

FB 61A

Sub: Mrs. Vernita Cox

Int: "Button Project"

South Bay

12-18-75

A.M.

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I: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?

V: Oh, I registered back in, um, '56.

I: What year were you first eligible to vote?

V: Oh..... I was eligible to vote, I would say, in '50.

I: Uh, did the local registrars ever turn you down when you applied to register?

V: No, it was just that I was moved from one place to the next ~~cause~~^{place,} migratory and never really settled in no particular place. So this is the reason that I didn't register or anything at the particular time.

I: ~~O.K.~~^{Kay.} Have voter registration drives been held in South Bay or the district of South Bay you were from?

V: Yes, we, uh, I know we held a voter registration drive the first year, second year, not the first year, from about seven to, oh..... about seven to one, and it was, um, fairly successful I would say.

I: Did, uh, Were there any organizations, local or national, that conducted these?

V: We had, uh, one organization but later it was conducted through one of them, uh, candidates, one of the young ladies that was running for a political office.

I: Mmm hmmm.

I: When were these voter registration drives held? You said in 1971?

V: ~~Nineteen seventy one~~ ¹⁹⁷¹ and up until now we, uh, have not had another one, but we're in the process right now of, uh, handling some way to deputize so that they can, uh, go out into the field and bring in people to, uh, go ahead and vote for this coming up national election as well as the next local elec.....
uh, election.

I : Mmm hmm.

V: We have about, uh, six ladies that we're gonna have, ~~working with~~ ^{In} West Palm Beach, I've contacted Mrs. Winchester and, uh, she that we could either come as a group or we could come singular and, uh, we're gonna start this drive right after the Christmas holidays.

I: You said they were successful, that's my next question, how successful?

V: They were rather in the, um, election that year, we did come out the winners. The two blacks that run, we come out the winners in that election. Now, the ~~succeeding~~ years, the years after that, we didn't do the election, we didn't do the voter registration, uh, and, uh, well, I did win but the other young lady chose to go back to school. So I couldn't say whether, ^{or} ya know, it would've been uh, ^{or} ya know, ^{the same as} ~~to say that~~ it was the prior year or not because we didn't use it. Now, this last election we had, we really lost. We didn't have a ~~voter~~ registration drive. So, we encourage now beginning to feel that each year we are going to have to get out and remind the voter, ^{or} ya know, that you should use your vote. Not as a payoff, but use your vote for the people that you think are gonna do the best for the city, not because somebody promised to give you a few dollars because then you..... say like in the long ^{run} ~~term~~, maybe you did get a few dollars at election time, but in the long run it seems that ~~the~~ ^{the vote} ~~most~~ people are gonna do for your city ~~you~~ will be much more advantageous to

V: you than the few dollars that you would be getting during election time.

I: Uh huh. ^{KAY,} O, K, Are there anythings in South Bay which prevent blacks from registering to vote?

V: Well, we, um, and this isn't really downing, uh, anybody in this area. Um, we.... We don't have a say a lot of people who are interested in politics. We're not..... You don't see in any interest in what is doing or.... until it hits the family. When it hits home then the, uh, the one who the first to start, ^{OU} ya know, criticize. Uh, education-wise, you didn't have people, ^{OU} ya know, who felt that they were qualified enough. Um, unless a black feels that he is qualified I don't think he would, ^{OU} ya know, step up and say "I'm gonna run" unless he had been paid to do that and this is to block the other black that, ^{OU} ya know, wants to run. But, uh, education-wise and then a lack of interest is to what's going on in the, uh, community.

I: Well, uh, to this next, uh, question I have a list I'd like you to go over and, uh, um, rate how important you think each of these ite..... items are for preventing blacks from registering to vote and, uh, if you could comment on each one as you go down the list but uh, be sure to comment.

V: Now when you say economic uh, economic dependency on whites.....

I: Uh huh.

V: You mean like I'm afraid they decide, ^{OU} ya know.....

I: You might lose your job or uh.....

V: I might lose my job. Uh, this is for voting or for registering?

I: For registration. For.....

V: For um.....

I: For just even registering.

V: For the person who they choose when they get at the pole¹. This plays a very important part here with, uh, economic dependence. Now in this last election and

V: uh, this is merely hearsay. In this last election quite a few people were paid off to make sure that the person uh, the other people ~~who~~ want to have in the office get into the office. It has been rumored that the coming up election, that a lot of money will be paid out to keep me from coming back in the office. I don't have the money, ya^{ou} know, to pay people to, um, to vote, and then it's against the law. Ya^{ou} know, you shouldn't pay people to vote. They should want to do this on their own.

I: Uh huh.

V: So, this economic dependence, because we have people here who, uh, say, well, they are the power people in this town.

I: Mmm hmmm.

V: And a lot of these people are dependent on these people for their, uh, bread and butter.

I: Uh huh.

V: So, they don't realize the fact that when I get behind the screen, ya^{ou} know, regardless of who I pull, nobody will never know, ya^{ou} know, what name I pulled. But they have been, say, a lot of coerced and, say, ya^{ou} know, you know where you work or you know who you work for. So you know who who to pull the lever for and these people follow the same pattern. And, uh, this has a lot to do with the outcome of a lot.... a lot of our elections in this town.

I: That's interesting. What uh..... What kind of industry, uh, did most people of South Bay work in?

V: To say that, I will actually say, ya^{ou} know, just go ahead and answer the question. Um, the biggest company in this area now and the biggest um, employer is the uh, South _____, uh, Corporation. These people handle, uh, sugar cane, they handle, uh, all the green leaf vegetables like lettuce and celery, mostly ~~celery~~ celery. I think they have something to do with cucumbers and peppers.

V: They plant this area and then they have farms in the other area, ^{ou}ya know, where they can go. The people are kept migrant and I feel strongly that they are kept migrant for a particular reason. Uh, like three or four months out of the year they don't have any work to do. Now at least, uh, say like two months out of the year they might have to wait until they get ready to say sell sell their seed bed? Like three months they have to wait until they get ready to replant cane. Now, everybody knows.... I don't care how good your salary is, there is just so much money that you can lay aside out of their salary because the more money a man makes, the more he spends, the more he sees and wants, and the more he's gonna spend. After these people have been off from their jobs for three or four months they don't have anything else that they can fall back on, so quite naturally, ^{when}this man pulled his bus out in September and say ^{id}I'm ready, ^{ou}ya know, to have my celery uh, for um, harvest, These people are so broke, ^{ou}ya know, I ^{but you}think ~~for~~ anything that they would get this bus in order to get themselves ^{back,}~~ya~~ know, economically wise again, and when they start working they work, like I think you don't start until about October or November and then there's Christmas right around there. And I've always prayed, say, well I hope, ^{ou}ya know, that we never get a frost like we did, I think that was ^{round} in the '60s that we got an awful frost here and it kills everything. All the celery, it killed all of the celery and all of the green stuff. Then they uh, started, you know, corn. That was just another big farming thing out here, corn. Then, uh, they started back work again and right in the ^{spring} of the year when they went and had worked for about three or four weeks and then it started raining, and then you have the rain doing something to the, uh, corn and the celery. ^{ou}Ya know, I think they say it causes the celery to turn black in the center where the heart is, and then the corn, it does something to the corn. So, really it if we ever get a ... a nice cold snap here these people will be out of

- V: work say like six or seven months out of the whole year. So when time come to work if they put in a month or two they don't have enough to bind them over and they will never..... You will.... You would find a few that is able to uh budget and save, but the majority will never say have a decent bank account or hospitalization, ^{ou}ya know, like, if I take my child to the hospital, I could say, well, I have hospitalization with uh Mutual of Omaha, International Life and I would have to pay a 250 uh, ^{ou}ya know, ^{ad}mission fee or something like this because they can't do it. They just don't have the room and the people know that out in this area.
- I: But does that make them afraid to manipulation by the.... by the growers or by the union.
- V: It is. There are manipulation and it will ever be as long as uh, ^{ou}ya know, we can't get or we don't get some type of industry or some other type of, uh, working in this area just to let these people know that, ^{ou}ya know, you're not the only man that these people depend on. Now they make..... I'm not gonna uh, down the salaries. When they're working they uh make.... they make a fairly good salary. But, at the same time, in order to keep anything, you have to work year round. You just cannot stay off your job even with a good salary. You can't still get off four months and expect to get ahead. You can't do it.
- I: That's interesting.
- V: And another thing, um,..... uh, I'm..... I don't know how I can go about it, but this is in an alcoholic program that I'm in and many times, I'm sure, like if you go on your job if you're working..... if you're working with a person, if you go on your job and if you appear to be intoxicated or have had had anything to drink, they would ask you to leave and come back maybe when you're better or when you think that you can do your work without drinking. But on most of these jobs,

^{these}
V: people are kept in a depressed state. They are kept depressed so that they would not know really what's going on. Now they can drink on most of these jobs. They uh, carry..... In fact, people who are supposed to be like foremen, they carry out the beer and the wine. So that means that these people are drunk from one day to the next day. They really don't know what's going on. And if it's someway that, ^{you} ya know, uh, we're talking about uh, trying to cut down on the, uh, rate of alcoholism, and if we're gonna have this ~~white~~ like this, it's not gonna be ^{ing to be} ~~anyway~~ ^{easy} to cut down on it. It has to be ^{one} ~~some~~ way that you can manage, to say make a law, pass some kind of a law that you know..... Don't even..... Like even the busdriver. Like, if he knows someone has beer and wine that's taking out to these places, ^{you} ya know, there should be a law against that so we could cut down on the on the amount of depression and maybe ^{you} ya know, let the people think clearly at least for six months and maybe they can see where they can help themselves. ^{you} Ya know.

