

FB65A

Sub: Leon Collins

Int: Dr. James Button

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Cocoa

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Tape begins on side 2. Perhaps side one was erased.

J: ~~guy~~ <sup>Yeah, I've heard other officials say, like they have a meeting in Atlanta, I</sup> ~~just~~ once a year.

L: Right, right.

J: Do you go to the....?

L: Uh I hav<sup>e</sup>n't been yet but I am going. You know I was a little reluctant at first to go because ..... wonderin<sup>g</sup> how the tax payers would feel about me spending tax money. Ya know.... the tax payers' money to attend <sup>a</sup> the Black Caucus. I I I think I might get a little bit of, uh, back lash for that.

J: Mmm hmm.

L: But I do want to attend it and I'm gonna attend it if I have to spend my own money to go.

J: Do you have to.... Do you to pay to go to Washington or will that.... will that be paid for by the....?

L: It's paid for by the city.

J: O.K.

L: But now if I feel like I'm gonna get some harrassment by it, then I'll spend my own money to go. But now I'm going to bring information back.... here that ~~there's~~ uh uh uh usually when you attend these caucuses, from what I understand, uh they have a lot of information about federal monies that we can get for the

L: low income areas that maybe... ya know the city manager's not aware of.

J: Mm hmm.

E: And uh we <sup>went</sup> out to Houston and I was talkin with <sup>some</sup> /.... I was talkin to Mayor  
Bradly out there, and I was talkin to Hatchett from <sup>Gary, Indiana</sup> ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~, and black  
mayors, and commissions<sup>er</sup>, and councilmens from all over the country.

J: When was that?

L: Uh that was last year. We went to Houston after the National uh National League  
of Cities Convention.

J: Mm hmm.

L: And just in talkin with them. and getting information and jottin little notes  
down ya know and I'd get back home and I talk to City Manager about it and I  
make a few co.... uh ya know.... I uh... I make a few phone calls up to  
Washington and find out that we got <sup>a million</sup> ~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ six hundred thousand dollars sittin  
up there we can get. Ya know federal monies.

J: Mm hmm.

L: And uh we got that money. I got that money see? So the trip cost the city,  
it cost the city 'bout what about three hundred dollars.

J: Mm hmm.

L: For one point six million that we got in federal monies to pave the streets and  
drain streets and and uh... ya know do a lot of things here that we need. So  
I don't know, maybe maybe that trip to Washington might mean some more money  
that we are not aware of. So I'm goin.

J: O.K.

L: I'm going. So I don't care where the money's spent. I don't care if it's spent  
in <sup>the</sup> black communities <sup>X</sup> or <sup>the</sup> white community, where it's spent. <sup>If</sup> We gotta drain ~~it~~ <sup>the</sup> problem  
<sup>let's</sup> ~~From on and~~ spend the money. We got the money let's let's do some ~~thing~~ <sup>about</sup> the problem.

J: O.K.

L: Yeah.

J: How about welfare? <sup>Next area,</sup> 11. Now that.... I know that may not apply uh that may be handled by the county....

L: That is handled by the county. We don't uh.... We in the city don't have anything to do with welfare. That's all county.

J: O.K. So I guess.... say not affective in the sense that it doesn't apply?

L: Right.

J: Employment?

L: Employment? We have one of the highest rates of employment in the state. We have about <sup>fifteen</sup> ~~fifty~~ point five or six per cent unemployment in <sup>Brevard</sup> ~~the~~ County right now, it's ridiclus.

J: Then the highest unemployment rate?

L: Unemployment. Yes, yes.

J: Yeah.

L: Uh I don't know what we gonna do. And I dnn't know what we can do about it because uh we've tried to get additional federal monies through the pep <sup>?</sup> program the CETA program to hire people but uh we havn't been successful in doin it. Even the county's tryin to do it and all the municipalities. We've got fifteen municipalities in the county, and they have all been tryin to do it we just havn't been able to do it. Now maybe if we could get some federal monies we could hire people temporarily for <sup>few</sup> a/months, ya know what I mean, to offset this high unemployment rate that we have in the county. It's it's it's really bad. It's really bad.

J: So..... I guess you're saying you've been not effective.

L: Right.

J: O.K. Let me answer that phone. O.K. the next area is uh parks and recreation.

