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This is a study conducted through the University of Florida to investigate the impact of the black vote in Florida since 1965. As part of the study, we are interviewing all black elected officials in the state. We would like to stress that the results of this interview will be reported anonymously; that is no names of officials or name of cities will be mentioned in the final report. This we hope you can feel free ^{respond to} ~~report~~ ^{our questions} ~~oppressions~~ in an open candid manner. In order to accurately gather your views, we would like to tape record this interview if that's acceptable with you.

G: Fine ~~with me~~.

I: The following questions are asked to find out how well the voting rights act of 1965 has helped blacks take part in Florida politics. What year did you first register to vote?

G: Oh, that has been a good fifty-five years ago or there about.

I: What year were you first eligible to vote?

G: ^{Um-} ~~1940~~. Ever since I was of voting age.

I: Okay.

G: And that--I'm sixty⁵⁰~~four~~. You can deduct from that.

I: How were you registered? By a local registration/^{board} or by federal _____?

G: By local registration^{board}.

I: Did the local registrars ever turn you down when you applied to register?

G: No. No.

I: Okay. Have voter registration drives been held in the district in which you hold office?

G: Yes. Understand that we don't have districts here, ~~now~~.

I: You do not.

G: We have citywide voting and registration^{ation}.

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I: Could you name some of the organizations, local and national, that help the registration drives?

G: Well, NAACP has helped here quite a bit. The local Democratic party as well as some democratic organizations.

I: When were these federal registration drives held--before 1960, 1960-64, Before then?

G: These were before 1960 and since. As a matter of fact, voter registration around here goes on intermittently, being sometimes this year, maybe next year. At no time did we stop voter registration Bad place in tape

I: How successful were those voter registration drives?

G: Relatively successful. ^{Right} Relatively.

I: Okay. Are there any things that prevent blacks from registering to vote?

G: Non^{at} all. Not in ^{Miami} ~~my~~ any at this time anyway.

I: Please rate how important you think each of the following items are in preventing blacks from registering to vote. Economic dependence upon whites. Is it very important, fairly important, or not important?

G: Not important really. Not at all.

I: Fear of physical violence from whites?

G: No. No.

I: Complicated registration forms?

G: No.

I: Poor registration hours?

G: Well, that may be questionable, but I ⁱⁿ would think that any man in this country now where voting is not a problem--certainly not in ^{Miami, uh,} my neighborhood. The hours shouldn't be difficult because ^{there are} their times ^{when they} ~~never~~ even have registration say in the evening so that if a man ^{who} works ~~he~~ can't register to vote during the normal course of a day, And the evenings, ^{he} you gets

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G: that opportunity. Now that happens ^{not} about every year, ^{but} and some years they ^{they} let that happen. _____ of the whole--they kept saying, ~~you know, it's happening there~~ ^{they didn't know what's happening there} and commercialism, recession has been OK, I'm sorry.

I: Is registration here held often enough?

G: I think so.

I: Is there an indifference?

G: As a matter of fact, you can go register any day around here if you really want to go down to the courthouse. No problem.

I: Is there an indifference here of blacks to voting?

G: I'm sure there is a good proportion of indifference, and there is no inhibition in registering to vote. At least I have not heard of any.

I: The following questions are asked to gather information on the election campaigns of Black elected officials in Florida. Were you able to campaign freely?

G: Yes indeed.

I: Were you threatened in any way?

G: None at all.

I: It's amazing the difference between this city and Jacksonville.

G: Is that right?

Your answer,

I: Your answer was no. Were you handicapped by a lack of campaign money or not?

G: Well, no. I--^{at} first you, ^{you} may have some difficulty, but if you get well organized then people in the community think you are a fairly good candidate, there are whites and blacks alike who will contribute. They did for me anyway. I did not have money as a problem, and I didn't get a lot of money, you know. I got as much, I think, as I needed to

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G: operate my campaign.

I: Why did you decide to run for office? Was it your own decision or were you selected by a party or were you asked to run by a group of concerned people or what were your reasons?