I: Dr. Button is, uh, is also the faculty advisor to, uh, the United Farm Workers Union at the University of Florida and uh.....

V: You say Dr. Button?

I: Dr. James Button, yeah.

V: How How you spell it?

I: B-u-t-t-o-n. And uh, have have you..... Has the community here had any contact uh, as far as a union organizer?

V: Well, you know um, this ^{follow} ~~is~~ ^{before} that organized uh, the grapes of Shivari, Caesar.....

I: Caesar Shivari?

V: Caesar Shivari. He came here at one time and, uh, that was about in, uh, '71 or '72 but I havn't seen him, ~~here~~ he hasn't been back out, ^{you} ya know, and I think he was gonna organize the sugar cane, uh, business.

I: Yeah.

V: But he hasn't been back out here.

I: Well the.....the..... They're..... They're winding up their fight in California. It looks like ~~in~~ either we'll shift to Florida sometime in the near future and, uh, the United Farm Workers is, uh, I think gearing up for a a fight against minute maid, and some of the other large growers in Florida.

V: Yeah. Uh, ~~that's the~~ ^{let's see,} Minute Maid..... That's the orange..... in the orange, uh, belt industry. Well, it..... it seems that they are going to, ^{or} ya know, have a pretty tough fight with, uh, the sugar can growers. Uh, we elect..... That is another thing too. Um, I don't know how some Uh, I was speaking to judge, a judge from West Palm Beach, how to go about changing the election time because our election time, we have a lot of migrants in this area and uh, election time is held during the time that a lot of these people are out of the area. They are away working and this is when the election time is held.

I: When.... When they're away is when the election is held?

V: When they're away, mmm hmm. Because these people leave like in June and they don't get back here until in October, some don't get back until November and our elections are in September. Elections are held..... ^{or} Ya know, you start campaigning in June, July and then you actually do the registr..... registered uh, voting in September and uh, a lot of people are away at this particular time.

I: And you would rather have them..... in.....

V: Well, like in March. They're here in March.

I: Yeah. Well, getting back to this list, how about uh, fear of physical violence from whites ? Is there any?

V: I don't really think it's a fear of physical violence but there, uh, they're

V: afraid that like they will not have any work to do or they'll lose, ~~and~~
just like you say, lose the jobs or things of this nature. But physical
violence, I don't think uh, no one has ever uh, ^{ya} know, ~~was~~ resort to physical
violence.

I: Yeah. Complicated registration forms?

V: No, the registration forms were not, uh, complicated, but the hours uh..... They
have, uh, geared the hours to meet, uh, in some instances, to meet registration
time. Now, uh, I tried to explain to Mrs. Winchester that..... the people
^{are}
~~will~~ usually working from morning, early morning, until night. Um, Saturday,
December 13th, they sent out a mobile unit for registration, but it was 11:00
in the morning and a lot of these people, when they start working, work a
seven-day pattern. They work from..... from Sunday to Sunday and work seven
days straight, and a lot of these people cannot get around to registration and
they do not get home until like, um, 6:30 or 7:00 in the evening and, uh, she
was at the plaza, I think until maybe two or three and then she went on ship
over to ^{Belle Glade,} ~~Belgrade.~~ But this wouldn't fit a great deal of the people out in
this area. So that is one reason ^{why} we're asking to have our own people deputized.
So it is necessary for us to say, uh, close up like say 2:00 and then come
back and open like 8:00 at night and work until 8:00 until 11:00 at night
in order to catch the people who cannot come in the daytime. And we would
do things like this. Hello. (she is answering the phone) Hello?

I: Allright. How about registration, not held often enough?

V: Um, I believe it can be held a little more often maybe, uh, even with the
hours that she..... they had..... they have, ^{ya} know, chosen, they might get

V: more people in and, um, with us doing some of the registration it might help out some. But, another thing, I think, another disadvantage, not to just registration, a lot of our people don't know how to use the voting machines. I don't think that they know.... Uh, ^{you} know, just how to pull the levers, and uh, in many instances they might ask for help and it has been said that someone would go in to ~~and to~~ show them and it might be a person that's working on the polls who has a person that he wants to get in. So invariably showing ~~him~~ ^{them} how to do this, he just might show ~~him~~ ^{them} you know, what levers to pull and what have you. So we had thought maybe if were to get a machine or to get a machine from the county, from Jack ^W Winchester, and bring it out and then teach the people actually how to pull the levers and use the machine, this might be a big advantage in, uh, helping people to, uh, put the person in office that he wants in office. Not necessarily me. Anybody that he would like to put in office, that he can get this person in office. Now, at one time they had a black and a white voter, uh, registration uh, book.

I: Separate?

V: Separate book. But that has no longer been..... I'll tell you who was responsible for that.

?: (child's voice) Can I have some water?

V: I'm busy right now. Um, VKTA workers. When the VISTA workers started, I thinkthe ?, I think they were responsible for..... They were responsible..... I ~~have to~~ have to ~~bring it into~~ bring it into this afternoon. ~~bring it into~~ bring it into ^{or} They were responsible for ^{or} you know, changing over and then bringing it into warn. ^(?)

I: Uh huh.

V: But in this last election we had here, we have hold watches, people can see

V: what's going on. Uh, I understand they never ask for identification cards.

I: Federal? Were they federal?

V: No, this is ^{just} a local people.

I: Local?

V: Uh huh. Like uh, in every..... I'm sure those ladies can't remember everybody, you see, and they never ask for um cards for identification, so maybe, ^{ou}ya know, anybody can come up and say, well, I'm this person and that person can go ahead and register. And uh, this is one of the complaints that the poll watcher said that she was very, uh, surprised, ^{ou}ya know. Like you have your card, your registration card, and she thought maybe to say, "well, let me see your registration card," something like that, but they never asked for registration cards and identification.

I: Mmm hmm. Well one.... one last thing then. The difference of blacks, you've already mentioned that. Uh, you feel that it's.....

V: And a lot of people uh, would turn..... Some people would try..... I wouldn't say a lot. Some people would turn Some blacks are turned away. Now, this is the thing that makes it, uh, difficult. I've never, ^{ou}ya know, worked with the polls and I can't say it is between ^{ou}ya know, both races that are being turned away. Let's say you..... you're not qualified, ^{ou}ya know, to uh, reg..... to vote. Because um..... some people have said to me, "I voted last year and I was already registered with the county and the city, but I couldn't do it this year. And, ^{ou}ya know, why is it that I couldn't do it, ^{ou}ya know, this year?"

I: Mmm hmm.

V: And this is one of the things that we would like to do a study on. Like when we go through the community to find out, ^{ou}ya know..... did you vote last year?

V: To do a study on this to find out how many people, ^{ou}ya know, were turned down, uh, and to find out what was the reason for them not being able to vote in the last election if they were registered with the county and the city and if they had registered in the, ^{ou}um, past election, what was the reason why they didn't, uh, do this? They have all kind of little things. ^{ou}Ya know.....

I: Do you think there may have been violation of the law in that?

V: This is what I'm, ^{ou}ya know, beginning to think. ^{ou}Ya know, when you talk with different ones and say, well I..... ^{ou}ya know, I registered in the last election but they said I couldn't register this time. Now why..... ~~What~~ was the reason for this? Why you couldn't register this time? Had you moved out of the area, ^{ou}ya know? Were you in another area which means that..... you could not vote in two areas. You can't vote ~~again~~ ^{here and} over in ^{Belle Glade} ~~Belgrade~~ too. But I'm still living here in South ^{Bay} ~~Dade~~ and I couldn't uh..... couldn't, ^{ou}ya know, vote.

I: Yeah.

V: There are a lot of little things really that you would, uh, have to get down in because all..... there are little things. These are the little things that cause you to lose an election. These little things.

I: Right. Would you just go quickly down that list and check the.... these different categories very important, fairly important, not important?

V: Mmm hmm. I don't think this, uh..... would be because when you register you go up to city hall. Either you go out to the um..... ? office stores and then you tell em, ^{ou}ya know, for what reason you're there and then they ask you themselves the necessary questions, like if you're a citizen of the United States or if you're an alien or how long you've been here and then you're administered an oath right there too. You don't have anything to read or anything so they can't make you. This couldn't be um..... And I'm gonna put questionable here because, uh, before I make an accusation I

V: would like to know um.....

I: Right. What actually inaudible.

V: Yeah. I make that questionable because I have a feeling that it could have some bearing on the outcome of the ^{election}um, but if I make that statement I would rather be sure of it.

I: Could you elaborate on these rumors that, uh, they may be out to stop you as far as, uh, being elected again?