L: Parks and recreation uh ya know that's handled by the county too although we own the properties. Uh we own the <sup>Provost?</sup> 1 Park, the <sup>Joe Lee</sup> 2 Smith Park,

L: we owned the Taylor Park, the Travis Park. All the lands are owned by the city but we lease the land to the county. Uh....

J: And they fund uh recreation?

L: And uh they fund the recreation things through uh.... through a tax milage or something like.

L: O.K. so I guess you're saying not affected because it doesn't apply?

J: Right, right.

L: O.K. Water sewage and garbage?

J: We have a problem right now. We have a, we have a good collection system as far as our garbage is concerned but right now we have a <sup>moratorium</sup> ~~landfill~~ outside the municipality because our plants are not not large enough now to handle it. We need about a million dollar expansion. So believe it or not, I was talkin to some people when I was up in Washington to the Coke conference, I was up there on union business but I also got a chance to talk to Congressman Fry and I got a chance to talk to uh.... let's see Senator Claude Pepper and I got a chance to talk to Dick Stone while he was up on <sup>the [Capitol] Hill,</sup> ~~the Hill~~. And uh I was askin about this money taht was froze under the Nixon administration for ya know sewage. So I said, well look can ya check on it since I'm here to Washington, <sup>and</sup> ~~can~~ can ya check on it and find out where that money is and when that money's gonna be released. So they did. So while I was there in <sup>the</sup> office and I got back home and he gave me a call. He had one his agents call me and said that the money had been released but they had put it under another program. They had changed the name of the program. So I called the city manager. I said Bud, I said that money has been released now, look now we got a moratorium on our <sup>sewer plant</sup> ~~landfill~~ and we got the money's been turned loose now... we .... let's... let's submit application for that money so we can expand our sewer plant here. I said, cause we can't grow unless that thing is ..... uh ya know enlarged. I said, look the money.

L: So he checked on it found out the money had been released and now we submit application for the money we're gonna get it. They're gonna get about two million dollars ~~that month~~ of that money,

J: O.K. good. Do how how effective do you feel then that you've been in....?

L: Very effective.

J: O.K. Health and hospitals?

L: That's a problem. That's a problem. Here in Bravard County we have uh we we are really having a problem with <sup>our</sup> ~~the~~ hospitals. Although we don't deal too much with health, that's county too ya know and the the rehabilitation centers and all that. We are having a problem with hospitals, <sup>man</sup> ~~now and~~ let me tell <sup>you,</sup> ~~ya~~ you'll die in this county if you don't have some insurance and some money. You won't see a doctor. We have a shortage of doctors. Uh you might uh you might put in an appointment to see a doctor and it might take ya two weeks to see a doctor in this county. If you go to a hospital uh... ya know for an emergency, if ya don't have some money or some insurance, you're in trouble. You're in trouble. Uh I would like to see the day come that we would maybe have a city operated hospital or a county operated hospital to deal with these problems when people don't have the money because we don't always have the money. Uh ya know the ones of us that are fortunately working ya know for the government and and ya know good group ya know plans, hospital plans, and life insurance, and accident insurance and all that. Uh we, we do have a problem in that area, that's hospitals. Uh, ya know there's too many times that I read that people die waiting to see a doctor in the emergency room down here at \_\_\_\_\_<sup>7,</sup> Hospital and that's bad.

J: Mm hmm.

L: Uh... here for years we didn't have a neurosurgeon. Uh all the..... all of the head injuries and things like that, brain damage and things like that ya know

L: patients had to be transported to Orlando. So now we do have a neurosurgeon <sup>here</sup> in the county.

J: O.K. How effective/<sup>do you feel</sup> you've been.... in that area?

L: I, I havn't been effective at all in that area. I've been talkin about it but that's about as much as I've been doin.

J: Yeah. O.K.

L: Havn't<sup>e</sup> been able to get any support.

J: O.K. (pause) How about education? And that again may not apply to....?

L: No that doesn't apply to me so much. That's taken care of by the county. We have a county school board and things like that.

J: O.K.

L: But I do think we have a good system here in the county.

J: O.K. ~~So~~ I guess not effective, but it doesn't apply.

L: Right.

J: And finally, fire uh... protection.