G: Well, I was appointed to fill out an unexpired term. And after I had filled out the unexpired term or was just about to complete the term, I asked among the blacks if any young black was interested. ^{uh} At the time I did not get the kind of response I thought I should have gotten, in that, I wanted a commitment of--how you're going to make sure this community belongs to all of the people--not whites or not blacks, not latins. And the black who even ran against me did not give me the kind of positive plan _____ I want. I was committed to that ~~for~~ ^{philosophy} ~~months~~, and so I then decided I would run because that's what I wanted to see. I'd gone for the period of integrating this community, and I was determined that nobody--white nor black--would turn the clock back. It is just as bad to be a ^a black racist as it is to be a white racist so I felt that ^{this} ~~that~~ community belonged to all of us. And that this community could best be served by any man, whether he be latin, whether he be white, whether he be black, who felt that way. And because ^{he} ~~he~~ did not give me the kind of answer I wanted, I then decided to run. And ^I ~~I~~ was successful.

I: To which political organization do you belong?

G: Well, I'm a Democrat.

I: What were the two or three most important issues on which you campaigned?

G: I ran on the issue that this community should be an open community, that ^{uh} it should not be all black or all white or all latin. See we have a latin problem here, and I was concerned that the latins be treated like I would want to be treated. And that whites, even if ^{we, if} whites were in the

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G: minority, that they would be treated equally. You see, any^{any} road that works for you will work against you. And^{uh} you cannot have a community where people enjoy and feel at home if there are all these inhibitions. And I--that was the key for me. I was not interested in many of the other things. The race relations to me is number one because I know that if people don't get^{uh, get} along, you ~~will~~^{can} forget it. All the money you have, all the institutions you create, you can forget it.

I: Do you think these issues were the main problems facing blacks in your community?

G: I thought that that issue was the greatest threat to this community for all of us--all parties. And I still think it's important in this community. I think that we who hold public office need to unequivocally make that known. And anybody who thinks and feels^{and does} otherwise--we need to deal with them positively--either get them out of office, don't vote for them next time or make sure to not put anybody in there who does feel that way.

I: These questions are asked to determine some of the conditions which have enabled black to win office in Florida. How were you elected--at large or by district?

G: At large.

I: How many people are in your district, in this case at large population?

G: The entire population. And I'm happy to say that^{that, uh,} blacks didn't elect me, Cubans didn't elect me, whites didn't elect me. If you look at the precincts, you'd see that across the board I was elected. I'm happy about that. I feel much better and I'm much freer being elected by all of the people rather than black people whom I must answer, say, to black folk or either Cubans--to Cubans or ~~the~~ whites to whites. I

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- G: think ~~that when~~ ^{wh,} a man holds ^{ing} public office, certainly in a city like Miami or any other city for that matter, ~~it's very often~~ ^{is better off when} he is answerable to all the people then he must always be on the lookout and mind his p's and q's.
- I: What percentage of the population in Miami is black?
- G: Those who give out the figures say about twenty--between twenty and twenty-five percent.
- I: About what percent of the blacks of voting age in Miami are registered to vote?
- G: ^{um,} I don't know for certain, but I would assume that about thirty percent, which is way low--much lower. ~~The~~ ^Salvation of people, whether it be black or white, is in politics--not, you know, some of these other things because we the politicians rule what happens to their lives. And you ought to be concerned.
- I: About what percentage of blacks who are registered to vote do you estimate actually voted when you were elected?
- G: ^{um,} I'd venture to say at least 50 percent. I wish it were higher, like in some foreign countries where people just go to the polls. I wish we would develop among all of the people--not black people--all of the people where voting gets to be a way of life, with a passion, you know. So that we who sit in public ~~at~~ ^{or hold} public office realize that we are accountable. And either we keep that trust or we have to go. I really believe that.
- I: Do you think ^{you got} votes from whites, then?
- G: Oh yes.
- I: About what percentage of your total vote do you think came from whites?

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G: I think--I'd venture to say that I got an equal percentage. I think I got--well, the returns show that I got more white votes than anybody else. It's the fact that I got elected. And my--the votes I got, if you look at the precincts, I got ^{a, a,} an even, by at large, balanced percentage of votes in white and black and latin precincts. I was happy about that.