V: Well, I know, um, I can give you the name..... name of a fellow's name, the man that's gonna..... he's gonna run against me if I run this year. If he runs against me then I can say, well, apparently there must be something in truth that uh..... Now he has been a commissioner before and he didn't run in this past election because his brother was in the past election, his brother lost. But this man's name is, uh, Goodbread. How.....Howard or either Harroll Goodbread. Now if he runs against me, then I can pretty well say to myself, well, yeah, I believe these rumors are true. But I was in hopes that I have established myself well enough with the citizens, not only black citizens, the white citizens as well, that I would have enough supporters, ^{you} know, to put me back in regardless of how much money is, uh, was being spent. And the same, um, people that, uh, that supported in this past election will be the same people I understand that will be supporting this guy. And we've had different meetings about the past election since we've had the election and, uh, people who have said, well, yes, that well, I have.... I was right there when money exchanged hands. Like, uh, here's \$150.00 for you, for you to do this and that and the other. And one fellow say, well, I could've had the \$150.00 but I didn't think it was right so I didn't bother with it. But, ^{you} know not just one person but from different ones and, uh, they say well, Mrs. Cox, well we've heard the same thing that's gonna happen to you. See, there gonna ~~find~~ finance this things. And sitting

V: our board right now, I can't say, ^{or} ya know, ^{whether} ~~with~~ all of the monies in the world brought about the difference but the board is manipulated by South Growers. We have three guys on there right now that are employees for South Growers and, um, I don't..... I really wouldn't want this quoted because the young lady that said it to me, she's a reporter and, ^{or} ya know, it might get her in trouble. However she went and wrote to one of the big men from South Growers. and she was saying to him, ^{or} ya know, how did you get three men on the, uh, council? So he said it was just according, ^{or} ya know, a coincident^{ce}. But uh, the people around here, they don't feel like it's a coincidence. People that are on that board suffered in particular. Um, now I know last year if it.... if they had been on there last year, uh, maybe they are on there because of the actions that we took last year. Uh, these people have quite a bit of land around here and, um, I know sometime there is some question of electing some of the land. Well, now some might be say uh, some The commissioner said that maybe we can elect that but there are others I'm sure that will not be able to be elected into the city and things like this, ^{or} ya see.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: So if you have the majority on a board when you have sides, you don't have to worry about, ^{or} ya know, what might be able to be done or what might not be able to be done because, see, these people carried away.

I: Mmm hmm. Um, the next few questions are asked to gather information on your election campaign. Uh, were you able to campaign freely?

V: Yes and um.... I went from..... In the first election um,..... Well, I did sort of like a stereotyped thing. I only campaigned in the black community and I was really at a distance to prove this. And I lost the election by thirty-one

V: votes. And the next election I, um.... Well, you give.... you give this thing some thought, ^{you} ya know, and you say now I've accomplished with so many white people. It has to be thirty-one people within that population that, uh, may not be biased and may not be prejudiced. There has to be at least thirty-one people in there and, uh, say, well, I'll try for thirty-one but maybe I might come up..... if I have some good reason why I want to become a political person, I might get more than the thirty-one, so I just go ahead and give it a try, ^{you} ya know, to see just how receptive these people would be, ^{you} ya know, toward me. And um, I did a door-to-door campaign. I went from one door to the next door and surprisedly, ^{you} ya know, the people are very nice. And, um, couple of places they were yes, ^{you} ya know, said, um, if you think you can do this or think you can Well, it's not that I'm making a promise but I will be in there ~~in~~ ^{with} **everything** I can because I live in this town, ^{you} ya know. And quite naturally if I live in this town I want the town to be as smooth as possible. I would like for it to be a model town too because I would like to say "Oh, yeah, I'm from that place. It's a very nice place". So I would be there to do everything I can and do ever..... ^{you} ya know, make this town a better town to live in and, uh, to my surprise, ^{you} ya know.... overwhelmingly I... I did the election next year. So um, I plan to. If I run this year, I plan to do the same thing again and go from door-to-door. And uh, I've been in now for three..... four..... this is my fourth year, fourth year and um, I plan to, ^{you} ya know, point out some of the things that ~~will~~ ^{would} never ~~be~~ ^{happen} in South Bay if we didn't have the commissioners that we had last year. Uh, we had people on the commission that we ^u business people and they didn't want competition so they never would've vote in a mini-plaza..... so you could have a choice. I mean you could

V: still go to the man if you want to but at least you have that choice. Well, ^{ya} know, I don't think I wanna go to him because he's just a little too high. But this way, if you'd never had the choice, you would never know, ^{ya} know, what you.... what you would do. And the housing, uh, most of the people, ^{ya} know, they're renting out. These are people, all of a sudden, you work for housing because I'm not gonna get my place rented out. So we voted on housing here in this area, and as soon as we can break down some kind of a barrier to get more land, we would see if we can get some more housing in for other people. But you have to have people who are not say, um, well, who don't have that much to lose if they bring in housing. And I don't have anything to do with _____ housing, so I could sit there and vote all day on the issue because I don't have anything to lose. But people on the board, see, some of them have quite a bit to lose. ^{1.} _____ individuals ~~say~~.

I: Yeah. Were you handicapped at all by lack of campaign money or?

V: Well, in the campaign ^{now,} ~~for~~, um, as far as the money is concerned, I've bought cards in what had been passed out and I think it cost ^(em) like twenty dollars or something like this. I didn't have any radio announcements and no, um, people to um, uh, to build me up, ^{ya} know, through the immediate news media or anything like that and the news people right in this area, they will do it for ^{ya} for nothing if you'll just go to them and say, well, look, I would like you to run me in the paper for about a week or so. They will do it for you for nothing, and uh, so and by me going from door to door, which I plan to do now and I thought I didn't need anything else and like I say, I... I... I can't... and I have told people this and I... I will constantly say it, "I am working for you", ^{ya} know. And I can't see me paying you to work for you and if I had to pay you I just don't have the money to do it. But I can't see me out there

V: everyday . I know, um, a couple weeks ago I was out til about 12:00 at night trying to get some cars back that the city had taken away, uh, from, uh, a lady here. And I was out, ^{ou}ya know, until this hour of the night and I'm not looking for anything in return. So all I'm looking for, if I do a good job, for you to go back to the poll and vote me in again.

I: Uh huh.

V: But I don't expect you to pay. I don't care what the..... what the problem is, when you come to me and I try and solve it for you, I'm not expected pay because I'm an elected official and I I'm obligated to see about your problems. And I cannot pay you to work for you and this is what a lot the, uh, officials are doing.

I: Do uh..... Do you get donations or uh.....?

V: No, I never ask for donations. Never ask for donations. Now, I told..... If there's a person after election, if there's a person who would like to, uh, do something for me or like to show people my appreciation, like if you wanna have a party at the park or something like that for me after elections, I mean, it's all well and good. But if you don't feel like that you have the financial support, then forget it and I'll try and make it up during the year. Like if something comes up and ask.... ask you to work on like ^{it} instead of working say, ^{ore}hour or two hours on it, maybe I have to spend three or four hours just trying to solve that one particular problem but I will do what I can just to show you that I'm not in the business just to be in it, but really and truly, ^{ou}ya know, I have the people at heart. ^{ou}ya know, I would like to see that these people are treated fairly and squarely and this, uh, not only goes back to the blacks but as well, the whites as well.

I: Why..... Why did you decide to run? Was the decision your own or was.....?

V: Well, I had been away from here for some time. I had uh.... After I graduated from high school I went to uh, New York and up in Connecticut and I came back and um, well, if you've left home before, I don't know ^{whether} ~~if~~ you would appreciate this or not but, um, like I told you, I was migratory. Worked from.... Worked here in the season and then go up north in the summer and I can't see no reason for it. And then after leaving here and going and working and, say, getting a little more experience and a little more knowledge of what's happening on the other side of the track, then you say, well, ^{ya} know, why can't have some of these things in the city of South Bay? And the city of South Bay had been in a stagnated state ever since I can remember because this is..... I wasn't born here but I was brought up here. And the same people that had it from the time that I got here, they were the same people that still had it and nothing was happening. Uh, the streets..... Well, they're better and improvement is needed, but they're much better now than it was..... ^{ya} know, was even in '70 and '71. Especially streets on this side of town.

I: Mmm hmmm.

V: So um..... uh, young man uh, came and ask me if he could.... ^{ya} know, if we were to.... say, we would back ~~to~~ you, would consider running. So I said, well, I'm always, ^{ya} know, on the shy ~~side~~ I don't like to go to you and say, well, ^{ya} know, I wanna run because I don't want to seem..... want you to think that, well.... she is a person that ~~is~~ ^{ya} know, ~~just~~ ^{gets} out there. But since you have asked me, I'm very happy because I'm.....

I: Who was this young.... .. Who did he represent?

V: Uh, he's one of the citizens in this town and I was in a club that we called Citizens Committee..... uh, South Bay Citizens Committee which we tried to

V: do things to help people in the area. And these were the people..... I was president of the club and these were the people were in that club. They say, if we were to back you would you try to uh, run? And I was very happy that they had asked me. I said I would be very happy to run. And just like I said, I lost the first time.