L: We have very good fire protection in the city of Cocoa. In fact, uh uh this is one of the things that I believe in too, is good fire protection. We have a good department, we have the manpower we need, we have the best equipment we need. We don't really have a lot of high rise buildings uh here in the city of Cocoa but we do have the equipment to even take care of that. We have one out <sup>here at Voluntary Home</sup> ~~where~~ where the senior citizens live and we got one of these trucks with that boom <sup>on it</sup> ~~about~~ about a hundred and some feet up in the air in case <sup>of,</sup>uh, somebody gettin stranded on the fifth or sixth floor or something like that. And uh... one of the other things that I had been workin on is <sup>ambulance</sup> a ~~amulance~~ service. ~~Free~~ <sup>Free</sup> amulance service for the.... need it for the citizen<sup>s</sup> of Cocoa. We have a, <sup>we bought</sup> ~~an~~ ambulance service now that runs off of Merritt <sup>Island</sup> ~~Isle~~. They have to come from Merritt <sup>Island</sup> ~~Isle~~ to Cocoa to get some-

L: body to the hospital and uh involved in accident or something of that nature. We do have a rescue vehicle..... <sup>but</sup> ~~with~~ all of the equipment I think <sup>the vehicle</sup> ~~it~~ costs around thirty thousand dollars with the equipment on it and I have a list of the runs they they make for heart attacks, burns, epileptic seizures, uh child birth, <sup>OR</sup> whatever the case <sup>might</sup> ~~may~~ be and these guys are doin a splendid job. And they will only transport someone to the hospital if it's an extreme emergency. And uh they have, they've had the training out at BCC to deal with just about anything that they would have to deal with due to an accident or anything. And they have the equipment to do it on the truck. So now if we can get an ambulance or get a couple ambulance to follow the rescue truck then we'll be in business. So we're gonna get that next year.

J: You said you had . tried to get more uh fire hydrants and things in the in the black communities?

L: Yes because of the lack of line that we have. The water lines are too small.

J: Mm hmm.

L: In certain areas. Not in all sections of the black community because now uh... here in this section where I live now, was at one time predominate<sup>ly</sup> white.

J: Mm hmm.

L: And uh ya know the blacks are spreading out now and uh ya really can't ya won't go into any areas where ya won't find a few blacks.

J: Mm hmm.

L: ~~I~~ mean even your <sup>upper</sup> ~~upper~~ ..... your upper class neighborhoods you gonna find a few blacks there. And just about every community you go in now, so when you talkin about black community really, you're just about talking about every community in the city. Ya know. But uh this is the bulk of the black community say from uh.... from here back to ya know back to US uh the old US 1 over there.

J: O.K. So how how effective do you think you were in that area?

L: Very effective.

J: Very effective?

L: Yes.

J: O.K. (pause) Have you as an elected official, or even part of a committee, been able to bring in industry or retail stores uh into this area?

L: No uh I havn't. Uh really I've been concerned about it because uh it really disturbs me when I can see all the big businesses on Merritt Island and I know why they're doin it to get away from paying city taxes. Uh maybe we're doin something wrong here in the city. Uh... maybe they're offering the people something on Merritt Island that we are not offering them here. Sure I would like to see <sup>it</sup> we have a little industrial park but that's about the extent of it. I am concerned about it and I think if we had, maybe we wouldn't have so many people unemployed. And I think the city owns enough land if we can, we can make a <sup>compromise</sup> ~~compromise~~ and bring some of these people in. And the city in the past, and is now, letting the City Chamber of Commerce handle this and I don't think they're doin a good job so I'm gonna ask to serve as <sup>liaison</sup> ~~lason~~ to that board. Now we uh ya know we appropriate thousands of dollars a year for these people to advertise and invite people down to look at our area and uh and uh try to entice industrial uh something like this to come in. But I don't think they're doin the job and that's why I wanna serve as lason for that board to find out what they're doin. And uh if, if that is a problem then I don't think we should fund it.

J: Mm hmm. O.K. There's a need but so far you havn't been able to to bring in any industry?

L: Right, right.

J: How about federal revenue sharing? Has this <sup>been</sup> being able to help uh... some here in Cocoa and if so, in what areas?

L: Well, like I said the CETA Program. Uh that was federal revenue sharing monies and we couldn't survive without it. For drainage, uh for paving those streets, for lights, uh for fire protection, police protection, there are many, many things that we use federal revenue sharing monies for and we couldn't survive without it.

J: What what's CETA? That's an employment program?