I: This interview is a bit more specialized than what would be really necessary for ~~my own~~ ^{Miami} because of the latin population.

G: Yes.

I: You don't find that in some of the ⁱⁿ other areas of the state.

G: Right. And with our voting here, it ~~turns~~ ^{carries} a special tone because it's easy to hide something ~~s~~ that unless you are aware and furrough: them out. They would not be seen.

I: In the election in which you won office, how many opponents did you have?

G: I think I had ^{uh,} eight.

I: How many were white and how many ^{were black} ~~of them was there~~?

G: Let's see. One was black. He was the major candidate, that is major opppnent. The next--I'm talking now in terms of ^{uh,} how the votes show-- was a Cuban. And ~~the~~ next was a white.

I: What percentage of the total vote did you get?

G: I got ^{uh} more than fifty percent.

I: These questions are asked to determine how well black officials in Florida have been able to benefit ^{by} those they ^{--to benefit those they} represent. In what ways do you think you've helped blacks in your district by holding office? Please discuss.

G: Well, frankly at first ^{I, eh,} ~~politics~~ was not my cup of tea. I'm happy, however, that I did get ^{uh, get} ~~into~~ politics because I was--I need ~~to~~ make

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G: the system ~~of~~ aware of some things that I don't think the system was aware of. And I'm happy because I think I ^{I...I} take a point of view to the commission which is not necessarily a black point of view or a white point of view or a latin point of view. I take a point of view and I maintain this all the time. My first concern is what's best for this community, and not what is best for black folk necessarily. And I think that what's best for this community gets to be best for black folk as well as ^{for} ~~the~~ white folk. And ^{and} some things that people were not aware of in the black community, I get an opportunity to make them aware of it. At least they listen. And some things we have had--we have got done here. I'm happy that we got them done. I question if we would have got them done otherwise because you know, ^{eh} the average black community is the last to be considered. And it's like in anything else, the squeaking wheel gets the grease and the crying baby gets the attention. And the fact that we are not here ^{at} ~~at~~ that is we blacks are not usually at the commission hearing and all that because ^{it works} ~~of votes~~. I'm not so sure it's always worked. Sometimes there's indifference, but the fact that they're not here but I'm here I can voice some of the concerns. So even if I don't get ^{don't get} a lot done, the fact that I get a relationship developed is important.

I: Is there anything that has prevented you from doing a better job, especially in regard to benefitting blacks? Is there anything?

G: No, politics being what it is, certainly in our case, you have to have three people to vote for ^{is what} ~~what~~ is to be. And I must say this about the present commission. The present commission in my book is the best balanced racially, ethnically, culturally. And ^{uh} anything I have taken before the commission that affects particularly black

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G: people, they have responded right off and positively. Now we have some problems. That is not to have you believe that, you know, we don't have problems. Oh, we have problems, but we would have them anyway. And so what we have to do is to realistically face them, and we can't undo the past. We have to start from where we are and move on.

I: Please rate how important you think the following items are in preventing you ^{if so,} from doing a better job in benefiting blacks. That the office has no real authority--very important, fairly important, or not important.

G: I don't really ^{think} feel that there is any reason or anything that inhibits me from doing a good job for blacks, providing what I want for blacks in reasonable and sensible. Now you know ^{uh,} it's very nice for me to want to undo the past, you know, but I'm a realist. I take the position--I cannot live in the past and I can't undo the past so I must deal with the present. And hopefully what I do today will help ^{the fu-} help tomorrow--the future.

I: Do you experience any lack of cooperation from blacks?

G: No, I have not.

I: Do you experience any lack of cooperation from state officials or federal officials?

G: No, no. The reason for that is, there is a oneness of mind on the commission. I think if there were not--if it were not that way, we would.

I: Do you feel that white officials treat you differently than the other officials or not or that is, do they consider you a spokesman for the blacks? Are you able to only raise certain questions?

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G: Oh no. That's a free commission up there. You can raise any issue, and the interesting thing is somethings they know more about it than you, you know. And they--and sometimes they raise issues that you would ~~feel~~ ^{be} reluctant to raise, but they have ^{they have no, uh--} no hesitancy about raising them. It really surprises you.