I: Yeah.

V: And then I ^{won} ~~reigned~~ the second time and uh, then the next time I ran unopposed. But this year, from what I can understand, I'm gonna be opposed.

I: Do you belong to a party or a party-type organization?

V: Uh no. This is uh, a club in which anybody, any citizen.....

I: No, but do you yourself..... Do you yourself.... Do you..... Are you registered democrat or.....?

V: Oh yeah, Democratic party. Yes, mmm hmm.

I: Have you ever received any support, financial or otherwise, from the Democratic party?

V: No, I have had uh, in the past.... Let's see within the last six months they had a meeting in Washington, I believe it was, for elected uh.... for the mayor. I don't think it was elected official, black officials. I think it was just the mayor and I received one of these letters saying that if you didn't have finances to come, ^{ya} know, let us know and we would, ^{ya} know, get you here and see to it that you, uh, be in on these meetings. But I'm not the mayor and I didn't think it was, uh, ^{ya} know, fair for me to take advantage of the situation. I would like to have gone but they specified the mayor and I'm not the mayor.

I: You were the mayor at one time weren't you?

V: I was uh, last...last year. This election we reorganized and we have another mayor.

I: What were the two or three most important issues that you campaigned for?

V: Um, number one, uh, housing, and number two, crime, and, uh, well in general, uh, just.... trying to make this area..... I did say and I havn't broken a bit in that, year round employment for people in this area and I havn't made into that. I have spoken to, uh, South Bay Growers and um, the men that I spoken with, well, he asked me what did I have in mind. And at that particular time, I told him what I had in mind that he could set up for year round work for the people in this area. But, I havn't I... I... I mean I hate to say, it but I havn't made a dent into that area and also, uh, included medical services in this area. We don't have any medical services and right now we are negotiating about bringing in a doctor into this area.

I: Do you think those issues are the most important issues facing the black community?

V: Uh, right now um..... Year round work, employment, is a big issue into this area. Housing, I think, one of the biggest because if you had the time and if you can just ride through the city, housing, I think, is one of the biggest things right now, if we could something. But the point about it is, I know you see the houses and you see the conditions the houses are in. Why not, ya know, put pressure on these people and make them, ya know, uh, tear these houses down. But like if you go to put pressure on people, well, where are these people gonna move? ~~ya~~ know they don't have anything..... ~~ya know~~ anywhere to move. So we have this project which, ya know it didn't ease the situation much but it did make it comfortable for some people. And we still have more people, ya know, that need houses and this ^{is} one of the things that we will still be working on. Uh,

V: we have a population of about say, 3,000 and ? or maybe close~~x~~ to 4,000. This is stationary mostly. But then you have to think about the migrants that come into this area too. Although, they are not here no more than six months, I feel that during the six months that they are here they should have decent houses as well as people who are here for the year round. So you see, it's uh, it's uh, a burden, ^{ya} know, as far as housing is concerned. So I think housing right now is one of the biggest..... bigger issues that we should be working on.

I: O.K. ^{say}. Do you.... Have you looked into any federal help in that area?

V: Yeah, we.... The project here, it's done..... It's a federal housing, uh, project here, but they have to ^{id us that anytime} ~~take up the income~~ that we get for land space that they would help us to set up a city type-thing, one that would be run entirely by the city. Uh, what we have to do now is try and get the land ?. Because it.... you also note that sugar cane surrounds everybody..... and these belong to the sugar cane people. So uh, I don't know just how we'll have to go about getting them to, uh, lease land or to sell land, ^{ya} know, for this type of a thing because we really don't have, uh, land..... Even if you were to expand, ^{ya} know, going to.... to the west. ^{ya} know, all that is sugar cane and that belongs to the sugar cane people. Now I know about two miles outside of South Bay I had asked the sugar cane corporation in Clewiston would they donate that strip of land to the city of South Bay. There's a strip right in between just.... just outside the city of South Bay, ^{ya} know, for a recreation area. But, uh, because of the widening of state road 80, the man brought it to my attention that by the time they, um, put the, um, took land from state road 80, it wouldn't be large enough to put any type of a thing out there.

I: Uh huh.

V: But uh, I'm going back to him ^{on} ya know, shortly and ask him would he let us use that as a ^{uh} welcoming station for the city of South Bay. Ya ^{on} know, maybe put a couple of tables and chairs and a little information booth or something out there.

I: Uh huh.

V: Because I think it's a very pretty piece of ^s uh, land and it had ^s scenery. It has trees and flowers and everything. It wouldn't be too much that we would have to really do. If he doesn't want to ^{uh}, donate it then would he lease it to the city of South Bay. And then that would still leave us ^{on} ya know, looking for land for houses.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: We'd still have to find land.

I: ^{K.C.Y.} O.K. Um, the next few questions then are asked to determine some of the conditions which have enabled blacks to win office in Florida. How were you elected, at-large or by district?

V: Uh, well at-large. 'Cause we.... we.... won the whole kitty. I mean I can go anywhere into the city I want and ask for help or ^{uh}, during the time.

I: Right.

V: We don't have districts.

I: No districts at all?

V: No districts in South Bay.

I: How many.... How many people are in South Bay? What's the population?

V: Uh, stationary we have about Anywhere from 3,055 to 4,000.

I: What percentage of the population is black?

V: I would say we have about a 60 per cent population black and about a 40 per cent ^{white} and then 10 per cent whatever.

I: ~~0/11~~ ^{100%} Uh, about what percentage of blacks of voting age in your district are registered to vote?

V: Uh, the larger part is registered ^{to vote} ~~by~~, but the apathy comes in when the, uh, why don't they ~~go~~, go ahead and vote. Because, uh, we have ~~it~~, like say..... out of the ~~it~~..... We don't have but about 800 registered voters and ~~the~~ the majority of those being black, but then when time to vote, we only get a small percentage that, ^{you} know, really ~~go~~ up to the polls and ~~do~~ vote for any election.

I: Alright. Do you.... Would.... If you had ^{to} just guess at a percentage, what would you say it is that's registered?

V: Uh, we have about ~~it~~..... we have about 800 registered voters, and I would say about..... the same thing about ~~it~~, 60, or about 60 per cent would be ~~one~~ the blacks because we have the majority of voters in this town. (bell rings)
I'll be finished in just a minute. Hello.

I: Alright. Uh, about what percentage of blacks who are registered to vote, do you estimate actually voted when you were elected.

V: Um, I would say pretty close to 50 per cent voted in that issue.

I: Do you think that you got any votes from whites? *Answer*

V: ~~Oh~~. Yeah, I really did. I uh.....

I: What percentage would you guess?

V: Um, during the... all's fair ? about two-thirds the election that ~~at~~ the time that I won, I'd say I got about two-thirds blacks and about one-third ~~the~~ white. Because I think I got a pretty good support from the whites.

I: And the election ~~that~~ ^{in which} you won office, how many points did you have?

V: ~~It~~ no one but the ?

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

V: I got about ~~it~~..... I can't remember how.... I really don't remember how that last [?] . I don't remember now how that last race ~~it~~.....

I: I'm sure it's reported in some newspapers. ~~up~~ here in the ~~up~~, Metropolitan Handbook or whatever, I found these figures here that said your term expired in 19..... well, September, 1976, as mayor. But is that.....

V: No. Uh, as commissioner. As commissioner, but each year we reorganize after elections and we choose a mayor and if I..... Now we had been having commissioners over ~~this~~ ^{in different} department^s. Like commissioner of police, ~~the~~, commissioner of streets and parks. For this election it was changed. They don't feel that we should ~~the~~ have a commissioner of the police and a commissioner of the streets and parks. Anybody that comes to you with a problem, you should ^{be} versed enough on all these departments in the town that you'll be able to give help, ya^u know. If ~~the~~, if someone came in the police department, I should know enough about that police department that I could help that person. And ~~the~~ the only thing that we were afraid of that maybe somebody may pass the bucks, ^{or} ya^u know. If this is your department then you feel obligated to it. You'll say, well, this is my department and I have to help this person out. But ~~the~~ the way it stands, someone would mind that the commission, ya^u know, that someone might be trying to pass the buck. Like they call you in the middle of the night and say, well, I'm having ~~the~~ ~~an~~ trouble with the water department and you might say, well, look I'm I'm not sure what to say about that.....

(End side one)

(Begin side two)

V:..... have, say, election night, then I'm just a commissioner. ~~Beige sit~~ down ~~until I'm~~ finished. (talking to child in the room) I'm just a commissioner until we reorganize and then when we reorganize then you become

V: the mayor and the next person, the vice mayor and then the others are just commissioners. ~~Ersie, leave~~ ~~(talking to child again)~~

I: So the.... the reorganization wasn't what made you mayor? I mean there was no mayor before that or?