L: Uh it's uh.... yes. Yes it's funded by the government to hire employ... or ya know really to hire people temporarily to subsidize unemployment, cross-training, and upgrading, and this type thing.

J: Hm hmm. Have there been uh in Cocoa or in this area, have there been any black protests or sit ins, boycotts in the last ten years or even a riot?

L: No.

J: That you know of?

L: No. Not not.... No we've never had a riot. We did have some protests back in the early days of integration and uh it was very minor compared to uh other areas. We....

J: When when was that?

L: Oh I guess that was fifteen years ago.

J: O.K.

L: Yeah.

J: Not in the last ten years?

L: No no no.

J: O.K. I'd like to ask you a couple of questions if I could, last questions here, about uh black politics in Florida in general. And first of all, I'd like to ask you what's your opinion of Governor Ruben Askew? Do you feel he's

J: been favorable uh... uh in policy and attitude uh toward blacks?

L: Yes I think he's I think uh I think the Governor's doin a fine job and uh ' I had the opportunity of meeting him and talking to him on a couple of occasions and uh uh Jack \_\_\_\_\_ at that time was in Tallahassee and uh the Democrats had a big uh rally out here at the Houston stadium and I got a chance to meet the governor. I got a chance to meet him again in Tallahassee on another occasion. Yes, I think he's doin a fine job. Uh....

J: Any things in particular that, that have impressed you?

L: Well I'll tell ya before I <sup>he</sup> appointed a judge uh ya know the black judge is the Supreme Court Justice and that uh and he has done so many other things as far as ~~minorities~~ <sup>minorities</sup> are concerned, not only blacks, but women too. And uh ya know I mean givin em key positions in his administration and this like this and I really I ... Hats off to the man. I think he's doing a fantastic job and I would even like to see him ya know go higher. I'd like to see him at the national level and I think he is headed in that direction.

J: Mm hmm.

L: He's a fine man.

J: O.K. Are there any other state officials that that you feel have done a a..... an impressive job in terms of helping blacks do you think or...?

L: Well I think most of, uh, most of our elected officials here are from the county. I don't know.... I know of the other state officials, but I don't know em like I know the ones here in the county. I think the ones here in the county is is doing a fantastic job.

J: State representatives?

L: Yeah state representatives. Bill Nelson and, uh, Jane Robertson, Laurie Wilson, and

L: uh ... and uh Dave Barrett. And, Uh, Dave and I are very good friends, and uh John Voke, and yes I think they're doin a good job.

J: O.K. Just one last general question. uh I'd like to ask you, and that is, do you think winning and holding office uh in Florida has been worth the effort?

L: Uh.... I don't quite understand the question you said....

J: Well in terms of, now you've been in office a couple years, do you feel, looking back, that running for and holding office has, has been worth the effort?

L: Yes, I think so. I.... maybe if I hadn't been on board there were a lot of things wouldn't have come about..... uh here in the city. And I think now that the city administrators realize that uh.... uh I'm for all of the people and I'm working for all of the people and uh I'm gonna do what's right with them and I'm gonna want them to do, ya know, for it's people.

J: Mmm hmm.

L: And, uh, this is one of our main concerns. Uh, we have workin in many, many areas as to where we.... for instance, like out garbage system, we have on the ~~the~~ street pick ups now. Curbside pick up as they call <sup>it</sup> ~~emr~~. And uh the city passed law that even if ya don't get your cans off the street, and so we got a man now that they can call and deal with uh.... they can relate to, they can communicate with. And uh..... in this area.

J: Have there been any negative aspects of of running for and holding office?

L: No not really. It really is discouraging sometime but me, being the first black and, uh, the people got someone now in the community they can relate to with all of their problems. And it's discouraging sometime I mean it's really disgusting ya know. But then I do <sup>the best</sup>... I do the best <sup>that</sup> I can. I try to solve all the problems. I can't solve them all but I do what I can. Uh, if I

L: can't deal with a particular problem, then I'll call someone that can. Ya know I have a list of all these people that, uh, low rental help or whatever the case might be, welfare. And I have a book with the names and their positions and uh this type thing so I can usually refer them to someone ~~ya know~~ that <sup>you know</sup> can help them. And I'll sometimes call.

J: Mmm hmm. What effect has all this had on you personally and on your family? Has it, has it really changed things uh?