I: I think I'd like to sit in on one ^{of these} sometime. What services have you provided blacks in your area that they did not have before you took office?

G: Well, I can't really say we now provide a service that they did not have. I would rather think that we have gone to the position where we get better service and more efficient service than we once had.

I: Please rate how effective you think you've been in each of the following service areas: Police protection--very effective, somewhat effective, or not effective.

G: Considering the population of this city with the bilingual problem and the ^{uh,} not having as many police officers as we think we ought to have, I would venture to say that we've had reasonably good police protection.

I: Streets and roads.

G: Oh, certainly, in certain parts of Miami we have the best looking streets with sidewalks if you go -- certainly in Coconut Grove. That's one of my prides and joys since I've been commission.

I: Housing?

G: Housing? Unfortunately housing doesn't come under the city. Housing comes under metro. ^{I: welfare? G:} However, I need to say to you that the housing authority that they now have formally was the Miami Housing Authority. And legislate welfare. We do not control welfare either. That is under metro.

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I: Employment?

G: I think the city is looking better proportionately in the field of employment, than it has ever looked.

I: Parks and recreation?

G: We have a reasonably good amount of parks, and then our recent park, uh, bond issue. We've ^{we've} seen to it that parks are spread out, and we have a fairly good park service.

I: Water, sewage, and garbage.

G: No problem at all about water or sewers. Not even garbage. Garbage is like anything else, we ought to have more men. But there ^{again,} you know, ^{there again,} you're talking about how many dollars do you have. But comparatively speaking, we do not suffer from any of these services. The commission has tried and I feel--not that I'm satisfied--but I think has done the best job of trying to equalize what's here based on the population density and the actual needs.

I: Health and hospitals?

G: There again, we had--we turned over our hospitals. For instance, Jackson Memorial Hospital was ours, but we turned it over to the Metropolitan Government.

I: Education?

G: There again, that goes to the county, uh, Metropolitan Government.

I: Fire protection?

G: Oh, we have the best fire ^{uh} outfit in this county ^{we, uh} not the best--one of the best. We are rated double A, which means of course ^{we} you get much better insurance rates and ^f fire insurance rates and everything ^{else}.

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- G: Oh yes, we're number ^{we're} ~~we're~~ real proud. We have a first class--much better than--I'd venture to say we are the only city in southeastern America that has that kind of a rating. So that's not a problem.
- I: Okay. Have you gotten federal funds for your area?
- G: We have.
- I: Would you please list some of the more important federal grants you and other leaders have obtained for your area?
- G: Well, I do not want to convey the idea that certain leaders have obtained these grants. The whole commission has gone and got whatever grants we have, and the entire commission has shared in apportioning the monies through our administrative staff. And money being what it is, I think that they have done a fairly good job in distributing the money. Now ^{that we have a} ~~we~~ have one good thing in the distribution of that money and that is we have a team of people who go check and doublecheck as to how effective that money is being used and how effective the programs are. Now at the end of this year ^{Bad plus/see the} ~~in the~~ reports and it is our plan that if they have not cut the mustard, meaning ~~that if~~ they have not carried out the intent and it is not to the best interest of this community, we plan to cut off that money and redirect that money elsewhere.
- I: Have you ~~been~~ as an elected official been able to bring industry or retail stores into your area?
- G: Well, fortunately for us, we do not operate as one man or two men or three men. The commission, as I indicated earlier, this commission tries to do what it does as a team and not as--that I did or what you did. Now there are some of us who have special expertise, like the mayor. Business is his living, ^{you know, why} And that means naturally he would be