V: Uh, yeah. Uh,..... ~~Ersie, go downstairs and wait for me, O.K.?~~ ~~(talking to child who is making lots of noise)~~ Just like, say, election night is on the seventh, then I am mayor up until the seventh. When we go into ~~the~~ commissioner's room on the seventh, which is usually on a Tuesday night when we have our own election, When we ~~were~~ ^{go} to the commissioner's room uh, I ~~was~~ ^{am} still the mayor until we reorganized. Then when we reorganized if would like for me to ~~be~~ Well someone will make a motion. Say well, I make a motion that Mrs. Cox continue on as mayor. But if they decide that they don't want me on as mayor, then they'll make the motion that Mrs. John Smith be made the mayor. But this is when we take over our new seats, on the on the night of election after we have finished with old business. Then we go into new business with a new mayor.

I: In......

V: Did I make it clear?

I: Well, I was just.... I was just asking because I didn't.... I was wondering

V: We have a mayor all the time, the year...uh, the whole year up, ~~or~~ even election day, I'm still the mayor. But when we go in to like canvass the votes that night and ~~up~~, the five.... the new people are in and the old ones that are still there. So there are always..... Now this election that is coming up now, it will be three old ones because every other year three people will run and then the next year two people will run. So you always have an old..... two old people sitting on the ^{commissioner} ~~position~~ and ~~up~~, up

V: until ~~we~~ they canvass the vote and they make it official that ~~we~~ these three people who can have legally been elected by the public then the mayor has to turn over his seat to whoever we choose that night to be the mayor or who ~~ever~~. They make the motion and they ~~section~~ ^{Second} and it's done by the majority.

I: Well, I.... I asked because I... I wondered whether ~~why~~ you had ~~any~~ say, been elected mayor and because you happened to be black..... reorganized.

V: We're not elected We're not elected..... We're not elected as mayor, we're only elected as commissioners.

I: Yeah, ^{okay,} ~~ok.~~ I understand.

V: And then the commissioners will ~~up~~ among themselves nominate a mayor.

I: Yeah. Alright. The next questions are asked to determine how well black officials in Florida have been able to benefit those they represent. In what ways to you think you've helped blacks in your district by holding office or in South Bay?

V: Um..... I think in housing is one, one way. I have.... They have some better housing here. Um, I think ~~any~~ a lot of ~~any~~ brutality, police brutality, and some of the crime rate ~~any~~. I think I have been able to ~~any~~, to, ^{ya} know, try to prohibit some of this ~~as~~ brutality and what have you. Uh, recreational-wise. Uh, we do have a small recreation center that we have and ~~any~~ I was able to initiate this from the other commissioners show the importance of, ^{ya} know, this type of a thing. Um, I have helped out in some areas of the health field. We don't have a hospital as such, but ~~any~~ I have helped, ^{ya} know, with the ~~any~~ bringing into the organization of this particular program, and I think this would be considered health services.

I: Mmm hmmm.

V: And so as far as the people are concerned..... ~~into~~ this whole area, not just South Bay. This whole area because this concerns this whole area.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: And um, some ~~uh~~ education-wide, I think I have done a little bit in educational field ^{as} well.

I: ~~O.K.~~ ^{Kay} Uh, has there been anything that's..... that you feel has prevented you from doing a better job to the black community?

V: Um..... in salary-wise for the..... some of the employees in the city of South Bay. Now ~~uh~~ let me see. Things that would..... would have, would, have meant preventing ~~uh~~..... Well, I could..... ~~Right~~ now the commission that I'm sitting on, that ~~uh~~ that whole commission right now is ~~uh~~ preventing me from being able, I would think, to ~~uh~~ ^{do} more that I.... would ~~uh~~ would be able to do or could do. The hope ~~uh~~, and ~~uh~~..... I can't say what was the difference between the other commissions than it is now because last year I was the only black on the commission, but I had more cooperation than I'm having this year. I ~~do~~ don't have any cooperation this year. So I don't care what it is that I want to do, ~~but~~ I'm pretty sure that I'm not going to be able to do it this year. So this is the whole thing in a nutshell. Uh, it's really the commissioner's step for not.... that's keeping me from doing what I would like to do.

I: Mmm hmm. I have another one of these little check lists for you. If you would run down these are possible uh,..... uh,..... deterrants ^e to you doing a better job as far as benefitting blacks, and if you could run down each one of them and make a comment and check whether you feel it's very important or fairly imporant or not important. Whether the office has real authority. You were.....

V: Now I... I don't want to be mislead^{ing} It's I feel that it's very important for me to be in the office although to me the office doesn't have that much authority behind it. But I feel that it's important. Even like I'm saying now, the commissioners are not getting the type of cooperation that, ^{ou} ya know, I can get or I should get from the commissioners or I feel I should get from the commissioners. But on the other hand, I am there to let the people know what's going on and to let them know how I feel about it. As long as, ^{let} the commissioners know how I feel about it and let the people know what's going on, I think this is, ^{ou} ya know, one of the big things toward getting our problems answered. Um, the.... the office is just fairly important as far as I'm concerned.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: But I feel that it's important for me to be there.

I: Mmm hmm. Here I think uh, you.... what you just mentioned before was probably apropos that you were outvoted by white officials?

V: Yeah, mmm hmm. And that's uh, kind of a, I ~~would~~ ^{wouldn't} even say very important that you were outvoted.?

I: Well, do you feel that was very important in preventing you from doing a better job?

V: Oh yeah, uh huh. Next.

I: Lack of revenue.

V: (long pause) ^{Kay,} ~~OK,~~ Now here again, I really won't.... I really um, Well, see if you have a group of people who would want to support you but are afraid to support you.....

I: Mmm hmm.

V: Would you....

I: I wouldn't say that was lack of cooperation.

- V: They want to support you but they... they know, ^{ou}ya know, what's gonna happen if they support you.
- I: I think what ~~uh~~ Dr. Button is getting at with that question is ~~uh~~, is there an apathy or an overt uh.....
- V: Uh huh, it is. It is. We have apathy among a lot of the blacks in this area. Black cooperation ^{with} ~~of~~ state officials. (long pause)
- I: How about ~~uh~~ familiarity with ~~uh~~ administrative duties? Did you find that a problem that you ~~uh~~, you were new to the.... to the office?
- V: No, I sure didn't. I don't think that was ~~uh~~..... Because of the fact that I was in this area all my life and I knew the problems of the people and it's mainly ~~uh~~, problematic here. ^{ou}Ya know, what's to do for this thing or what you do..... what can you do for that thing.
- I: Mmm hmmm.
- V: And uh, one of the hard.... One of the worst things in this area ~~uh~~, is the crime rate and police bru... ~~uh~~ brutality.
- I: Mmm hmmm.
- V: And ~~uh~~ I was the commissioner of police so then, ^{ou}ya know, to add to these problems it was just a matter of getting in and digging in and finding out where the ~~uh~~, sore sport was.
- I: Mmm hmmm. Um, has criticism or lack of support in the black community hindered you ~~uh~~, as far as in... in holding office ~~uh~~, that it has.....
- V: They have really given me 100 per cent. I think this is one reason I'm ^{ou}ya know, still in. The blacks have really given me 100 per cent uh.... help.
- I: They don't believe you're just a token then?
- V: No, and I think what's gonna happen ~~uh~~, in this electionwe are right now we are having meetings ~~uh~~, every Monday night ~~uh~~, and ~~uh~~, getting ~~uh~~,

V: more blacks and more blacks involved because of the ?, you know, if
 this man is going to pay out like that much money to keep her out then
 we're gonna have.... we don't have the money, but we are going to have
 to try to get these people to ~~uh~~ use their votes, you see, wherever the
 voters ~~are elected there~~, ^{is necessary} ya know.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: Trying to get these people to realize how important it is to ~~uh~~ ^{up} come and
 vote if they want me in there again. And uh, number two, regardless of,
 ya know, what they say to you, ^{ou} ya know, on the job, when you get behind that
 screen, nobody's gonna know who's name you pull. You can pull everybody's
 name and nobody's gonna know, ^{ou} ya know, who's name you're gonna pull.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: Trying to get them to realize, ^{ou} ya know, that uh, although, ^{ou} ya know, we're
^{fixing} ~~going~~ to celebrate ^{with} ~~what's~~ the bicentennial year. You know, you don't have
 to be afraid.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: Who... Whatever reason you wanna pull for, whatever person you want to
 get in. And uh, we're gonna bring in these voting machines or try to
 get these voting machines so we can teach ^{em} how to vote.

I: Mmmmm.

V: And uh.... But I think these people have really ~~uh~~.... And another thing,
 if a..... Now that I know that ~~uh~~, it's three to one..... I constantly
 say to the blacks that they come through about anything. Like the lady that came
 up and said they had taken her cars and they ~~uh~~ had ~~uh~~ the new stickers
 that say she had it inspected, they had ~~uh~~ new tires and they had one
 car she had put a motor in, they had the up-to-date tags which meant
 that the car was a car she was using.

I: Right.

