NOW COME ON LET'S CATCH UP—LET'S GET UP TO THE TIME—I'M REALLY INTERESTED WHEN, WHEN THESE VOLUNTEERS WENT MISSING AND THE EFFECT THAT'S HAVING ON THE CORE PEOPLE AT THAT TIME AND THAT AREA.

Devine: I think it had, you know, it really had—

INTERVIEWER: WELL NOW SAY IT. TELL ME WHAT IT IS. TELL ME WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT WHEN YOU SAY IT.

Devine: The, the incident, you know, where the volunteers were missing and couldn't anybody tell what had happened to them. We, you know, you could think anything. They might've gotten drowned. Somebody might've shot them to death. The problem was how long is it gonna take to find the bodies, you know. And, and that, that just, you know, it was an upset thing. People were coming and going. Many people are—who did not plan to stay in Miss—some of the volunteers who did not plan to stay. Remember some of these kids were quite young and some of 'em wanted to go home.

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Devine: Some of 'em did go home, but many of 'em stayed.

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INTERVIEWER: NOW THEY—THESE, THESE VOLUNTEERS—PEOPLE EXPECT THAT THEY'RE DEAD. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEIR DYING AND EMMETT TILL DYING AND ALL THOSE BODIES THEY FISHED UP OUT OF THE RIVER DYING? WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Devine: There's a lot of difference because, you see, the movement was in, at that time, was in—almost in its height of, of going upward to doing things. You know, people had gotten encouraged and anxious about what is taken place [sic]. We'd be—because we weren't playing. We weren't playing. Our organization was tight. We knew from Atlanta to Washington day by day what was happening in the communities and, I think, that, that encourage [sic] the local people to open wider their doors, corporate [sic] more, to—get into the meetings more, volunteer more for services. We, as I said, that was the “best of times and the worst of times.” Food was coming in. Clothing was coming in. We had nothing to fear in many cases so the thing was, let's keep it going like this. Let's keep it going. So that people will be able to realize some benefits from this and in the meantime we're organizing, we are getting the local people organizing around the organization of the Mi—Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. Political organizing, as we were to understand, was just as important more important than anything else that we were talking about because if we had the right to vote then we had the right to make choices. Once we got people in office they could make real to us the promises of the government and we just, you know, it was just a flow—

INTERVIEWER: OK.

Devine: —of information and love and community togetherness.

INTERVIEWER: OK. SEE THAT WAS PAINLESS RIGHT? THAT WAS GOOD.  
THANK YOU, CUT.

Devine: OK.

[cut]

[end of interview]

00:07:33:00

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