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- G: speaking to business people when some of us are nowhere around. But when the time comes to make that decision, he brings that matter before the entire commission and the entire commission has to vote. Just the other day ^{we, we} went to Atlanta looking around to see what they're doing that we're not doing, ^{and} to try to do some creative and imaginative things in Miami because we have a special problem here. One is to get rid of Latin America and whether we like it or not, we've got to live with that. And we're now considering--talking about--how important it is to put a fashion mart kind of a thing here so that people out of Latin and Central America could come, shop, and we want to deal with this free trade zone business. So we--I venture to say no one ^{no one man} can talk about what he did really. He may initiate, but it ends up what we did, you know, on this. And I think that ^{that} keeps down a lot of friction and you know, fighting among us.
- I: Have you been able to see that blacks are hired fairly in local government?
- G: We are now in the midst ^{wh,} through ^a federal government team ^{that came} ~~and a team~~ last week of really assessing this problem. You do not have as many blacks hired as we should have and you know, that's probably a system that has been created. But presently we are trying to make everybody sensitive to the inequities, to the differentials, and some of them don't want to change. Some of the people who ^{were at these departments} ~~work with these problems~~ don't want to change, but we're trying to ^{ca} conjoin them. You know the first thing is to ^e ~~con~~join them, and if you can't ^{ca} ~~con~~join them, you know, the government ^{is--well the} federal government is not going to let us continue to go the way we've been going. Either we're going to have to cut the mustard or they're going to cut off that money. And you know it's very simple. I learned that ^{wh} people who ^{-who} are affected economically get religion in a hurry, you

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G: know. And they discover that that money is going to be cut off, then they start thinking, well, let's see what we can do, you know, one of those things.

I: Has federal revenue sharing helped your area?

G: Yes indeed. Yes, we get ^{perhaps} ten percent of our budget comes from federal sharing, and it's a very integral part of this budget system here. It has enabled us to do some things that we wouldn't have been able to do before. And it has enabled us to give some incentives so that people would be inclined to want to change--very important. And revenue sharing is a very good thing for cities like Miami that ^{uh,} find themselves economically in a bind.

I: ^{uh,} Have there been any black protests, sit-ins, boycotts or riots?

G: Recently, no. ^{But,} The interesting thing here is because you have this mixture that we have, ^{ah,} you can have your differences addressed. And I think, perhaps the most single thing that makes this community--that makes me happy--I'm a native incidentally--born and ^{reared} ~~raised~~ ^{but} here ^{that} makes this community what it is for me is the fact that the broad base of the commission for men and woman. Woman is wonderful. See we-- we've got a woman, we've got some Roman Catholics, we got some Protestants, we got a Jew. You see we got a black, got a ^{Lat, a} Cuban, and a Puerto Rican, white AngloSaxon. So we have all of these different people there, and because they're there--at least there's openness to discuss and to try to remedy. And I think those who there are sensitive. And we don't ^{-we don't} sit around and talk so much about the past. We're concerned about where we are right now and where we're going tomorrow. That's our ^{probl-, that's our} concern.

I: The following questions are asked to enable an assessment of black politics in Florida in general. Briefly, what's your opinion of

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- I: Governor ^{Reubin} ~~Ruben~~ Askew?
- G: I think he's one of the best governors we've had. Next to ~~to~~ he and Leroy Collins are my men.
- I: What is your opinion of other state officials and state representatives?
- G: Oh, Dade County has produced some good ^{uh,} senators and some good ^{uh,} representatives. And I think within the last five years, we've had a good crop of ^{uh,} legislators--men who have seen to it that--~~serve~~ ^{say} Dade County has received a fair share--not an equal share--meaning since ^{we,} we're about twenty-five--we give about twenty-five percent of the bulk of the state income. We don't receive twenty-five percent. Maybe we get, ^{say maybe} eighteen percent, but there was a time we weren't getting that much. And the men who are ^{there} ~~now~~--because they have gone to school with several of the others from other parts of the state--they at least have a working relationship and a [~] talking relationship. And because I knew you in school and you knew me in school, you know, that kind of ^a thing. Up until about ten years ago--fifteen years ago, we didn't have that. And we always suffered, but we're getting a fair share. And I want to say this, the governor ~~s~~ has been, in my book, one of the most outstanding men this state has produced in politics.
- I: What do you think his chances are of ^{a na-, of} holding national office?
- G: Sometimes I think he's too much of a gentleman. ^[Laughs] Only because, you know, the governor wants to do the right thing. And I'm not so sure, you know, that gets to be ^a /problem. But I would say this, he would grace any national office that he is appointed to or is elected for.
- I: Do you think that ^{uh} the presidency or the vice-presidency is, uh, is in the picture for him?
- G: Well, if he were going to be the president, I'd say fine. As a vice-

G: president, he'd get relegated to--you know. I'd rather keep him in Florida.