V: And they just.... The city just took the car off and dumped it. And uh, when she came in and.... she was talking about these things and I told her, ^{ou}ya know, well, we'll do everything I can to get your car back. And then they wanted her to pay for the car and I told her I didn't see where you should pay for the car because, ^{ou}ya know, we took the car off so we should bring the car back. If it was through an error, that was our error and we should bring your car back. So, I was saying now these are the things that I say to you people. ^{ou}Ya know, don't wait until you get into trouble to come see me, ^{ou}ya here? Come up to commissioner's meeting sometime.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: And ~~in~~ many times I'm in a tight spot. ^{ou}Ya know, you could stand up and say something for me and let.... let the people know, ^{ou}ya know, how you feel about the issue. Because my word only goes so far. Although I'm a commissioner, it only goes so far.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: Like um, the other night I was.... I was very angry the other night and I was angry the next day. Um, the mayor came to see me and I was off.... and he shouldn't have come to see me because he knew he was violating the sunshine law. And that.... Now that doubly made me angry but I was ... as far ~~as~~ ^{ou}ya know, about the way I spoke to him.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: Um, then we have a fireman here. The first.... We have two but this guy was the first fireman, trained fireman, we've had in the history of South Bay. Now this is something else I had to fight for. This is

V: the first ~~t~~ man that we've had in South Bay. And ~~uh~~ the first thing about it, no one had ever tried to get together a program to fight fire until we got a fireman. Then they want to put him on the twelve to eight shift and put this other fireman on the four to twelve and they'd say um, streets and park people would take over. And this was unusual to me because why didn't streets and parks do something about fires when we didn't have a fireman. Then the salaries came up. Uh, he's through manpower ~~uh~~. Manpower pays his salary. Now when it first came out it was understand that they were gonna get \$9,000.00 and where this came from, I don't know whether the ~~uh~~ old manager made it up or whether this was actually from Manpower's office. Then it was found out that the man wasn't gonna get but \$7,000.00 so he asked the city, ^{on} ya know, to supplement his salary with \$100.00 a month. Now, that's not a week, that's a month. That's \$25.00 a week. The man is very important to the city of South Bay. We had another fellow that came into town uh, which, ^{on} ya know, was a utility man (tape cuts of for a moment) ... and ~~uh~~ it has been a... ^{on} ya know, it has passed that this guy gets \$300.00 a week. Now here's this other man, he's only asking the city to supplement his ^{a week} \$25.00 and they hassled over that and they hassled me. Well I, ^{on} ya know, said what I thought about it. Not because of the fact that the man was black, but because of the fact that the man was something that we really needed in the city of South Bay. And they hassled over and they hassled so they finally came up with a \$10.00 a week difference. And I wonder how in the world can you justify yourself paying one man \$300.00 a week and not wanting to pay another man \$100.00..... say \$25.00 which would bring his salary up to about maybe \$120.00, \$150.00 a week? How can you justify yourself, ^{on} ya know

V: doing anything like that?

I: Who are they giving \$300.00 to?

V: Well, this is ~~up~~, he's the public director ~~up~~ which we have a group of people out at the water plant, which is doing a very good job, and he just rides over the streets to see that the people keep the streets clean and he goes out to the water department. I don't... ^{ou} Ya know, what he does at the water department but he.... he knows something about water. But we had a group of people out there that was doing just as well, ^{ou} ya see, which to me is that, ^{ou} ya know, he wasn't that important. But they passed on... they.... pas..... we... We tried to keep him out. We did, we kept ^{him} ~~em~~ out for about a year until we lost the other commissioners. Now the people who are in, apparently they know him and they want him in so they voted him in. So there's nothing I can do about it. But uh, then they said that they thought that he was, ^{ou} ya know, he deserved \$300.00 a week. So on the other hand, here's another man that we don't even feel he deserves \$25.00 a week. Now that's awful. To me that's awful.

I: Right.

V: That's terrible. And they hassled about it so they finally came up with \$10.00 and uh, they went around to find out did everybody agree with it. And no, I didn't agree with it. I don't even know the man. The man, no more than he was a fireman.

I: Did you make that point to the commission?

V: Yeah, I made the point to the commission. Wanted to know, well, didn't he have another job. He's a reverend somewhere. But that's not my business. ^{ou} Ya know, if... As long as he gives me forty hours or forty-eight hours or something like this, ^{ou} ya know, this is what I'm looking for. His work,

V: his performance in the city, not what he does when he gets on the outside.

I: How did they try to counter your argument?

V: And well, they say he might not answer but one uh, fight fires. To me he might not answer not one fire. But the point is, he took the job as uh, uh, fireman, ^{uh} ya know. And if he gets one of fifty, it's hours that he has to get in. He may be called out at 2:00 in the morning, 3:00 in the morning. And somebody said well, he's an unknown. So what. [?] The man came to you with his ~~prudentials~~ ^{credentials, on}. Ya know, you hired him so apparently you must've thought enough of him to hire him and make him the fire chief. I mean so that's ~~prudentials~~ ^{credentials} enough right there to give the man, ^{uh} ya know, what he's asked for.

I: Uh huh.

V: So, ^{uh} ya know, these are the kind of things that, ^{uh} ya know, kinda get me down when I go up to commissioners meeting but uh, it appears right now that nothing will be done this year and that we are really trying ~~super~~ ^{very hard} to get this voter registration and get some young people together so that they go out. We don't have any young people I don't think. If it is it's just a few young. Like the eighteen years old since they moved the uh, age limit. We don't have but a few of those people, ^{uh} ya know, registered.

I: Uh huh.

V: And we're trying very hard. We got some young people to work with those people and ~~uh~~ to get more of those people registered and then we're going to try to get these other people who are registered ~~uh~~ a little more interested in those people and then get the ones that are not registered and um, to come out and so maybe in this coming up election

V: that we would ~~try~~ do better because ~~why~~ we made a real bad showing last time.

I: Uh huh.

V: And maybe we can change some of these things.

I: Uh, are... are a number of black candidates gonna run? Uh, do they....

V: Now, last year we only had one. Uh, Mr. Reiss, uh, he ran last year. Now I don't know whether he's thinking about running this year or not. He works also as counselor here. Now he might be thinking about running next year which ~~why~~ I was in hopes. If not, we're gonna have to get out new candidates for some ~~why~~ more blacks to see.... to run. Because I know ~~um~~, I was ~~uh~~ going around here trying to find out. I tried to work it by the street since we don't have that many streets in town, do it by the streets and we had started on one street about a month ago and we.... There's a young man ~~uh~~, who's an instructor at one of the schools around here and he has a degree also in political science and I said, ~~you know~~, ~~uh, show him ya know~~ like if we don't get any candidates, do you think you'll be interested enough in politics since you do have your degree in uh, political science. So he said he would give it a thought, so maybe we might get him to run for mayor.

I: ^{Good.} ~~Right:~~ Are there.... Are there any white candidates that you ~~uh~~, could support as far as.... Is there Is there a white candidate that has the trust of the black community?

V: Uh, we had some in the last election that uh, ^{you} know, the black people trusted very well. Um, and I'm sure if they would ^{ru} ~~you~~, they would get the black support as well.

I: Mmm hmm. ~~Alright.~~ Do you feel that white officials treat you differently from other officials or not? That is, do they consider you the spokesman

I: for the blacks and are you able to raise only certain issues?

V : Well uh, I... They uh, They havn't said anything about it but uh, because of the fact that I am as aggressive as I am, any issue that comes up, I will voice my opinion on it, I don't care what it is. Whatever the issue is, I will voice my opinion. But I can see their reaction that they're not too well pleased, ^{o^v} ya know, at the many things that I say. Like uh, we have a lot of commissioners that follow the lead and you say I vote yes, then the next man say I vote yes. But I'm not that type of an individual. I I think I should vote the way I feel I should vote.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: And it's what I think the people ? . Now I don't have all of the answers but ~~my~~ I do know that ~~my~~ I'm not gonna say yes just because you said yes.

I: Have there been any services provided uh, to the blacks since you took office that were not provided before?

V: Um, yes, ~~my~~ just like I say, that recreation center. We had uh.... We never did have that and I don't know Well, when it comes up again ~~uh~~, and it has to come up because the city pays the rent on the building. Now, I don't know whether it's going to be passed again. I'm was in hopes that it's passed again.

I: Right.

V: Um, have you heard of meals-on-wheels?

I: No, I've never heard of it.

V: It's a program, I think it was started by ~~uh~~ EOE, the like the equal opportunity offices, federal's thing. Well, at one time they didn't have enough funds to ~~uh~~, to carry on so they were going to each city, ^{o^u} ya know,

V: that ~~oh~~, fed people. This is a program where like old, the elderly people that cannot get out and work or they don't have anybody to make a meal for them. Well, once a day, I think it is, these people will come around with a prepared meal and if you can come out they have an area where you can go and eat with everybody else. But if you cannot come out then they'll see to it that you get your meal at home.

I: Uh huh.