L: Except that you get invitations now that you wouldn't normally <sup>y</sup> get, you attend affairs that you wouldn't normally attend otherwise, and it's, uh, keeps ~~ya~~ <sup>you</sup> on the go. Ya get home in the evening ya gotta list of phone calls to make and then you got two or three engagements and ya can't make but two. And uh this type thing. It keeps ya on the run all the time.

J: Mm, so you're a lot <sup>a</sup> lot busier?

L: <sup>A</sup> lot busier, yes.

J: What effect has that had on your family? Any?

L: No<sup>t</sup> much. Not much because my wife is very active too and she's, she's headed in one direction and I'm headed in another one.....uh and, uh, ya know in a lot of cases

J: Mm hmm. Mmm hmm. O.K. Just a last couple quick personal questions here. Um.... your occupation?

L: I'm an electrician by ~~trade~~ <sup>trade</sup>.

J: O.K. Um your age?

L: Thirty-six.

J: O.K. Level of education?

L: Two years uh of a junior college.

J: O.K. The salary you receive from your, uh, elected position?

L: Four hundred a month.

J: O.K. Has it been that since uh .... since 1973?

L: Yeah.

J: O.K. Were you active in the Civil Rights Movement of 1960 to 1966?

L: Not really active, no. But I was concerned.

J: Were you, or have you been a member of the NAACP?

L: Yes. Yes, and I am now.

J; You still are?

L: Yes.

J: Any other civil rights, uh, organizations? SCLC?

L: No.

J; O.K. What church do you belong to?

L: I belong to the Church of Christ.

J: O.K. Are you an official in that church?

L: No.

J: O.K. You've mentioned some of the other community organizations uh that you're uh involved in uh..... what are some of those?

L: Well I'm a member of the \_\_\_\_\_ Civic League. I'm a member uh .... I'm on the Board of Directors of, uh, United Way of Brevard County. I'm a member of the Concerned Democrats. I'm a member of the Young Democrats. Uh, I'm on my Local Executive Board of the Electrical Executive Board in my local union, FFL-CSD five twenty five. Uh..... I'm..... I'm administrative assistance to .... to the President with the Executive Board of Recreation Association. And, uh, I just can't think of all of them right now.

J: O.K. (laugh) You are busy.

L: Yes.

J: Um.... what is, or was your father's occupation?

L: My father?

J: Yeah.

L: Uh he was more or less a custodian most of his life. He went to med school back in his early days and uh.... found reason not to continue <sup>at Tuskegee</sup> ~~at Tuskegee~~. But he did uh.... he worked uh.... as a ~~veterinarian~~ <sup>veterinarian</sup> for years.

J: Mmm hmm.

L: And, uh, after he got ~~off~~ <sup>out of</sup> that he just started doin<sup>g</sup> custodial type work ya know. I don't know why he..... he didn't, ya know, decide to continue his education and I never really questioned him about it really. Ya know? But I know he was smart man. I knew that.

J: Mmm hmm. O.K. Are there any other black elected officials in this area that, uh, that you know of uh that we should be talking to?

L: Yes. Uh... we have Jerry Taylor down in Palm Bay and, uh, <sup>walk</sup> we got uh we got Julius Montgomery in Melbourne.

J: I'm gonna see him this afternoon.

L: Yeah, Julius and I. I know him quite well.

J: O.K.

L: And I know Jerry too.

J: O.K. You met Pappy Kennedy?

L: Yeah Pappy, I know Pappy.

J: Yeah.

L: Yeah.

J: O.K.

- L: Carl <sup>Langford over</sup>            there too. He's a character too. The mayor, over in Orlando?
- J: Uh huh.
- L: Oh he's a character.
- J: Is he a black elected official?
- L: No no.
- J: Yeah. Are there any black....other black elected officials?
- L: No, I think, I think uh... I think Julius and Jerry and myself are the only ones in the county.
- J: O.K. O.K. That's it and I wanna <sup>find out,</sup>            I don't know whether I got on tape. Are you interested um.... eventually in having this become part of the Oral History library at the University of Florida again after you've received a transcript, you've gone over it, you.... you've changed it if you wanted to?
- L: Fine, fine.
- J: Is that O.K.?
- L: Yes.
- J: O.K.
- L: Very good.
- J: This is Leon Collins of Cocoa. I guess that's it.