I: Where he can do something.

G: Where he can do something. You know, he's spread himself broad and thin. I don't want him to be no vice-president where he's got to be the second. ^{see} I want him to be number one. A man like ^{Reubin} ~~Ruben~~ Askew. We need to be where the buck stops there.

I: Everyone that we've interviewed thinks so highly of him.

G: ^{Right,} ~~well,~~ he's a great guy.

I: Do you think that winning and holding office in Florida has been worth the effort?

G: Yes. Let me say, whether you and I like it or not, we have to come to the realization that politics is here. It's a way of life, and the thing that saddens me about politics is good people decide they

don't need to get their hands dirty. Well, okay. Who's going to it--who's going to get ~~get~~ them dirty. ^{hey,} You know, all you have to do is to be so good and

let the other guy do it. Then you end up getting nothing. You know, that is you get no kind of government that's worth talking about. But, uh---

In the state of Florida, I think we're getting a new crop of men.

They're young. They've made some mistakes ^{but} ~~and~~ so have I. ^{uh,} Who doesn't make mistakes? And the thing for all of us to do is don't turn our backs on politics because of the mistakes that have been made, but to come forward and say don't let ~~you~~ make these mistakes anymore.

I: These questions are asked to compile an overall group profile of black elected officials in Florida. No individual names will be reported. Type of office held? Have you held any previous offices?

G: No, no, no. This is the first public office I've held.

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I: The date you were first elected?

G: April, 1970--no, I was appointed April, 1972, and two years ago I ran for the office.

I: The date that you took office?

G: No, April the 20th, 1972, and then of course, when you're elected, you take office in November.

I: The number of times that you've run, only once?

G: Once.

I: Your age?

G: Sixty.

I: Occupation before--

G: I'm a clergyman and I love that.

I: I've been wondering, are you Father Gibson or Reverend Gibson?

G: Right. I'm Father Gibson. Either one. Don't worry about me. [Laughs]

I: Okay. Because I didn't now which, I didn't want to say the wrong one.

G: Don't worry about ~~it~~. ^{nothing. Its the same} Look, ~~the same~~ I'll be the same animal anyway. [Laughs]

I: Okay. Your education, grade school, high school, and college.

G: I finished grade school in Miami, finished high school in Miami, and went to St. Augustine's College, a church related college in Raleigh. Finished three years in the seminary, did some graduate work.

I: I had ^{uh,} understood it was Reverend Gibson, but mother said, you know I think everyone calls him Father Gibson.

G: Don't worry about it.

I: Well, I didn't want to say the wrong one.

G: I have ^{I have a} a surprise for you. I've been made a canon in the church and they're all wanting to call me Canon Gibson, you know. And I said,

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G: look, you know, I still love Father Gibson.

I: ^{And my mother was right.} She said, you know, Marcia, I think everyone says Father Gibson. My parents _____.

G: I love Father Gibson. You know what, because there's something, you know, there's a romance about that.

I: Yeah, there is.

G: And all of those things are Noise.

I: Salary received from your elected position?

G: Five thousand dollars a year. You can't believe it. [Laughs]

I: That's really quite a bit less than any of--

G: Right.

I: Were you active in the civil rights movement?

G: Yes, I was.

I: Okay.

The church to which you belong.

G: I'm ^{I'm} director of Christ Episcopal Church.

I: Are you an official in your church?

G: Yes.

I: Are there other community organizations or activities that you're involved in, if so, could you name some.

G: Well, I'm ^{yet} active in the NAACP, and many of the ^{civic} local civic organizations.

I'm active. I try not to join a lot of them because in politics I think it's ^{your} the advantage not to. And before I got into politics I was ^{very} active in a lot of things, but I think that you can't have two masters.

I: Do you know of any other black elected officials in this area who have been in office since 1974? We have, I think, a pretty complete list.

End of FB 54A