V: And uh, they were asking, the lady that uh, this program up was asking for donations, and I'm pretty sure that if I had not been sitting on the commission that we would not have donated the money to that program that we did donate to that program. Mainly because of the fact that ~~oh~~, most of the meals that would be served would've been served to black people in this area. And another thing is that we donated money to this program and I had to show them where in.... It was \$3,000.00. But I had to show the commissioners where in we would over a period of time, we would have saved the \$3,000.00 because regardless of ~~oh~~,..... what person you put in jail, you have to have someone there around the clock to watch them. Now, if they was taking intoxicated people here, people who show that they are alcoholics or what have you, they transfer them here so you cut down on the food bill. You don't have to buy food for them the days they're in jail. If they have to go to the doctor, you don't have to pay that doctor bill and there are..... The people like many times like on a Saturday night you might not have anybody but that intoxicated person because we don't uh, care ~~fel~~ felonies, we don't keep ~~fel~~ felonies. Only just misdemeanors and if he hasn't done anything then you can't send him as a felon, he's just intoxicated. So really you don't need anybody

V: to watch him, to pay anybody around the clock that night to watch the jail, because nobody is there. So in the run, you see, by you sending these people here and bringing here and letting us foot this ^{bill}; you will save money in the long run if you were to donate to the program and all the money that you donate to the program is not ~~going to~~ ^{going to} be spent for anybody that comes into the program, it's spent for people who ~~uh~~ come into this area or people who are not able to go on welfare and need to go to the hospital or people who need medication but are not able to be certified. ^{you} Ya know, they have to get their medicine sometime. You can't wait, ^{say}, a month before you can give ^{them} medicine.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: So where is the mon... money ~~going to~~ ^{ing to} come from if they can't be certified? So this money is spent to help these people out, ^{you} ya see, uh, until they're certified or until they're able to get things for themselves. And these things had to uh, be brought out and to be explained as to why you should donate to this ^{+ type of a} ~~practical~~ program.

I: Mmm hmmm.

V: And a number of things ~~by~~ the county last summer, it couldn't afford the ~~the~~ summer school, the enrichment program because they didn't have the funds. But if the city could see where they could pay an instructor that they would take care of everything else. So that's \$1,500.00, and that could register ~~ing~~ and they had to explain to ^{them} that, ^{you} ya know, well, children have been going to school for the whole.... I mean ever since I can remember they've been going to school every summer, ^{you} ya know.

I: Uh huh.

V: So what is it for the commissioners? Is.... In the revenue sharing ^{thing,} ~~claim,~~ monies from revenue sharing should be spent for educational purposes. So

- V: why not donate the money to the lady and let her, ^{ou}ya know, for the the instructor and let the county take care of everything else. ^{ou}Ya know, things like this, you.... you sit on that commission, think that you know that you wanna have to really say, "I'm gonna have to stand up and talk about this because I'm sure it's not gonna pass." So after you have talked about it, it still, say, just pass you by. Then you can say, well, "at least they know how I feel about it."
- I: Right. So.... Well um, I have..... This is the last check list here, uh, last one of these.... this type thing but ~~up~~, ~~in~~ that and it asks ~~in~~, you to rate how effective you think you've been in each of those areas and comment on each. And ~~in~~, you can add a category not applicable if there is ~~up~~ nothing on the commission as ~~in~~..... mandated to do in that area.
- V: Now housing, we still oh we have ~~up~~, we got sixty-six ^{units} since I've been here. We still need some more housing so I'm gonna have to put ~~up~~ somewhat effective. On welfare, I don't know.... I've never helped anybody get on welfare.
- I: Yeah. Is that not ^papplicable as far as the commission, do they with welfare?
- V: I... I didn't uh,..... I've.... I've never been approached, ^{ou}ya know, uh, about welfare.
- I: Mmm hmm.
- V: Employment is somewhat effective now in parks and.....
- I: Very effective in _____?
- V: Yeah, mmm hmm. We are working on that and ~~up~~ I can ~~up~~,..... I am still working on uh, recreation and I have spoken to um,..... Mr. Dantz in West Palm Beach,

V: But what I would like to do, what I really want to do is to ~~my~~ work with the juveniles ~~my~~ the potential juveniles and ~~the~~ juveniles, ^{ou} ya know, to see if we could..... because most of the crime that is committed in South Bay is committed by juveniles.. Every now and then you may find uh, an adult fighting or shooting a pistol or something but like all of the breaking in and stealing and things, it's done by the juveniles.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: And I want ^{to} work with the.... with the juveniles to see if we could, ~~em~~ ^{ou} ya know, cut the rate down and if we could cut the rate down in the juvenile department, then you would eventually cut the rate down in the adult things. But I told ^{em} them that we need recreation. We really do because if I can get the type of recreation program that I want here, then we could put these children to work, ^{ou} ya know. If it's necessary for them to come out of their home, ~~the~~ just like if you were instructing to a school and you had given me a ring and say, ^{ou} ya know "I see um, John Brown and, ^{ou} ya know, he has a tendency that he may be sliding into the juvenile bracket, ^{ou} ya know. Why don't you talk with him and see what you think about him?" And then if I talk with John Brown and I feel the same thing, then maybe I'll send somebody around to John Brown's home to see what's going on into his ^{ou} ya know, home life.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: And then maybe it might be.... he just might need to come out of his home for a little while. And if we had recreation that we could offer him something to do and, ^{ou} ya know, and give him a little salary and see if we could cut down some of this, ^{ou} ya know, juvenile crimes and this is what

V: I really want to work on, ^{ou}ya know.

I: Uh huh.

V: This is what I really want ^{to} do right now, work with the juveniles and ~~us~~
 I just don't know..... (child interrupts) ~~I'll be there in a few~~
~~minutes. (talking to child)~~ And if I can do this, I.... I actually feel
 that I would have helped a great deal in South Bay. But I promised the um....
~~Put that down. You can't bother that. (talking to child)~~ I promised
 the children..... the young people here and this is one promise that I
 made and I don't know if I can really fulfill it, a swimming pool because
 we don't have a swimming pool here.

I: Mmm hmmm.

V: And these children have to thumb to ^{Belle Glade} ~~Belgrade~~ and you see all sizes and all....
 the little girls as well. And I keep telling the children, say one day
 you're gonna leave home thumbing to ^{Belle Glade} ~~Belgrade~~ and you might not get back
 because you don't who's gonna ^{ing to} give you a ride and where they're ^{ing to} gonna take
^{ou}ya. And it's awfully dangerous I feel, ^{ou}ya know, for these children to have
 to thumb.

I: Right.

V: So we have been trying to raise money, ^{ou}ya know, for a swimming pool but what
 can..... How much money can you raise ~~up~~ selling barbeques and showing
 pictures and things. When someone told me, said the swimming pool will
 cost about at least \$80,000.00. ^{ou}Ya know, 'cause I would say like \$30,000.00.
 But they said like if you have a pool you have to have a house, ^{ou}ya know,
 for.... to take showers and change clothes and everything. So, I don't
 think.... ^{ou}ya know, I don't think I'll ever raise enough money enough to
 get the pool in there.

I: Yeah.

V: I don't know.

I: [?] _____ major effort or somehow outside funds.

V: Yeah. Uh, water and sewage, we did very well on in the water and sewage department but with the uh population expanding, we will have to expand uh, our water and sewage department. But we do have sewage which we didn't have..... It was done the year after I came in um, we had septic tanks but now we have underground sewage and everything and uh, we brought in a new water department and everything so I think we're very ~~reorganized~~ ^{effective} here. We don't have an hospitals in here so ~~now you'd say this...~~ ^{it's not effective}

I think we have helped in the education department and I think this is very effective. Although people are not getting the salaries, we do have them on and we have a twenty-four hour coverage.

I: Right. ~~O.K.~~ ^{okay} Um, have you gotten federal funds for South Bay? Uh, I know you mentioned uh, revenue sharing.

V: Yeah we uh, we get federal rev.... very uh revenue shares but we had so many outstanding uh, problems. Just like ^{you} know, the water and the sewage, ~~uh~~ streets, we did a lot on the streets since I've been here and then we'd give and by the time we get finished giving the monies that we get it doesn't, ^{you} know, it doesn't go too far.

I: Mmm hmm.

~~?: (Someone walks into room to ask Mrs. Cox a question)~~

V: ~~O.K.~~ ^{okay} I sure will. But we have a group seven and um, out of Ft. Lauderdale uh, these people work on grants for us. So uh, by now in July we should be getting some grant money and this is gonna help take care of some of the streets in the city of South Bay. There gonna build.... I know you.... you noticed we don't have any sidewalks.

I: Uh huh.

V: Well, as soon as we get the grant money they're gonna build a sidewalk
..... The ~~up~~ Rosenwall Elementary School, that's right down
Palm Beach Road.....

I: Uh huh.

V: They're gonna build a sidewalk all the way from Rosenwall Elementary
School all the way up..... Did you come from West Palm Beach? Where
did you.....

I: I came from West Palm Beach, yes.

V: Boca Raton. Oh right up to the front of..... ~~That's a peel. (talking to child
who is bothering her)~~ Right up to the front of city hall and then they're
gonna..... It's a bridge for the children to cross there and they're gonna
fix that bridge in there, and then they're gonna be um some of these homes
where the people don't have the work, ^{ou} ya know, that they say they do their
own home, they're gonna go in and renovate some of these homes for the
people and I think that would be a nice thing, ^{ou} ya know, to help them out
a little bit.

I: Mmm hmm. Um, in any.... in any other areas have you gotten grants, I
mean outright grants for special purposes?

V: Uh no. No, we have never gotten any grants. We missed out on the LEA
Grant because uh, that's the police grant, because the fellow uh, did
not get out papers in, ^{ou} ya know, back into the office and um, whatever
monies we got, they have ^{been} loans and outstanding loans, like the water and
sewage department we have paid off, ^{ou} ya know. But uh, if we should get
this grant, uh it will be the first grant that we have gotten for the
city of South Bay. Now manpower helped us out a lot. ^{ou} Ya know, this
is the program..... ~~Ersa, stop that noise. (talking to child)~~ This
is the program that uh they send in people and the government pays the

- V: uh, salaries.
- I: Uh huh.
- V: And uh they work in the area that you need them to work in and I think that's a good program. You don't get any.... We don't get any funds directly but they pay the salaries for us.
- I: Right. Have you or uh, or the commission been effective in bringing any uh new businesses or retail stores in the area?
- V: Yeah, this is uh, the past commission, not this commission, the past commission has been effective in bringing in uh, that mini plaza that you see. ^{ou} Ya know, have the handy grocery store, we have the drug store, and uh, five and ten store and they have the washer and the drying business. And also, we have been successful in getting in the 8 Days Inn Motel here. And this past brought..... These areas have brought brand new industries.
- I: Um, have you been able to see that blacks are hired fairly by local.... in local government?
- V: I have been able to get them hired but..... they uh, have been fired. They don't stay.... They don't.... They don't work very long. Now I think it's more or less of the atmosphere when they start working. They can get the job. I'll see to them getting a job but then maybe the atmosphere isn't what it should be so maybe you just drop out and don't even bother to go back.
- I; Right. Have there been any black protests, sit-ins, boycotts, or riots in South Bay in the last ten years?
- V: Um, you'll have to look back in some newspapers. They had a demonstration, not a riot. They had a demonstration at the city hall and I believe that was in uh, in '70 or I think.... no, it was in the '60s, like '68 or

V: sometime like that, '69. ~~Ersa stop, I told you. (talking to child)~~ About '69.

I: ~~O.K.~~ ^{Kay.} Um, the following questions are asked to enable an assessment of black politics in Florida in general. Briefly, what is your opinion of Governor Reuben Askew? That is, do you think he's been a favorable in attitude and policy towards blacks in Florida, or not?

V: Yes, I think ~~uh~~ I have only been in one of the ~~uh~~ meetings with Governor Askew and ~~uh~~ I think the governor apparently or whatever ~~uh~~ offices he could have put blacks in, I think he has put blacks into those offices. Because off hand, I know he has put in ~~uh~~ some of our judges. We have quite a few judges that are here. Uh, the first lady to ur.... ~~uh~~, to hold the urban um,..... What Mrs. Range, ^{uh} ya know, she was the first black to hold the....this office. Then we have ~~uh~~ one of the.... his right-hand guys in education ~~uh~~, Dr. Anderson. And ~~uh~~, ^{uh} ya know, from the overall picture, I think Governor Askew has done for blacks..... has done quite a few for blacks in uh, especially in the ^{cabinets} ~~academies~~ in... in uh, Tallahassee. And uh, I must say, I like the man and I... I .. I don't know and I'm not... I'm not gonna say can't do any wrong but he impresses me as being so religious that I don't think, ^{uh} ya know, that his ^{con}conscious would let him do anything wrong.

I: Right.

I: Do you have any other opinions on ~~uh~~ other state officials or representatives?

V: Um,..... do you have anybody in

I; No, I mean uh, just let's say in general ~~uh~~

V: Because uh.... uh, now and this is purely heresay because the same time I met uh, the day that I saw uh, was in uh, Mr. uh, Governor Askew's um, audience, uh, ^(Richard) Senator Stare was there also and ~~uh~~, he was.... Then,

V: he wasn't uh, he wasn't the senator then. What was..... He was the senator for Florida. He is now in Washington isn't he?

I: Mmm hmm.

V: Yeah. But, I was at a meeting not too long ago and they said that ~~uh~~ Mr. uh, Senator Stone hasn't, ^{ou}ya know, done some of the things that he said that he would do, ^{ou}ya know, before taking this office in Washington. Now that..... ~~Don't you touch it. (I presume she's talking to child) That uh....~~ I can't say it's a fact because ~~uh~~ I don't know, ^{ou}ya know, what he has done or what he hasn't done but this is ~~uh~~ what I've heard hashed at that meeting, that he hasn't done what he has promised.

I: Uh huh. Do you feel like ~~uh~~ winning and holding office has been worth your effort?

V: Do I feel that it's uh.....

I: Been worth your effort? I mean do you feel.....

V: Yes, I really feel that it has worth every um,..... moment that I have put into it, I actually feel that uh,..... And I would say that at least I know, ^{ou}ya know, what is happening because, ^{ou}ya know, people on the outside really can't say what is going on in the inside.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: But if you're in the inside and you know what is going on, then maybe you can.... ~~then~~ if you can't..... If it don.... never comes that it is straightened out, at least you can, ^{ou}ya know, try to straighten it out.

I: Mmm hmm.

V: And uh, I think I have worked with these areas and with the people in this.... in this area to try to see to it that they are or they get ~~uh~~ everything on a fair and equal status, ~~uh~~ from one bill, from the water bill on

V: down through it. I think I have tried very hard to see to it that they get these things. And ~~why~~ I think it's a necessity that someone ~~be~~ be in there. I can't say ~~why~~ for the areas, but to tell the truth, in this area in particular, because the blacks are I've done quite a few things.

I: Hmmm. What effects have running for office had on you and your family?

V: Well, this is made my husband more political-minded. Uh, he has taken a great deal of interest in ~~uh~~, to the ~~uh~~ activities of the city and what is going on and ~~uh~~, right now he is in the ~~uh~~, citizens ~~uh~~, action council. He is a member of that ~~uh~~ particular thing which also airs out the problems that we are having in this area. So I think it has made ~~uh~~, my family more political-minded and also more problematic because they sit down now and they wanna know, ^{ou}ya know, well, what are the problems we are having now, ^{ou}ya know, and what are you trying to do, is there anything that you can do about it? And ~~uh~~, many times I'll ~~uh~~, say to the childreⁿ, I ^{ou}say ^{ou}"Ya know you can't do this because if you do this I can't go out there and tell other children not to do it because they're gonna say well, ^{ou}ya know, your boy did it^(?). And then what are the people gonna say when you.... they find out you're doing something, they're ^{going}gonna say, well, she can't ^{ou}ya know, do her own children, how can she do all these other children? ^{ou}Ya know, I kinda constantly remind them that, ^{ou}ya know, you can't do this, like ^{if}_____ you see a sign here so you're not permitted here to play, ^{ou}Don't go and play where the sign says not to play, because if you go out there and play, the other children are gonna play, and if I try to say anything, they gonna say, "Well, ^{ou}ya know, your little boy's out there playing and so what can you do about that^(?)"

I: So it's been mostly good, you say?

V: It's been very good and ~~up~~, I'm happy, y^{ou} know, that uh, it's turning out like this because I feel like..... y^{ou} see, my husband and myself show that we are problematic, y^{ou} know, find out what's going on in the city. Then I think this will make the people feel that at least well, that's one family y^{ou} know has the heart at mind.

~~?: Excuse me uh, I didn't leave no keys _____ . (someone interrupts)~~

~~V: Yes, you did.~~

~~?: Sure did.~~

~~V: Is this yours too?~~

~~?: Than-you. No, sure isn't. Yeah thanks a lot.~~

~~V: Ersa, stop that noise.~~

I: O, ~~K~~ we..... uh, I just have a few final questions. Uh, these are asked to compile an overall group profile of black elected officials and Dr. Button would like to stress again that no individual answers will be recorded on these things specifically. Some of them are slightly personal, I mean, not very personal but that there there will be no names mentioned. The type of office you hold.

V: Um, right here?

I: Yeah. It's commissioner, right?

V: Oh, uh, I was commissioner of police and then uh, the mayor and now with these commissioners, we don't have no bra.... no offices.

I: Mmm hmm. Date first elected?

V: It was uh, September in ~~the~~ '70.

I: September, '70. Date took office?

V: Um, September, '70.

I: O, ~~K~~ Number of times you've run for office?

V: One..... Three times, I believe.

I: Three times?

V: Yeah, three times cause this year is a two-year period. I lost the first time and I'm serving it four.

I: Uh huh.

V: So three times.

I: Now, is your age between eighteen or twenty-nine or thirty and forty-nine or fifty and above? I think you said..... twenty.

V: Thirty. Thirty and twenty-nine.

I: Thirty and twenty-nine? ^{say} O.K. And your occupation before elected?

V: Um, I'm director of nurses and nurses training.

I: Alcohol rehabilitation or something?

V: ?

I: Uh, what was your father's occupation?

V: What was the following?

I: Your father's occupation?

V: Oh, he's a janitor.

I: Your education?

V: Uh, B.S. degree in medicine from ~~uh~~, Florida A&M University.

I: Salary received from your elected position?

V: We get a stipend of \$150.00, we don't get a salary. It's purely volunteer.

I: Church to which you belong?

V: Uh, African Methodist Episcopal Church.

I: Are you an official at your church?

V: Just a board member.

I: Mmm hmm. Are there other community organizations or activities that you're

